WHAT
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DO

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What Urban Media Art Can *Do*

BY TANYA TOFT

...for our time the emerging major paradigm in art is neither an ism nor a collection of styles. Rather than a novel way of rearranging surfaces and spaces, it is fundamentally concerned with the implementation of the art impulse in an advanced technological society.

— Jack W. Burnham, 1968

In-keeping with the pace of networked, technological development and the ever-changing conditions of urban environments that facilitate our inscription in a digital reality, urban media art continues to explore what it can *do*. We have witnessed, over the past two decades in particular, how urban media art has altered our perceptions of – and relationships with – urban space, through inventions and interventions. It has deconstructed and augmented architecture and urban form. It has disclosed the world to us and explored various artistic tactics for establishing moments of "revelation". It has engaged with urban politics, performed critiques of dominant visible factors and interrupted hegemonies and power relations, while bridging between "what happened" and "what could happen". It has evoked global awareness about the complexity of local places and events and negotiated with our cultural, collective memory through re-tracing and re-composing our histories. It has facilitated new forms of human presence, encounters, connectivity and social activities and offered surprising, contemplative, or enlightening experiences while providing "perfect moments"[1] for re-establishing our human self reference in a digitally augmented, networked reality. Urban media art has pursued these, and other, ends by means of "making and doing" and through aesthetic practices that engage with people's urban reality and the conditions for experiencing that reality.

"Urban media art" refers to various forms of media-aesthetic, artistic initiatives in urban environments in which artists create and make use of innovations in software and technology to craft artworks for visible and invisible implementation. Different from painting, photography or video art, the "material" of urban media art is not determined by a medium but rather a condition of

1. Catrien Schreuder describes "perfect moments" as the unexpected encounter with (video) art that can affect one's experience of the urban environment, in *Pixels and Places, Video Art in Public Space* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2010) 51.

production – of space, mediating expressions, material reality, architecture, or the very medium or interface at work in the artwork, with its particular unique functionalities. As such, we recognise, when looking through the artworks in this book, a close affiliation with DIY (do-it-yourself) and maker culture, evoking ideals of the anti-industrial approach and underlying political attitude of the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. "Producing", as noted by French philosopher Jacques Rancière, unites the act of manufacturing with the act of bringing to light, the act of defining a new relationship between making and seeing in a process of material execution within a community's self-presentation of meanings.[2] Rancière considers art in a sense of "doing and making", not unrelated to the consideration of art as "craftwork" and the ability to create, reflective of the Greek conception of *techné*. To Rancière, artistic practices as ways of "doing and making" are not "exceptions" to other practices in life. They represent and reconfigure the "distribution" of these activities by suggesting corresponding forms of visibility that challenge discourses, norms and familiar patterns in our lifeworld.[3] The Greek term techné is tied to a notion of "utility" in a relationship between art and life and encompasses everything from architecture, agriculture, joinery, ainting, textile design, sculpture, and also communication – concerned with what one *does* when communicating rather than what is said or thought. As a form of communication, people are considered to have their own personal techné around speech, based on learned experiences, knowledge of social interactions, verbal and nonverbal cues, and the shared language used in a community – which affect how cultures interact. Urban media art considered as a kind of "craftwork" thus concerns an implication of knowledge into principles that shape both materials and systems of life.

  We find a similarity between urban media art and the consideration of the role of art in the quote from 1968 opening this article, in which Jack W. Burnham suggests art as an impulse in an advanced technological society. Urban media art can be considered in light of *system aesthetics*[4] of the 1960s, which reflects how art practices at the time were part of a larger "systematisation of society" and conditions of lived experience in society. System aesthetics denotes a transition from an object-oriented culture to one which is systems-oriented, with a development from "the unique work of high art" to artefacts of "unobjects", or even environments, such as kinetic and luminous art, outdoor works, happenings and mixed media presentations. Asking what urban media art can *do* is to think of the art as finding

2. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 41.

3. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 42.

4. Jack W. Burnham, "System Esthetics," *Artforum* 7 (1968): 31.

itself and its errands anew as an impulse in our advanced technological society, which characterises the conditions of being human today. This publication seeks to grasp urban media art as a domain of aesthetic practices, of "ways of doing and making", through which the art is finding new errands of criticality in relationships within our current technological condition. The overall telos of this approach assists us in discovering, and understanding, our human condition and our sense of self in reference to the complexity of today's world.

Art that *does*

Urban media art is a still emerging and fast developing domain of public art, constantly morphing and forging new relationships with technology, architecture, design, science, biology, urban development, film, music, performance, and other disciplines. By means of the diversity of skills, materials, principles and expressions, this art is conditioned by inter-disciplinary, inter-media, inter-network, inter-environmental, and inter-discursive conditions in the ecologies of many related fields. It is an aesthetic domain more concerned with its role and place in the world than with its status as "object", which achieves aesthetic significance not from its material but through its engagements and exchanges with the world. Urban media art has emerged within a current "regime" of contemporary art as a space in which to consider the ways in which art and its subjects appropriate matter in the world *in relation to the common world*.[5] Under this regime, which Rancière calls "the aesthetic regime of art",[6] the autonomy of art is established *within* the forms that life uses to shape itself. In this regime, the art is liberated both from being considered an instrument of ritual or imitation of reality, as in the early theory of Greek art that placed it in aesthetic hierarchies, and also from its "aura" in a modernist sense of having value by its subjective expression. Rather than considering urban media art in a dichotomous relationship with what we might have been taught to be "art" from the established hierarchies, categories and genres of art history (informed by a dominant modernist paradigm of the past 200 years), we can think of the art in terms of its ecological, relational condition. Perhaps because of the complexity of this condition, urban media art is developing under the constant pressure of having to articulate its criticality in a continuous questioning and consideration of what it can (and should) *do*.

From this position to urban media art, the aesthetic significance

5. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 28.

6. Ibid., 16–17.

is not found in accordance with familiar categories of art, nor is it found in the employed technologies, such e.g. as locative media, tracking technologies, telecommunication networks, new camera optics, drones, or novel computer interfaces, however exciting these may be. Rather, the aesthetic significance must be found in its role in affecting our ways of appropriating, perceiving and understanding our agency in relation to our lifeworld. As Rancière notes, with the example of photography as a new aesthetic domain, "… photography did not become an art by imitating the mannerisms of art (…) it is not the ethereal subject matter and soft focus of pictorialism that secured the status of photographic art; it is rather the appropriation of the commonplace".[7] The appropriation of the commonplace in photography led to shifting the focus from 'great names and events' to the 'lives of the anonymous and the details of ordinary life'.[8] If the emergence of photography participated in creating a cultural understanding of fixed time and representation, the emergence of video participated in creating a cultural understanding of (real) time and distance, and "new media" participates in the creation of cultural understanding of computational interactivity and networked participation.[9] In this perspective, what urban media art can *do* – the role of significance it may have to our lifeworld today – must be considered in terms of how it appropriates our world: how it contributes to creating shifts in focus, perception, and a sense of "being" and becoming, when participating in the on-going processes of *change* in urban spheres and environments.

7. Ibid., 29.

8. Ibid.

9. Steve Dietz, "Foreword," in *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), xiv.

Aesthetic ideals – pragmatism and aestheticism

When we look at the wealth of aesthetic projections and urban interventions across the current map of light and media art festivals, and when we pay attention to the increasing adoption of aesthetic and "creative" initiatives in urban development and architectural schemes, we can identify two aesthetic ideals in particular – thriving side by side. One is informed by *pragmatism,* concerned with the purpose in art and its potential to be useful, for example, as an instrument of change. The other is informed by *aestheticism,* significantly concerned with visuality as an organising and experiential factor in today's urban complex, with art presented as for example installations of immersive spectacles.

  In the first aesthetic ideal of *pragmatism,*[10] art is considered valuable by how it serves a purpose and is *useful* in urban public space. Since the late 1980s we have witnessed this orientation

towards using urban media art in an instrumental manner for purposes and objectives that are formulated beyond the art, in particular in discourses of appropriating art within the fields of design, architecture, and even urban development; in "cultural planning" (as a tool in processes of regenerating urban neighbourhoods and city branding).[11] The pragmatic aesthetic ideal of art as being useful is also tied into the paradigm of site-specific art, which up through the 1980s and 1990s was institutionalised as a practice and came to reinforce the cultural valorisation of places: something which has been outlined with some concern by Miwon Kwon in her description of the use of art to endow and promote places with a sense of unique distinction.[12] We also find urban media art in the service of less instructive or didactic goals, for example when art is conceived as a *means of* enhancing experience and thought, as a *source of* pleasure, critique or wonder, as a *promoter of* values of significance to a cultural community, as a *healing factor* of historic wounds, or as an alternative *means of communication*. At this softer end of pragmatic-aesthetic ideals, we find practices of socially engaged and participatory art carried out at the micro scale, deriving from principles of relationality, participation and and social engagement. These may be artistic and curatorial initiatives concerned with models of consensus, good intentions, moral objectives, solidarity with people and care for the wellbeing and sustainable futures of communities.[13] These ideals and imperatives are reflected in the curatorial inquiry with translocal practices expressed by the curators of the Connecting Cities Network, who emphasise the value of "purpose" in asking "what and who the artworks are for".[14]

The other orientation we identify by the ideal of *aestheticism*[15] in urban media art is one that responds to our visually oriented culture of expression and display. This orientation reflects a condition that is interwined with our spectacularised and visually dominated media condition; a condition in which we, for a while, have been experiencing an *aestheticisation* of our surrounding world, the forms of our social lives and

10. Pragmatism as a philosophical orientation originated with Charles Sanders Peirce in the 1870s and developed with the theories of William James and John Dewey in the twentieth century, with the dictum formulated in 1978 by James: "true because it is useful." See William James, *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1978), 98.

11. We find objectives of using art as a "tool" in urban development in a number of the urban media environments presented in this book, for example the Quartier des Spectacles.

12. Miwon Kwon, "One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October* 89 (1997): 104.

13. We find the pragmatic emphasis on the role of urban media art in urban and community development in recent publications on urban culture and urban space in the media city, e.g. Susa Pop, Gernot Tscherteu, Ursula Stadler and Mirjam Struppek, *Urban Media Cultures* (Stuttgart: av edition, 2011); and Frank Eckardt's *Media and Urban Space: Understanding, Investigating and Approaching Mediacity* (Leipzig: Frank & Timme, 2008).

14. Mark Wright et al., "Collective Curatorial Statement," this volume.

15. With the dictum "art for art's sake" coined by the French philosopher Victor Cousin in 1818, the philosophy of aestheticism developed in Europe in the late-nineteenth century in reaction to the "ugliness" of the industrial age, considering that art exists for the sake of its beauty alone. See *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Aestheticism," accessed May 1, 2016, http://www.britannica.com /art/Aestheticism

our life narratives, and in which (according to an oft-quoted expression by Peter Weibel) "... media experience has become the norm for all aesthetic experience".[16] We recognise this influence in the expanding map of *nuit blanche* and white night festivals in cities all over the world, in artworks that take advantage of the advancement in powerful projection and LED technologies. For example, in initiatives of projected or screened images of visual spectacles, immersive environments, installations of architectural projection mapping (closely related to aesthetics deriving from the VJ-culture of mixing light, music and video projection); and when entire buildings are turned into permanent outdoor gallery spaces, covered with LED lights. Aestheticism at the same time confirms and challenges the mythical concept of "the Spectacle" as a manipulative, pacifying and visual instigation of ideology, which – since Guy Debord's writings on the Society of the Spectacle in 1968 – has haunted artistic discourse and manifested the idea of spectacle as the *matter* rather than the *means of* artistic critique.[17] However, in contemporary visual culture, and following a recent growing attention in academia and the practical arts towards "affective experience", the spectacle – in the sense of the grand, visual display – has gained new interest and appreciation for its immersive, sensual and intuitive qualities. We are currently witnessing an increasing growth of massive media aesthetic infrastuctures, which expand the impact of urban media art to dimensions beyond our previous imagination and bring it into actual interference with the grand scale ecologies of our cities.[18]

We recognise the two aesthetic ideals of pragmatism and aestheticism when browsing through this book. On the one hand in grand, sparkling spectacles and aestheticised environments. On the other hand, in sensitive projects of moral concern that engage communities, nature and materials to improve our current situation and near-future scenarios. These aesthetic ideals gain significance because they operate as aesthetic forces in relation to the urban sphere and environment. In many cases we find both tendencies simultaneously. Sometimes visually spectacular art ties in with pragmatic-aesthetic ideals of the art to serve a purpose, and the aesthetic ideals of pragmatism and aestheticism combine. We find this for example in *Human Beeing* (2014) by The Constitute, which combines a community project around beekeeping with a spectacular projection mapping of the bees' building of their hive, which appears to be on the façade of a building.

16. Peter Weibel, "The Post-Media Condition," *Mute*, 2012, accessed April 5, 2016, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/lab/post-media-condition

17. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1967).

18. See for example the SESI SP Digital Art Gallery in São Paulo (opened 2012) and the Open Sky Gallery in Hong Kong (opened 2014) in "Urban Media Environments," this volume.

The distinct aesthetic ideals of art as useful vs. autonomous penetrates art history all the way back to Kant's distinction between the autonomy of aesthetic standards from morality and utility, liberated from religion and politics, and also from everyday life.[19] This was challenged with the pragmatist attention to the useful value of art, promoted by, among others, John Dewey with his concern for the *experience* of art to help us navigate real life.[20] In pragmatism we find a potential for art to *do* something in the context of our everyday lives, reflective of a democratic principle of "art for everybody" rather than "art for art's sake", replaced by a notion of art for *our* sake. Art is considered to *do* in a particular context, and to instigate change by means of its interference with the functions and human relations of this very context. Urban media art is conditioned by the urban. This is why it differs from art made and meant for exhibition in the white cube, wherein the art is isolated from direct contact with the operations of the world. Situated in the urban complex, the art is tied in with urban politics, cultures, conflicts and contestation and the urban context inevitably enters into the artwork's horizon for *doing*, forming part of the field of its effects and feedback. The pragmatic-aesthetic ideal proceeds with a concern for the urban sphere and environment and, in a sense, grants the art an intentional field of pursuing new errands in (critical) dialogue with the concrete conditions of our lives. We find in the ideal of aestheticism, however, the potential for art to augment and enhance certain features of the environment – perhaps increasing a sense of presence. We also find in aestheticism an appeal to our subjective perception and experience at the level where every thought, and every action or initiative, *begins* before "instruction" by society or our intellect. This liberates the art from being reduced to the particularity of the work, or its "thing-ly" character (that is to say, its medium), and it enables the art to *do* by means of its *effects*. This is what Adorno calls *spirit* [21] – the force of mediation at work, in an echo of his vision that "art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it".[22] When art appeals to us beyond the faculties of society and intellect it speaks directly to us, and in doing so may change those sensible impressions that affect our sense of agency, thus initiating processes of change in our perception of the world. This aspect is important to value in art, considering its opportunities for remaining self-reflexive – both in terms of balancing the technological optimism that simultaneously encourages and occasionally blinds us, *and* in terms of reminding us that attempts to improve our

19. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 [1790]).

20. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Tarcher Perigee, 2005).

21. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetics Theory,* eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

22. Ibid., 10.

urban conditions should avoid blindly obeying the moral imaginations and imperatives of their time.

Context, Presence, Change

The attention to behaviour and process in art, rather than to the object or outcome, reflects an emphasis on how things work rather than what they look like. This is a concept that applies to descriptions of much contemporary art but has been considered in particular in relation to "new media art". Characteristic to this aesthetic domain is how it is described by its behaviours, (e.g. interactivity, connectivity, and computability)[23] as: process-oriented, time-based, dynamic, real-time; participatory, collaborative, and performative; modular, variable, generative, and customisable;[24] as distributed in nature, networked in existence, and combining physical and virtual elements.[25] The emphasis on these "immaterial" qualities in art was considered long before new media art was articulated as a domain in the 1990s: in 1968 Lucy Lippard and John Chandler described a tendency of "dematerialisation of the art object".[26] This idea involved a concern for thinking processes which were of more significance than the art object or outcome.[27] The idea of dematerialisation in art, found, for example, in modes of conceptual art and performative actions at the time, contributed to the expansion of the field of art practices and the collapse of the specificities of the medium and of artistic disciplines — events that contributed to shape the aesthetic regime of art we are familiar with today, and which enable us to understand the qualities of urban media art as "art" at all.

In particular, experimental art of the 1960s enforced three dynamics in artistic discourse that have paved the way for urban media art: the emphasis on process over object, resulting in meaning being found in *space* (not objects); a growing attention to space as a matter of *perception;* and art as *movement,* i.e. processual and leading us somewhere. In these movements, which I will characterise in a little more detail below, we find the dynamics which led to, what I will suggest, *three* mutually dependent dimensions of what urban media art can do today — the creation of context, presence, and change.

23. Steve Dietz, "Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?" Neme's official Web Site, accessed May 1, 2015, http://www.neme.org/82/why-have-there-been-no-great-net-artists

24. Christiane Paul, "Introduction," *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 4.

25. Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 69.

26. Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12 (1968): 31-36.

27. Ibid., 31

1) From space to context

With the dematerialisation of art, the "work" became a volume in space in which the aesthetic errand of the art had to be located, instead of in the materiality of the object. In particular, installation art of the 1960s moved the focus from the artwork itself to the space or environment of its installation, gradually moving out into urban space where artists began to explore the specificity of the site by means of the installation as a mediating factor. Since the "site-specific turn" in art in the 1970s, public art began developing into a domain of its own, and during the 1980s and 1990s installations were increasingly characterised by networks of operations that involved interaction among complex architectural settings, environmental sites, and extensive use of everyday objects in ordinary contexts. The notion of dematerialisation was also interpreted in the architectural field as a result of the trans-disciplinary practices in the field of art in the 1960s. By means of glass and transparent materials, and later by incorporating information technology into the structure, transformability and ephemerality was integrated into architectural surfaces that came to appear light, adaptable, transportable, and unstable. [28] This conception of architecture as ephemeral and temporal gradually led to a notion of "event-based architecture" that communicates with and engages its context. In parallel with "conceptual practices" in art, Cybernetics (Greek for "governance") emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, which explored "movement" in terms of the dynamic and contingent processes by which information transfers between machines and humans and alters behaviour via feedback and visual effects.[29] Cybernetic art evolved from these explorations, where feedback takes precedence as an aesthetic "material". Media art has recently been proposed, by Christiane Paul, Margot Lovejoy and Victoria Vesna, as "context providers",[30] by which "the process of creating meaning is influenced by an awareness of shifting contexts, and the construction of meaning in the networked, digital environment relies on a continuous renegotiation of context as a moving target".[31] In urban media art, meaning is not found in the centre of the object, but in the environment, relationships and "times" that it engages.

2) From perception to presence

The ways in which experimental art[32] has dealt with "context" has been mostly about perception: about transforming recognitions

28. Darko Fritz traces the emergence of the first instances of media architecture back to the 1930s in "Media Façades and Urban Media Environments – Developments of Art Practices," this volume.

29. Edward A. Shanken, "Cybernetics and Art: Cultural Convergence in the 1960s," in *From Energy to Information*, eds. Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), 155–77.

30. Christiane Paul, Margot Lovejoy, Victoria Vesna, *Context Providers* (Briston and Wilmington: Intellect Ltd, 2011).

31. Ibid., 5.

and interpretations of the physical environment. By "installing" the viewer in a situation or artificial system, installation art in the 1960s and 1970s sought to appeal to his or her subjective perception, thus introducing to the concept of "art" the emphasis on sensory perception. Installation art implied the dissolution between art and life by considering the broader sensory experience of ordinary life, which could be considered from many different angles of audience perspectives – allowing for multiple subjectivities. A strand of installation art evolved as an offspring of the avant-garde after the advent of video in 1965, which expanded the installation of video on a TV-screen into large-scale, immersive and integrative complexes. "Expanded cinema"[33] became the term to describe multi-screen and mixed-media presentations built around one or more film projectors. One direction in expanded cinema advanced in the public realm, seeking to make cinematic experience more "tangible". Through the 1970s, like other forms of installation art, expanded cinema moved from an interest in psychedelia to focus on the expansion of perception through cinema-technology.[34] With this "contextual turn", the attention on perception moved to a focus on presence in the environment or context of the installation.

32. The term "experimental art" is used here to suggests a more explicit desire to extend the boundaries of art in terms of materials or techniques, rather than, for example, in avant-garde art in which novel ideas may be expressed through traditional means.

33. Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (Boston: E.P. Dutton, 1970).

34. Steven McIntyre, *Senses of Cinema* 46 (2008).

Much of the thinking within the field of body-computer interaction has been concerned with the opposition between the human and the inhuman machine, and more recently with the difference between artificial and human intelligence, leading towards questions around what the interaction between matter and code *does* to our understanding and experience of embodied life in a condition of "post humanism". For example, "cyborg art", emerging in the 2000s but originating in Cybernetics of the 1960s, is based on the creation and addition of new senses to the body via cybernetic implants and the creation of artworks through new senses. Theories of post humanism also concern an attention to the affective, and to corporality of perception that relates to conditions of "presence" – e.g. while immersed in media spectacles, or in situations of interactive engagement with the art.[35]

35. Inke Arns demonstrates how the notion of interactivity has emerged and developed to become a significant paradigm in contemporary media art in the text "Interaction, Participation, Networking. Art and telecommunication," this volume.

3) From movement to change
We find various examples of attention to "movement" throughout art history: for example in nineteenth-century Impressionist painting that challenged perceptual limits, and in early twentieth-century

Cubism that challenged perspectival conventions; but also in in early avant-garde, Russian constructivism, and kinetic art among other movements. Experimental art in particular brought temporality and movement in focus, initially by putting art into motion, and later by utilising the concept of feedback and invoking interaction in the viewer. The radical avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s was significantly concerned with the relations between art and the temporal, with perspectives of *changing* the reality of everyday life. The 1960s avant-garde group the Situationist International presented a critique of mid-twentieth-century advanced capitalism in movements that sought to bring art to "work" in everyday life. Inspired by Dada and Surrealism, and reflective of the phenomenon of the Happening as a performance, event or situation, they questioned not only the object of art but also turned it into a situation or an activity aimed at changing capitalist forces in society. The Situationists used urban, material and visual environments as their working space, where they tested artistic tactics of subversion in the *détournement* and studied the specific effects of the geographic environment on the emotions and behaviours of individuals in explorations of psychogeography.[36] The intention was to let new modes of perception and interpretation form new perspectives and lead to actual change and revolution. The attention to change has since the avant-garde become a significant paradigm, for example in "genres" like hybrid art and bioart, and focused the aesthetic ideal of pragmatism towards new horizons. However, change today derives from different and broader motivations than those found in the resistance tactics of subversion employed in the 1960s. Today, artists are continuously exploring new ways to affect society, encouraged by the conditions of a networked culture with new hybrid commons and the powerful ambient potential of new technology.

36. Psychogeography, as a tactic explored by the Situationists, makes reference to many urban artworks today that employ subversive tactics or challenge our geopgraphic navigation with mobile media, also known as "locative media" and "mobile art".

New urban resistance in aesthetics of repair

The mode of *resistance* we find in the radical avant-garde is perhaps the strongest discourse in urban media art in consideration of its raison d'être. We find in the radical avant-garde an inherent connection between the artistic idea of innovation and the idea of politically guided change, which is often considered appropriate for connecting the aesthetic to the political in urban public space. The resistance-tactics of the avant-garde, for example those of the Situationist International, involved a

reaction – in theory, a radical one – against what at the time was considered a major cultural thread in society: towards mid-twentieth century advanced capitalism, in particular the effects of social alienation and commodity fetishism. The resistance performed, since the 1960s onwards, towards capitalism and its visual organisation of our urban lifeworld, has gradually expanded in scope to address various conditions of digitisation under capitalism today and the new challenges this has brought to urban culture. In the urban context, art engages with current issues such as: decline in public culture and threatening of democracy by temporary, unstable conditions of public commons;[37] current critical implementation of technology and sensor networks into urban space that affects processes of cultural formation;[38] and a concern for the specific urban ideals that are concealed in technologies, i.e. protocols of digital interfaces.[39] Urban media art responds to current, critical urban discourses, often through interferences with, or an adaption of, network culture (and the invisible dynamics of surveillance) and the threat this poses as the dominant organisational principle for the global economy.[40] It investigates and disrupts the "smart city promises" of more efficient urban spaces,[41] and the implication of new geographies of information that are increasingly driven by data and predictive analytics.[42] When trying to understand the forces that organise our urban spheres and environments, we have to consider the hybrid commons, beyond the material public space, and take into account the forces that drive our "digital" cultures and behaviours. These forces do not represent aspects or ideas about the world as much as they construe and actively generate our world.

37. Eric Kluitenberg, "Public Agency in Hybrid Space. In Search of Foundations for New Forms of Public Engagement," this volume.

38. Soenke Zehle, "Common Conflicts, Imperial Imaginaries: Exploring the Becoming-Environmental of Media," this volume.

39. Martijn de Waal, "The Future of the City: A Smart City of a Social City?" this volume.

40. Kazys Varnelis, "The Rise of Network Culture," this volume.

41. Norbert Streitz, "Smart Cities Need Privacy by Design for Being Humane," this volume.

42. Mark Shepard, "Predictive Geographies," this volume.

Resistance is often considered in relation to a model of conflict. We find this in Peter Weibel's notion of "artivism", which combines art and activism, which he describes as "the first new art form in the twenty-first century."[43] Artivism is motivated by a performative turn, in the sense of the ability to respond to stimulus in the world, which is causing both an actual and perceived reciprocal influence between humans and environments with new media. Artivism arrives in response to a particular current phenomenon of "cultures of repair" in today's protest groups, found in for example the Occupy movement, which searches for ways out of the environmental, financial or democracy crises in reaction to the partial inability

43. Peter Weibel, "Artivism. Media, Art and Democratic Action in the Twenty-first Century," this volume.

44. Peter Weibel, *Global Activism, Art and Conflict in the 21st Century* (Karlsruhe: ZKM Center for Art and Media and Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), 24.

to act because of the structure of the political system.[44] What we witness in the notion of artivism is an increase in unequivocal responses to overcoming crises occurring in performance-based interventions, combined with distributions through the mass media.

Mirrored in Weibel's notion of "cultures of repair", perhaps we can consider "aesthetics of repair". "Repair" may be grasped in terms of restoring something to a good condition, making good damage, or putting something right. This is the concept as from its Latin origin of *reparare,* a combination of *"re-"* (meaning "back") and *"parare"* (meaning "make ready"). This conception implies a sense of utility, function and usefulness, in the notion of fixing something, not unlike the pragmatic-aesthetic ideal. But we may also consider a slightly different conception, in the notion of going to, or heading somewhere; somewhere as a place that is habitually or frequently visited or occupied. This conception has roots in the Latin origin of *repatriare* (meaning "returning to one's country") and concerns a movement towards a place that is "home" or familiar; perhaps more than location, an existential "home" of human self-reference, as reflected in the ideal of aestheticism. Aesthetics of repair might very well act as a formulation between pragmatism, aestheticism and a sense resistance: a simultaneous appreciation of the sensual qualities in art on its own merit, while also inviting a purposeful, active engagement of media art with issues, publics, situations and politics, in urban space. In this mode of doing, the three dimensions of context, presence and change are always engaged, sometimes one more explicitly than the other and sometimes coming to effect at different times during the life of the artwork. For example, "change" may happen long after the installation was up, while "presence" might be mostly affected during the installation.

As an aesthetics of repair, what urban media art can *do* is to produce effects in reality – as impulses in the current state of our technological society. It can react to situations, contribute to instigating vocabularies and models of action, and contribute to the formation of political subjects that challenge the given distribution of the sensible by evoking in the audience a political nature (by diverting them from their "natural" purpose). Attention to this aspect of what urban media art can do is found in this book under the theme ACTION. The art can also define variations of sensible entities, perceptions and the abilities of bodies, which is the focus of the theme HUMAN PRESENCE. It can take hold of unspecified groups of people, widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, trajectories and ways in which

groups of people adhere to a condition, and cause modifications in the sensory perception of what is common to a community, which is the focus of the theme SHARED EXPERIENCE. Art can contribute to a new literacy for grasping and decoding new "languages", for example code, big data, algorithms, predictions, etc. that become increasingly defining urban factors in our contemporary condition of twenty–first century media,[45] as explored under the theme ENVIRONMENT & SENSE ECOLOGY. It can interfere with the functionality of gestures and rhythms adapted to the natural cycles of production, reproduction, and submission in concrete urban contexts, and facilitate relationships between modes of being, saying, doing and making in public space, as is the focus of the theme PLACEMAKING.

45. The term "twenty–first century media" is suggested by Mark Hansen to denote a media system integrated with our urban reality that registers environmentality of the world itself (environmental sensibility), prior to and without any necessary relation with human affairs. Mark B. N. Hansen, *Feed-Forward: On the future of twenty–first century media* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 8.

It is crucial that we continue to challenge the aesthetic means by which we interfere with the distributed, sensible, and emotional infrastructures of our world. We should be aware and attentive to what media aesthetic expressions add to public space, our hybrid commons, our digital present and our becoming within it, and how they contribute to sharing culture and renovating ideas of what it means to be public – and human. What urban media art can do, as an aesthetic impulse, is intervene in the "sensible distribution" that orders and frames our urban experience, thus modifying our sense of agency and capacity to act upon the world.