

OPTIONALTIME/ *public expanse*

Before exploring the relationship between new media and public space, we'd like to briefly address the state of 'new media' today and more specifically, the use of 'virtual space'. Virtual space is generally defined as a 'space' created by a network of computers or more recently, networked mobile (communication) devices. While it is very interesting to investigate this new non-physical space, generally by doing so the 'real' space is taken for granted. In fact, in most cases physical spatial metaphors are being used to describe and control the virtual environments (like the way we still use an old-fashioned desktop as the main computer interface). This is limiting. We think a more interesting perspective is to turn it around; let (the rules of) virtual space define physical space. Suddenly the space would become dynamic instead of static, and time would become non-linear instead of linear. To achieve such a shift in perception we need new tools, new new media. In this proposal we use a yet to be defined medium: interactive movie.

When observing the use of the public space today, it is apparent how most behaviors circle around time. Time is in many ways the most influential navigation system for public space. Yet time is generally considered to be linear, and we believe this linearity limits the understanding of the space itself. What new new media can do in this case is create an *experience* of non-linearity. This might broaden our notion of the possibilities of (public) space and thereby inspire to a more dynamic use of it.

OPTIONALTIME/ *public expanse* has the appearance of a big mirror placed in a public space. The public will see itself reflected, but the reflected image does not obey the (common) laws of linearity. In fact it is not a mirror, but a movie, an interactive movie. The public is offered a role in this movie, not only because their physical image is part of it, but more importantly by giving them the possibility to play with the image, to direct it. *Now it is possible to place a passerby back into your (mirrored) reality while he already left the scene. Now people appear by your side that are not in your reality, or maybe have been there, but at another moment in time.* This mirror reflects public space with a sense of magic and entertainment. It enables you to interact with yourself; now, a while ago, and in action that did not take place yet. We use technology to make this non-linear experience tangible.

OPTIONALTIME/ *public expanse* is a layered projection; visually blended into one 'real' image. One layer is pure fiction and has been filmed by us, forming our most direct (personal) contribution. The fictive layer will be changed on a regular basis. Other artists and filmmakers could be invited to contribute, or one could even imagine a networked version, where this layer might be generated from other (public) spaces.

The public space and its public generate the other layers. The way this is achieved touches another aspect of today's public space: the use of cameras. Surveillance cameras have become a natural part of public spaces with the argument that they increase our security. OPTIONALTIME/ *public expanse* uses cameras with full transparency; what is recorded is shown and nothing is archived. All images are being processed in real-time by a computer, resulting in playback that sometimes is 'live' (a normal mirror image), sometimes buffered (delayed or accelerated mirror image) and sometimes spatially manipulated. The playback 'mode' of the projection is directly controlled by the actions of the public. Their positions and movements are captured by (other) sensing cameras. *If you freeze (no movement) in front of the mirror, your reflected image freezes, but another part of the mirror might freeze with you, while the reality side will carry on in its normal pace. Another person's mirror-image will remain frozen while he walks on in reality. The magic kicks in when all the rest of the mirror image keeps its reality pace too...*

In the last example OPTIONALTIME/ *public expanse* invites the public on a social aspect. Public spaces are oftentimes used as a 'non-place' where little spontaneous interaction takes place. We find that a pity.

OPTIONALTIME/ *public expanse* frames the public space as a unified image, stimulating new ways of interacting with each other. *The moment a person realizes that his movements have a visual impact on the mirror image of a stranger and decides to play with it, that stranger might be looking in the mirror too. A moment of contact that can be furthered.*

In cities with big scale architecture, our ideas are often challenged, as if tall buildings inspire us to think bigger.

OPTIONALTIME/ *public expanse* will in a similar way enrich the public space, infusing its users to understand their surroundings in a more dynamic and less linear way. Moreover it will entertain you, now having unlimited influence on your environment, while waiting for that train that arrives late in linear time.