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Performing Public Space

> The piazza, in fact, is 'un-American'. Americans feel uncomfortable sitting in a square: they should be working at the office or home with the family looking at television.
>
> (Robert Venturi 1966)
>
> I think we are still stuck with this idea of the street and the plaza as a public domain, but the public domain is radically changing. I don't want to respond in clichés, but with television and the media and a whole series of other inventions, you could say that the public domain is lost. But you could also say that it's now so pervasive it does not need physical articulation any more. I think the truth is somewhere in between.
>
> (Rem Koolhaas 1991)[1]

During the 1980s television screens began appearing in a variety of public spaces. At one end of the scale, standard size monitors were utilized as electronic information surfaces in locations such as railway stations, while from the other end the Sony Jumbo Tron was exhibited at *Expo 85* near Tokyo. Video artist Peter Callas (1999: 71) recalls monitors massed into formations: 'The Sony consumer headquarters in Ginza, built in the early 80s, sported an entire wall of monitors that was seven or eight stories high.' From the initial experiments in cities such as Tokyo and New York, the migration of electronic screens into the cityscape has become one of the most visible and influential tendencies of contemporary urbanism. The old television *set* has morphed from a small-scale appliance – a material object primarily associated with domestic space – to become a large-scale *screen*; less a piece of furniture than an architectural surface resident not in the home but in the street outside. This transformation has intersected the other major transformations of media technology and culture over the last two decades: the formation of distributed global networks using satellite, cable and fibre optic transmission which multiply channels and erode regional and national boundaries, and the emergence of mobile media devices which displace the social architecture which accreted around fixed media forms. The cumulative impact of these developments on the relation between media space and public space has been profound.

While public screens were initially startling, their novelty soon waned as large screens with better colour resolution became cheaper to install and operate. Reminiscent of the rush in the 1920s to create 'Great White Ways' to rival Manhattan's Broadway, cities across the world turned *en masse* to large-scale screens as a popular strategy for 'reinvigorating' public space in the 1990s. By New Year's Eve 2000, people gathered in public squares in

different cities around the world to celebrate the event – and to watch people in squares elsewhere celebrating via a global satellite link-up.[2] This distinctive manifestation of globalization, in which the idea of 'one world' can be *performed* by technology, proved a harbinger of things to come.[3]

How should we understand these new forms of *public* spectating? What impact will they have on public space? The decline of public culture, and the related demise of public space became a familiar tale in the late 20th century. Influential analysts such as Habermas (1989), Jacobs (1961), Sennett (1977), Berman (1982), Davis (1990) Sorkin (1992) and Harvey (2003) all argued that the public culture which had characterized an earlier modernism had been displaced by a pervasive withdrawal into domesticity and the private sphere. The rise of the suburbs was positioned as the nemesis to the public space of an older city. The integration of suburban life with national broadcast systems after World War II not only meant that electronic media such as radio and television colonized the public sphere, but media space subsumed more and more of the roles once reserved for public space. In this vein, Dayan and Katz (1992) defined the 'media event' largely in terms of the privatization of the public sphere, as events once experienced collectively in public space were increasingly consumed by spectators who watched from the privacy of their homes. Paul Virilio's (1994: 64) account of the displacement of traditional public spaces by the 'vision machine' sketches a similar trajectory:

> This public image has today replaced the former public spaces in which social communication took place. Avenues and public venues are from now on eclipsed by the screen, by electronic displays, in preview of the 'vision machines' just around the corner. [. . .] Really once *public space* yields to *public image*, surveillance and street lighting can be expected to shift too, from the street to the *domestic display terminal*.

In *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (published in 1966 and recognized as one of the key texts of architectural postmodernism), Robert Venturi (1966: 33) put a more positive spin on the same transformation, famously polemicizing against older forms of public space: 'The piazza, in fact, is "un-American." Americans feel uncomfortable sitting in a square: they should be working at the office or home with the family looking at television. Chores around the house or the weekend drive have replaced the *passeggiata*.'

Whether the spatial paradigm established by electronic broadcast media led as inexorably from public to private as these accounts suggest, the emergence of new media platforms clearly demands that we re-examine this trajectory in the present. Large public screens and mobile media devices mean that media consumption is increasingly occurring in public space. What impact will the electronic screen have on the street, the self-proclaimed birthplace of modernism? How will pervasive media alter the dynamics of public space? New forms of public interaction clearly have the potential to transform existing configurations of power defining the uses

and ambiance of public space. If urban space has historically been defined by the relation between static structures and mobile subjects, this dichotomy is fast giving way to hybrid spatialities characterized by dynamic flows which not only dissolve the fixity of traditional modes of spatial enclosure, but problematize the unified presence of the subject traversing their contours.

To better understand the contemporary interplay between media and public space, I will begin this chapter by tracing the trajectory which took modern culture from the street to the screen and then back again. Arguments for and against 'the street' as the site of cosmopolitan public culture not only register tensions in competing visions of the modern city, but serve as an important framework for understanding the contemporary function of electronic media as the *hinge* between public and private life. These older arguments also index the crucial political dimension to contemporary debates over the relation between media and public space. Part of the ambivalence surrounding digital media in the present is precisely its implication in contemporary developments to 'secure' public space through what Lyon (2001) calls 'surveillant sorting'. Yet new media technologies also offer tantalizing glimpses of more participatory and inclusive forms of mediated public space. While modern media technologies have historically been integrated into the spatial dynamics of the city along the two dominant axes of spectacle and surveillance, the extent to which contemporary media can be used to promote other forms of spatial agency remains a critical issue. At the conclusion of this chapter, I will suggest that the experimental practices of contemporary media art can offer a useful test-bed for exploring the critical potential of relational space – the demand to actively construct social relations to others across heterogeneous spatio-temporal regimes – by promoting new forms of public agency.

Down in the street

In *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman (1982) subtitled his chapter on Baudelaire 'modernism in the streets'. For Berman (1982: 148), Baudelaire's prose poems collected as *Paris Spleen* (1869) offer access to 'primal modern scenes', notably through their celebration of the street as the condenser of social heterogeneity.[4] In Berman's (1982: 196) terms, the street formed the 'common meeting ground and communications line' of the 19th-century city; in more contemporary terms, it was the *interface* at which different classes met and intermingled. While Haussmann's urban zoning meant that working-class housing in Paris actually became more segregated than previously, as many workers were relegated to outlying suburbs, Fierro (2003: 24) notes that the new boulevards nevertheless produced new patterns of social contact:

> As boulevards cut across the city in unrelentingly straight lines, they provided
> a sectional slice through *quartiers* that had been closed to view. Immediately

behind the regulated facades of the boulevard, neighbourhoods of the lower classes could be seen, and their constituents had full access to the city's major thoroughfares. Consequently, the boulevards provided an arena for the display of the bourgeoisie not only to each other, but to a wide demographic mix of economic classes and nationalities.

In grafting new forms of public visibility onto new modes of social mobility, previously unfamiliar conjunctions and contrasts became evident. In 'The Eyes of the Poor', Baudelaire describes the experience of sitting with a lover in a luxurious, brightly-lit café situated on one of the new boulevards, surrounded by piles of rubble – the debris of the old Paris which is being cleared to make way for the new. The poet becomes aware of a poor family watching them through the large glass window which was a distinctive feature of the new building. However, where the poet feels guilt and pity as a consequence of this scrutiny, his lover merely expresses her desire for the poor to be removed from her sight. Ultimately, this creates an emotional distance between the pair that leaves the poet disconsolate and angry. The poet's response indexes the ambivalence of Baudelaire's work – and the ambivalence of the practice of *flânerie* of which Benjamin regarded him as emblematic – to the social transformation conditioned by the extension of market capitalism. While Baudelaire clearly recognizes the novel interplay between architectural and class divisions underpinning the formation of modern culture, he evaluates the disjunction as a personal rather than a political relation.

On the boulevards of modern cities, the *crowd* emerged as specific social actor. As Simmel (1997) summarized it, the characteristic experience of the modern city is living among strangers *who remain strangers*. In other words, these strangers do not move on, as they would from a village, but neither do they necessarily become familiar in staying. Instead, mutual anonymity takes its place alongside various degrees of familiarity as the most common social condition in the modern city.[5] Building on Simmel's concept of the 'blasé attitude', Giddens (1991: 152) argues that modern public life is characterized by 'civil indifference', as personal knowledge of others is replaced by more abstract administrative forms of control and increased reliance on expert technical systems:

> The public only becomes fully distinguished from the private when a society of strangers is established in the full sense, that is when the notion of 'stranger' loses its meaning. From that time on, the civil indifference, which is the gearing mechanism of generalised public trust, becomes more or less wholly distinct from the private domain, and particularly from the sphere of intimate relationships.

It is this gathering of strangers, with its tendency to produce unexpected conjunctions, that underlies Richard Sennett's optimistic rationale for modern urban life. In Sennett's (1977: 296) terms, living among strangers means that experience is inevitably subjected to multiple collisions or jolts:

> These jolts are necessary to a human being to give him that sense of tentativeness about his own beliefs which every civilized person must have.

In other words, the *structural* conditions of modern urban life militate against absolutism and in favour of cosmopolitanism – the cosmopolitan being Sennett's (1977: 17) 'perfect public man'.

While Sennett's (1977) influential account of the 'fall' of public man shares common ground with Berman – both extol the cosmopolitan virtues of modern urban life, advocating the expansion of parochial experience through the 'shock' of difference, and both castigate the late-20th-century city for its loss of vibrant public spaces capable of sustaining such interactions – his more ambitious analysis departs Berman's in a number of key respects. If both writers see 19th-century Paris as a crucible for the formation of a new public life, Sennett (1977: 160) locates the demise of public culture significantly earlier than does Berman. For Sennett (1977: 125), the increased dynamism of the Parisian boulevards following Haussmannization was a sign that Paris was in fact 'ceasing to be a public culture', and was instead becoming a spectacle.[6]

Sennett argues that the flowering of public life in the 18th century was associated with the emergence of new public spaces in which strangers might meet, such as theatres and parks. However, the balance between private and public behaviour was progressively altered during the 19th century, obviating the 'distance' previously granted by social rules and conventions.[7] The importance of the loss of distance is a function of the pivotal role Sennett (1977: 29) gives to social role-playing in sustaining public culture among strangers: 'Playacting in the form of manners, conventions, and ritual gestures is the very stuff out of which public relations are formed [. . .].' Playacting among strangers is vital because it involves testing out boundaries, thereby moving social rules from the background of the taken-for-granted to the foreground of public consciousness. Playacting in public can therefore take on political connotations. It can become the basis for a collective reassessment of habit and custom.

While playacting demands the maintenance of social distance, Sennett argues that the capacity for public expression declined during the 19th century as 'playacting' gave way to 'intimacy'.[8] Sennett relates the rise of intimacy to the new conditions of commodity capitalism. As depersonalization became the increasingly routine consequence of economic transformation, it was reactively counterpointed by a heightened demand for 'authentic' personal interaction. The interplay of these two forces militated against the very forms of social interaction that had been vital to sustaining cosmopolitan public culture. Instead, they created the modern conditions in which people came to believe 'that community is a mutual act of self-disclosure', while at the same time undervaluing 'the community relations of strangers, particularly those which occur in cities' (Sennett 1977: 4). Once 'intimate relations determine what shall be believable', conventions, artifices and rules appear only as blockages to social interaction: they are 'obstructions of intimate expression' (Sennett 1977: 37). Sennett (1977: 37) argued that this severely diminished the social capacity for public expression:

> With an emphasis on psychological authenticity, people become inartistic in daily life because they are unable to tap the fundamental creative strength of the actor, the ability to play with and invest feeling in external images of the self.

As a consequence, public expression was reduced to a special quality, one thought to inhere only in certain individuals, such as actors, musicians, artists, and, importantly, politicians. However, for the majority of people, who did not believe themselves to possess these special expressive capacities, expression was relegated to the private sphere of family life. Silence and uniform behaviour emerged as defensive mechanisms for appearing in public.[9] The result was a public culture privileging looking over talking, detachment over engagement:

> There grew up the idea that strangers had no right to speak to each other, that each man possessed as a public right an invisible shield, a right to be left alone. [. . .] Public behaviour was a matter of observation, of passive participation, of a certain kind of voyeurism [. . .]. (Sennett 1977: 27)

In this context, the kind of ritualized interaction among strangers in public, which might lead to collective political action, was doubly displaced: first, by the retreat of authentic personal expression into the sanctuary of the family; and, second, by placing heightened reliance on charismatic secular leaders for vicarious public expression. This marks the historical point at which politics begins to become a media phenomenon in a modern sense.

Sennett's analysis accords in many respects with Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire, but sacrifices something of Benjamin's sensitivity to the *emergent*, and therefore uncertain, nature of the new social conditions. For Benjamin (1999b: 10), Baudelaire is a seminal figure precisely because, as the epitome of the *flâneur*, he registers the ambivalence of modern life so acutely: 'The *flâneur* still stands on the threshold – of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd.' Where most 19th-century writers treated the crowd predominantly as a figure of menace or despair, Benjamin (2003: 324) argues that Baudelaire's initial attitude to the crowd is characterized by *fascination*. Like much else, it will not survive Haussmannization unchanged:

> If he succumbed to the force that attracted him to [the crowd] and that made him, as a *flâneur*, one of them, he was nevertheless unable to rid himself of a sense of their essentially inhuman character. (Benjamin 2003: 326)

As a result of this tension, Benjamin (2003: 343) argues that Baudelaire's work offers the first *aesthetic* recognition of the historic contradiction of modern life: 'He named the price for which the sensation of modernity could be had: the disintegration of the aura in immediate shock experience [*Chockerlebnis*]'. It is from this perspective that Benjamin locates a significant shift in Baudelaire's work as the commodity character of social relationships becomes more pronounced. As the rhythms of both economic exchange and social life accelerate, the prospects for *flânerie* diminish. What Benjamin (1997: 53) called the *flâneur*'s 'art of strolling' depended on the maintenance of barriers to urban circulation: he

contrasts the Paris which still relies on ferries rather than bridges to cross the Seine to the London of Poe's 'Man of the Crowd' (1840) where rapidly moving urban dwellers have already been reduced to 'masses'. Impediments to circulation are the architectural counterparts to the mannered 'distance' that Sennett posits as social supports for interaction among strangers. A feature of the Parisian arcades was the way that pedestrians could linger without competing with vehicular traffic. Benjamin (1999b: 31) notes:

> Around 1840 it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades. The *flâneurs* would have liked the turtles to set the pace for them. If they had had their way, progress would have been obliged to accommodate itself to this pace. But this attitude did not prevail; Taylor, who popularized the catchphrase 'Down with Dawdling!' carried the day.

'Down with dawdling' could equally have been Haussmann's *motif*. By the time *Paris Spleen* was written at the close of the 1860s, Benjamin (2003: 343) suggests that the *flâneur*'s radical lustre had faded. In a letter written to Adorno in 1939, Benjamin (2003: 208) argued that the *flâneur* gradually becomes 'attuned to the commodity'. The liminal quality of the new public spaces ebbed away as the 'unproductive' practice of *flânerie* was gradually integrated into the economically 'productive' practice of shopping. For Benjamin (1999b: 10) 'The department store is the last promenade for the *flâneur*.' In the department store shopping was raised to the level of an aesthetic practice capable of generating pleasure through the new forms of commodity display born on the back of mass production.

The corollary of the spectacular society of which the department store is a symptom is the profound levelling of social experience. As those such as Marx and Simmel pointed out, the extension of the market economy into more areas of social life, meant that everyday experience was increasingly subjected to quantitative measurement. The growth of the money economy meant there was a growing sense that everything had a price and could be compared on that basis.

While there are significant differences between the analyses of public space proposed by Sennett, Berman and Benjamin, all three writers share a sense of the importance of a public culture in which people interact, not as voyeurs, consumers or commodities, but as active agents able to understand, and thereby alter, their own social situation. In their analyses the street constitutes a vital theatre for the formation of a specifically modern consciousness. The advantage of Benjamin's analysis is not only that he is more attentive to the political ambivalence of mid-19th-century public culture, but that he situates this ambivalence in relation to the emergence of technological media. Benjamin emphasizes that the isolated individuals observed by Engels in 19th-century London are not a 'natural' part of urban life, but the historically specific outcome of developments in industrial capitalism. While Benjamin evaluates the *flâneur* positively in contrast to the

undifferentiated crowd, he also draws a negative contrast between the individualism underpinning *flânerie* and the imagined solidarity of a working class becoming conscious of its own life circumstances. It is this understanding that underpinned Benjamin's insistence that the technological image was the key to developing new forms of political collectivity, once the dynamite of film had blown apart the prison cell of the industrial city.[10]

Repudiating the street

Benjamin (2003: 327) notes that: 'Fear, revulsion and horror were the emotions which the big-city crowd aroused in those who first observed it.' This statement also seems an apt description of the attitude taken by key figures of the *avant-garde* of modernist architecture. Fear of revolution merged with antipathy to the growing squalor and chaos caused by capitalist industrialization, creating the conditions for over-investment in the dream of the *planned* metropolis. Corbusier's 'architecture or revolution' coda added to *Towards a New Architecture* (1923) was symptomatic of a widely shared view that rational building was the key to rational social form.[11]

While there were many good reasons – and at least some good intentions – behind the numerous schemes for 'modernizing' the city that emerged in the wake of World War II, the general polemic against the street was marked. In place of the disorganized street, functional zoning and integrated infrastructure were distilled from Haussmann's example into a general programme of urban planning. The formation of the Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in 1928, and particularly the principles of its charter enunciated at its fourth Congress on 'The Functional City' held at Athens in 1933, established urban planning parameters which held sway until at least the 1970s.[12] While urban planning produced some undoubted gains with respect to the inefficient flows, miserable living spaces, and endemic health crises of the industrial city, amongst the many problems later identified is the problem of public space: at what point do attempts to rationally plan increasingly complex urban spaces and circulatory systems collapse into prescriptive attempts to control public behaviour? In retrospect, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that, following Haussmann to the letter, many plans for 'rationalizing' the street were premised on the desire to eliminate any site which might enable 'the people' to constitute a collective revolutionary subject.[13]

The desire to tame the street became a staple of modernist architectural thought. Hugh Ferriss, one of the key figures behind what Corbusier dubbed the 'pitiful paradox' of Manhattan, opened his influential *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929) with a memorable description of the view from his office tower into a stygian Manhattan fog. The subsequent descent into the street is figured as a traumatic encounter with the 'real':

> Going down into the streets of a modern city must seem – to the newcomer, at least – a little like Dante's descent into Hades. Certainly, so unacclimated

visitor would find, in the dense atmosphere, in the kaleidoscopic sights, the confused noise and the complex physical contacts, something very reminiscent of the lower realms. (Ferriss 1986: 18)

The need to systematize the street's benefits and pacify its dangers was stated most forcefully by Le Corbusier, and can be traced through all his early writings. The key urban problem, as Corbusier formulated it in the inter-war period, was congestion. On the one hand, the design and lay-out of city streets was set at the wrong scale. On the other hand, the speed of new vehicles, particularly the automobile, necessitated radical change. In *Towards a New Architecture* (1923), Corbusier (1946: 54–56) establishes what will be a recurring position:

> We should repudiate the existing lay-out of our towns, in which the conges-
> tion of buildings grows greater, interlaced by narrow streets full of noise, petrol
> fumes and dust; and where on each storey the windows open wide on to this
> foul confusion. The great towns have become too dense for the security of their
> inhabitants and yet they are not sufficiently dense to meet the new needs of
> 'modern business'.

Corbusier's solution to the needs of modern business is not the dispersion of the city into the suburban gardens of Howard or Wright, but the creation of even larger towers. By concentrating habitation, such towers 'will leave enormous open spaces in which would run, well away from them, the noisy arterial roads, full of traffic which becomes increasingly rapid. At the foot of the towers would stretch the parks: trees covering the whole town' (1946: 56). A similar vision animates *The City of Tomorrow* (1924) which proclaims: 'The "corridor-street" between its two pavements, stifled between tall houses, must disappear' (1971: 77). In its place, Corbusier (1971: 122) proposes: 'We must create another type of street'. Drawing on his favoured metaphor of machine production, Corbusier (1971: 131–32) asserts: 'The street is a traffic machine; it is in reality a factory for producing speed', later adding his famous assertion: 'A city made for speed is made for success' (1971: 179). In streets designed primarily for circulation, the *flâneur*'s 'art of strolling' can find no place.

Despite his advocacy of planned communities housed in high-rise buildings, Corbusier (1971: 165) did not support mass transit systems as a solution to urban congestion. After declaring: '*The tramway has no right to exist in the heart of the modern city*' (1971: 165), Corbusier's 'Voisin Plan' – so named for the car company who sponsored it – gave the private motor vehicle a striking dual role. Corbusier (1971: 275) proclaims: 'The motor has killed the great city. The motor must save the great city.' This is the basis of his plans for a multi-level circulation system, which included arterial roads bearing a striking resemblance to contemporary urban freeway systems (1971: 164–65). In *The Radiant City* (1935), the same theme is repeated: 'Streets are an obsolete notion. There ought not to be such a thing as "streets" ' (1964: 121). What has changed by the mid-1930s is that the street's function is to be internalized: 'Most of the city's streets will now be

inside the buildings' (1964: 113). Drawing, as he frequently did, on the model of the ship, Corbusier's building of the future was designed with internal circulation systems. The corridors of Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation (1947–52) not only looked back to Fourier's 19th-century *phalanstèry*, but forward to the future in which large-scale shopping malls replaced strip shopping centres located on public streets.

The modern separation of the social and circulatory functions of the street was eventually canonized by influential educators such as Lewis Mumford and Siegfried Giedion.[14] However, despite constant advocacy, the conflict between the automobile and human habitation of urban space has never been resolved, merely displaced. Indeed, even as Corbusier dreamed of new streets which submitted the ecology of public life to the rationalization of Fordist-Taylorist logic, the car found itself being increasingly overtaken by the higher speed of a new vector: that of electronic media. If the private car is the harbinger of the dominance of suburbs over city, it is electronic media which consolidates this new political settlement in which the political function of public space cedes ground to media space. While the spectacular space of the 1920s electropolis still radiated a level of political ambivalence – a sense that the destabilization of tradition could promote radical political change as a corollary to rapid technological and economic change – by the end of World War II this conception of public culture and public space was declining. Instead, the liminal space produced by the expansion of capitalism was welded into new social and political formations in which technological media played a key role. On the one hand, this gave rise to the destructive, false unities of racially based fascism and national communism, where media such as radio and cinema were used to engineer ecstatic fusion of the masses with a charismatic leader.[15] On the other hand, it found expression in the Fordist mass consumption lifestyle pioneered in the United States, where a radical image politics emerged from the fusion of the star culture of Hollywood with lifestyle marketing and expanded commodity circulation. After World War II, it was *this* political settlement which proved victorious, and spread across large swathes of the world. Fetishizing the individual in terms of private rights and consumer choice has proved to be incompatible with the values of public culture. As a result, the role of urban public space in animating an earlier modernity began to recede significantly, especially in the United States.

Post-urbanism

If the 1920s can be seen as the zenith of the modern industrial city, the decline becomes far more evident after World War II. In the United States, official policies supported suburbanization. Subsidized Federal loans for returned soldier housing fuelled the flight from inner city areas which were themselves starved of funds. The scale of transformation was unprecedented: between 1940 and 1947, 60 million Americans – nearly half the population – moved to new homes (Dimendberg 1997: 70). Older city

centres were increasingly becoming 'black' ghettos contrasted to the new 'white' suburban developments such as Levittown. This growing fear of the city looms large in *film noir* of the mid-1930s and 1940s.[16]

Suburbs significantly altered the balance between public and private space. As Kasinitz (1994: 275) argues:

> Suburbs [. . .] are notably rich in private spaces and poor in public ones. By the postwar era even the layout of American homes – spacious backyards and 'decks' replacing front porches and stoops – had come to express a turning away from the street and towards controllable domesticity.

In this 'turning away from the street' the public encounters that had characterized the social life of an older urban form were increasingly displaced onto the electronic media. As Virilio (1991: 25) sums it up: 'The screen abruptly became the city square.' The spread of the suburbs corresponds to the historical rise of broadcast media. Radio and television outflank traditional forms of interactions in public space by constructing alternative means for virtual participation in collective social life. As the home becomes a media centre, a *node* within radio and television networks, social life is increasingly characterized by a retreat to the private. This is the context for the emergence of a fully fledged image politics which depends, above all, on television becoming the dominant political medium. By the 1950s, television was bringing politicians 'close' to the audience in a double sense. While the use of close-ups gave access to facial expressions and previously unseen personal attributes, television delivered these into the living room, exemplifying the transfiguration of 'nearness' that Benjamin posited as the key effect of technological images. As late as the end of the 1950s, Tourraine still felt able to argue for the radical edge of this new mediated polity:

> Those who are 'home-centred', and who own a radio, a television, a record player, magazines, are by-passing the social hierarchy of their community, in order to make direct contact with broader social realities and values. (Cited in Sadler 1998: 38–40)

Half a century later, the democratizing credentials of 'direct contact' media seem far less certain. This is not only because the rhetoric of 'directness' is now routinely employed by contemporary politicians to justify their preference for media such as talkback radio or the internet which allow them to communicate with 'the people' while bypassing the scrutiny of professional journalists. It is also because the same forces which brought television viewers 'close' to politicians enabled intimacy to re-emerge from the bosom of family life and become the dominant model for political life. In Sennett's (1977: 220) terms contemporary public life is increasingly characterized by 'destructive *gemeinschaft*' in which social relationships are treated as 'disclosures of personality'. Since the Clinton presidency this is often called the 'character' issue: the tendency to judge politicians and other public figures according to what we think they are 'really like as a person'. On the surface, this marks some kind of return to what Habermas (1989: 5–7) called the 'publicness of representation' in

which the feudal lord displayed himself publicly as the literal embodiment of higher power. However, a key difference in the present is that those subjected to such close examination are no longer chosen by birth or guaranteed by social hierarchy. Instead their status has increasingly become a function of the celebrity conferred by the circulation of technological images. This transition underpins the deepening of the convergence between the role of actor and politician, as power is increasingly meshed with media-defined circuits of celebrity. The effective politician, like the good actor or celebrity, is likely to be one who is able to 'be themself' on camera.[17]

Sennett's analysis of late-20th-century public culture undoubtedly has its limits. His critique of public intimacy can certainly be read in terms of his unspoken fear of the 'feminization' of public culture. However, it shouldn't be reduced to this. Sennett's key insight is that a critical public culture in a large-scale society needs to develop forms of public interaction independent of the putative 'authenticity' of the character of its participants. The problem with evaluating strangers in terms of 'character' is that modern social encounters, especially those orchestrated through the media, grant limited ability to make such judgements. Yet the nature of contemporary political debate means that such judgements are routinely demanded. The result is a raging trade in manufactured tokens of public intimacy extending well beyond official politics, spanning a cultural spectrum from the unofficial politics of advertising to the rise of 'confessional' media forms such as webcams, blogs and reality television.

Control space

The flight of inner city urban populations was partially arrested during the 1980s, as defunct industrial sites in city centres around the world began to undergo widespread redevelopment. However, what emerged was strikingly different to older city centres. By the end of the 1980s Mike Davis (1992: 155) argued:

> The American city is being systematically turned inward. The 'public' spaces of the new megastructures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity.

Jane Jacobs' (1961) famous advocacy of New York's village model of mutual community supervision of the street stands as the last hurrah of an older urban public space. In its place emerged a new emphasis on techniques of *control*, from gated communities and 'business improvement districts' to the ubiquity of technological surveillance. In the shift from what Beck (1992) terms 'partial modernity' to the 'full modernity' of risk society, public encounters with strangers are treated as increasingly problematic, and control of the street has become part of a wider agenda to render urban space not only safe but *predictable*. The 'war on terror' announced in the wake of 9/11 has accentuated the burden placed on media technologies to police public space.

Building on Giddens' (1991) insight that the modern city comprised of strangers elevates questions of 'trust' to a pivotal position, David Lyon (2001) argues that the urban society of strangers created the conditions for the emergence of 'surveillance society'. While the mutual anonymity which is the gift of big city life opens space for self re-invention, it also generates the need for abstract systems of identification to facilitate social interactions among strangers. Lyon (2003: 104–05) notes:

> The modern world may be a society of strangers, but no one was able to maintain their anonymity for long. Bodies may well have 'disappeared' as it became possible to do things at a distance, without direct involvement or intervention, but they were made to re-appear courtesy of surveillance.

Lyon stresses that modern surveillance is not always, or even primarily, undertaken with the explicit intention of instituting police functions. Surveillance society emerges in the nexus of growing demands for economic and administrative 'flexibility'. Like Haussmann's boulevards, it is an outgrowth of the modern quest for efficient circulation. As technological tokens of trust, such as passwords, PINs and credit cards, assume a greater role in social life, social interaction becomes increasingly dependent upon the collection and checking of large volumes of information about individuals. Speed of comparison via the computer is the practical key to the viability of such routines. The searchable database which is the heart of 'information society' is equally the lifeblood of 'surveillance society'.

Contemporary surveillance deploying digital networks differs significantly from its modern predecessors. Not only has surveillance been increasingly displaced from personal observation to technological systems, creating what Virilio (1994) terms the 'vision machine' of automated recording, but individual cameras and sensors are now interconnected, and linked to face and pattern recognition software. Urban CCTV systems are no longer 'islands' located at specific sites such as banks or casinos, but merge into networks permeating wide swathes of urban space. Anyone travelling through a contemporary city is likely to leave a traceable record. This was strikingly illustrated in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, as the movements of Mohammed Atta were retraced from various financial transactions, and could even be watched on video. Lyon (2003: 88) notes: 'He could be seen on grainy CCTV footage entering a motel, paying for fuel at a gas station, picking up supplies in a convenience store, and so on.'

Two factors are worth emphasizing about such a record. First, it was not part of any official police or security operation, but merely the electronic 'footprint' which is a routine part of everyday commercial transactions. Second, digital convergence of older, more fragmented systems meant that authorities were able to assemble various streams of consumer and visual data with great speed. Lyon (2003: 97) concludes: 'Data-gathering is routine, generalized, and distributed across almost every sphere of daily life.' Routine data gathering is the condition for the emergence of what Deleuze (1992) dubbed 'control society' in which the stable separation of spaces

that characterized Foucault's 'disciplinary society' is displaced by spatial flexibility and continual monitoring. In control society, Deleuze argues there are no longer 'masses' and 'individuals', but merely *dividuals*: the condition of the masses become digital samples, or *databanks*.

The speed and flexibility of digital data fundamentally alters the functions of surveillance. Lyon (2001: 57) argues persuasively that the retrospectivity of electronic 'record' has become the prospective orientation of risk management:

> When speed has become so central, not only knowing what is happening in the present, but also anticipating what is about to happen also becomes crucial. Surveillance overtakes itself, as it were, to produce data on events and processes that have yet to occur in real time.

While the rationale supporting the deployment of surveillance technologies in individual cases is often 'reasonable', the problem is the extent to which 'risk management' based on technological surveillance becomes the dominant philosophy for managing public space. As the pioneering studies by Westin (1967) and especially Rule (1973) demonstrated long ago, surveillance inevitably demands the differentiation of normal and deviant groups since 'total surveillance' is prohibitively expensive. As Rule (1973: 279–80) puts it: 'mass surveillance requires constant efforts of *discrimination*'. Without discrimination between those who belong and those who don't, surveillance loses any practical function. This logic assumes increasing importance in the context of the 'war on terror' with its demand for mass screening on the basis of gross profiling.

While such surveillance is invidious, it should not blind us to the fact that security policing remains merely the visible tip of a larger commercial iceberg. The bulk of contemporary surveillance, such as the data-mining of electronic transactions, is undertaken with the ambition of rendering desire more profitable via the formation of detailed personal consumption profiles. The integration of electronic surveillance into contemporary marketing epitomizes Crary's (1999: 73) notion of the 'attentive subject' who internalizes disciplinary imperatives, as individuals become 'more directly responsible for their own efficient or profitable utilization within various social arrangements'. Indeed, the internalization of technological scrutiny has now proceeded to the point that social responses to surveillance have altered significantly. No longer the nightmare scenario imagined by Orwell, surveillance sometimes becomes a mirror for experimental constructions of the self.[18]

The dream of ludic space

If the heterogeneity of urban crowds which generated unexpected encounters on city streets has been central to the cultural dynamism of modernity, the crowd has also inspired fear, loathing and strategies of

containment. As Vincente Rafael (2003: 415) notes: 'Centralized urban planning and technologies of policing seek to routinize the sense of contingency generated in crowding.' To these forms of scrutiny and control we could also add the extensive channelling of desire towards commodity consumption. The success of such strategies for organizing and harnessing the crowd's unruly energies has led to recurrent speculation as to whether there is still space for unplanned social interactions outside the dictates of the commodity spectacle and the increasing routinization of daily urban life. This question was the basis of the Surrealists' group pilgrimages to particular sites in and around Paris in the late 1920s. It was also central to the urban analysis proposed by the Situationists a generation later, and it remains a key issue in contemporary debates about public life in the media city of 'real time' interaction.

The Situationists famously rejected any possibility of reforming the existing city. Change had to be total, predicated on radical changes in the organization of social life. In this vein, Debord's 1959 'Theses on Traffic' (quoted in Knabb 1981: 57) refused to debate the merits of various schemes to promote efficient vehicular circulation, but stressed the need to change the *function* of vehicles in the city, arguing: 'we must replace travel as an adjunct to work with travel as a pleasure.' Situationist theory consistently stressed the street's role as a site of social encounter rather than vehicular circulation.[19] The street was the primary arena for psychogeographical investigations and techniques such as the *dérive* were designed to probe its varied ambiances. The purpose of such urban interventions was to alert people to their imprisonment by urban routine. In contrast to the functional divisions espoused in the name of centrally planned cities, the aim of 'unitary urbanism' was to reassemble the separated strands of life, including art and architecture, technology and poetry, ecology and machine production. In this new social space, the 'battle of leisure' created by modern technology was to be resolved in favour of endless adventure rather than unlimited boredom. Debord (quoted in Knabb 1981: 23–24) argued: 'The most general goal must be to extend the non-mediocre part of life, to reduce the empty moments of life as much as possible.' However, 1968 proved to be a high-water mark rather than a dress rehearsal for radical social change. In his retrospective assessment of the 'New Babylon' project written in 1980, Constant argued that the potential for even limited interventions in urban space such as the *avant-garde* 'happenings' of the 1960s had decreased:

> The material conditions for ludic actions have also deteriorated. The centres of big cities are cleared by land speculation; the population is forced to move to widely dispersed dormitory towns, dependent on car, television and supermarket, robbed of direct and spontaneous contacts [. . .]; in short the atmosphere and the setting for collective ludic behaviour disappears. (Reprinted in Wigley 1998: 235)

If, by 1980, ludic space seemed to be only a dream, the problems lay not only with existing social trends, but with the Situationist International's

uncompromising analysis. In many respects, the Situationists echoed the tension defining Benjamin's work, suspended between his Surrealist-inspired fascination with contingency and the fragment, and his later leaning towards rationality and an almost positivist science of 'testing' under the sway of Brecht. While Debord (quoted in Knabb 1981: 50) clearly wanted to distinguish the technique of the *dérive* from the Surrealist celebration of chance, defining it as 'playful-constructive behaviour', the Situationists were limited by their oscillation between a subjective language of libidinous play and a behaviouralist language of data and effects.[20] Nevertheless, the Situationist International forms an important reference point for contemporary urbanism. Like their contemporaries such as Archigram and Constant, their attempt to articulate a different urban future remains instructive in a context where the issue of social spontaneity is no longer simply a question of urban modernization programmes, and the routinization of social life under bureaucratic capitalism, but is increasingly tied up with sophisticated technological systems monitoring urban space.

As Lyon (2001: 57) points out: 'Flexibility, mobility and speed of communication make a huge difference to the way the city is organized.' Corbusier's (1971: 179) aphorism that 'a city made for speed is made for success,' initially coined in 1924 to proselytize for the rationalization of the street, has taken on a new meaning as digital infrastructure assumes primacy in economic and social relations. Embedding devices such as cameras, motion detectors, RFIDs and other sensors in urban infrastructure, and linking them to computers and databases for analysis and feedback, creates new prospects for responsive architecture. It also raises vital questions concerning the future of public space. Roy Ascott's (1995: 39) 'smart buildings' which 'attend to our every move, our every utterance' envisions technology that not only satisfies needs as they are expressed, but *anticipates* them:

> We are not talking about simple voice commands at some crude computer interface, but about *anticipation on the part of our constructed environment*, based on our behaviour, resulting in subtle transformations of the *mise en scene* [. . .]. It is a matter of high speed feedback, access to massive databases, interaction with a multiplicity of minds, seeing with a thousand eyes [. . .]. (Emphasis added)

As Hegel demonstrated long ago, there is a fine line between the master and the slave. The technological environment needs to know what we like, or at least what we *do*, in order to anticipate our needs. But at what point does 'anticipation' become a neo-Weberian 'iron cage' for shaping behaviour? If the horizontal networks of ubiquitous computing constitute a potential first step in the democratization of the media city, what are the implications when intelligent building, not to mention every smart appliance, compiles a personalized database as part of its optimal operation? Ascott (1995: 40) remains a keen advocate of urban transparency, a quality that is now to be achieved via technological systems rather than the glass architecture of an earlier era.[21]

[A city] must be transparent in its structures, goals and systems of operation at all levels. Its infrastructure, like its architecture, must be 'intelligent'; and publicly intelligible, comprising systems which react to us as much as we interact with them. The principle of rapid and effective feedback at all levels should be the heart of the city's development. This means high-speed data channels crisscrossing every nook and cranny of its urban complexities. Feedback should not only work but be seen to work.

As Mitchell (2003: 29) notes, the proliferation of electronic media has reversed the traditional urban balance between the hidden and the open:

Once, the natural condition of cities was opacity; architects created limited transparency by means of door and window openings, enfilades, open rooms and public spaces. Today, the default condition is electronic transparency, and you have to work hard to produce limited zones of privacy.

In this context Bruno Latour offers a more critical assessment of the modernist attachment to the value of transparency, and its temporal correlate of immediacy. For Latour (2005: 21), these investments are in fact political *disasters*: 'Transparency and immediacy are bad for science as well as for politics; they would make both suffocate.' If scientific knowledge which lacks awareness of its situatedness and its limits is susceptible to distortion and hubris, cities in which social interactions are governed by the precepts of perpetual contact in 'real time' lack the necessary conditions for a varied social life. Benjamin's emphasis on the importance of obstacles to vehicular circulation in sustaining the radical edge of *flânerie* before it was subsumed into accelerated practices of consumption is worth recalling. It suggests the need to recreate strategic social barriers to the rule of transparency and instantaneity in order to sustain a richer ecology of public interactions in the present.

Mobile publics

By the 1990s, the impact of smart buildings was matched by the growing urban effects of mobile media. In what is now clearly an earlier phase of the media city, devices such as telephone and television were primarily fixed. They were usually located in either the office or the home, and in fact were pivotal to the negotiation of the gendered boundary between public and private space.[22] This phase has now given way to an era in which media technologies have become ubiquitous, mobile and scalable, generating new possibilities for social interaction in which information flows are increasingly able to act on and shape social activities as they occur. Mitchell (2003: 107) argues:

In cities today, electronically propagated narratives flow constantly and increasingly densely. These narratives – superimposed, as they are, on real space in real time – act as feedback loops recursively transforming the very situations that produce them.

The new capacity for micro-coordination has not only exerted significant effects on social protocols among friends and acquaintances, including the negotiation of accepted notions of punctuality and presence.[23] Mobile media also have the potential to alter the dynamic of public interactions among crowds of erstwhile strangers. Mitchell (2003: 161) describes this incipient form of social activity as electronic 'swarms', while Rheingold (2002: xii) dubbed the collective actors in such situations 'smart mobs':

> Smart mobs consist of people who are able to act in concert even if they don't know each other. The people who make up smart mobs cooperate in ways never possible before because they carry devices that possess both communication and computing capabilities.

While the potential of developing new kinds of agency and cooperation in public space is enormously important, it is not an outcome which can be guaranteed by technology alone. Both Rheingold and Mitchell have a history of *boosting* new technology, and their seizure of mobile media as the next frontier reveals significant flaws. The problems in Mitchell's stance are perhaps more intractable. Mitchell largely recapitulates the *avant-garde* programme of spatial fluidity and personal mobility advocated in the 1960s by those such as Yona Friedman, Constant and Archigram:

> In the emerging wireless era, our buildings and urban environments need fewer specialized spaces built around sites of accumulation and resource availability and more versatile, hospitable, accommodating spaces that simply attract occupation and can serve diverse purposes as required. (Mitchell 2003: 159)

But, while he updates this programme to accommodate new technology, he strips it of any vision of social change. If his 'electronically supported nomadism' clearly echoes Constant's vision of the New Babylonian perpetually on the move, his primary example of so-called 'swift space management strategies' in contemporary cities strikes a markedly different tone:

> By the early 2000s, we could see the beginnings of this in the combination of electronic road pricing and electronic navigation systems for managing road real estate [. . .]. (Mitchell 2003: 166)

Mitchell's (2003: 57) 'electronic nomad' is very much a creature of commerce, animated less by the prospect of unpredictable social interactions than their rationalization. Wireless networks link users efficiently to services such as transport timetables, theatre tickets and parking availability. Mitchell (2003: 124) constantly presents devices such as mobile phones and PDAs as polite, reasoning servants: 'If it knows the public transportation system schedules and fares, it can figure out the best way for you to go. If it knows your interests and time constraints, it can personalize a tour for you.' This image of a thoughtful electronic servant fits his rational image of consumption, in which consumers know what they want and can afford to buy it, while producers benefit through the tracking of individual consumption patterns. Mitchell (2003: 60) extols the benefits of the

hyper-coordinated market – 'the post-sedentary world represents the ultimate abstraction and mobilization of exchange capability [. . .]' – without considering its deeper consequences. He never questions the effects of inserting of media technologies into fundamental social bonds, such as intimate and familial relationships. Even though he acknowledges uneven access as a problem, its implications are dismissed summarily: while 'others' may worry about issues such as hierarchies of race in cyberspace, for him 'disconnection would be amputation' (Mitchell 2003: 62).

In contrast to Mitchell's vision of intelligent media faithfully serving the individual consumer, Rheingold puts more stress on the collective possibilities of 'smart mobs'. Beginning with the premise that new media, such as location-sensing wireless organizers, wireless networks and community super-computing all '*enable people to act together in new ways and in situations where collective action was not possible before.*' Rheingold (2002: xviii, xii) adds: 'The "killer apps" of tomorrow's mobile infocom industry won't be hardware devices or software programmes but social practices' (2002). While this focus on social relationships, and the need to reinvent the social in the context of pervasive media is welcome, Rheingold's analysis lacks awareness of fundamental political contradictions. This is most evident in his discussion of the role of 'smart mobs' in political events such as the over-throw of President Estrada in the Philippines in 2001. For Rheingold (2002: 157), 'People Power II' was simply dramatic and concrete evidence of 'the power of the mobile many'. While he cites Vincente Rafael's (2003) astute analysis of the paradoxical role mobile phones played in this event, he occludes the very political tensions that Rafael is at pains to highlight. For Rheingold, the mobile phone had two key functions in 'People Power II': first, to provide a communication network which was not susceptible to State control, and second, to coordinate massive crowds of protesters. In contrast, Rafael (2003: 400) suggests these claims for the ability of the phone to orchestrate political unity in the context of the Phillipines was largely a middle-class fantasy, symptomatic of a contemporary 'fetish of communication' predicated on the false promise of dissolving existing class divisions. Instead, he suggests that 'People Power II' actually revealed significant political instabilities and fractures, even within the middle class:

> For once heard, the masses called attention to the fragility of bourgeois claims to shape the sending and reception of messages about the proper practice of politics in the nation-state. Media politics (understood in both senses of that phrase as the politics of media systems but also politics as the inescapable event of mediation) in this context reveals the unstable workings of Filipino middle class sentiments. Unsettled in its relationship to social hierarchy, such sentiments at times redrew class divisions, at other moments anticipated their abolition, and still at others called for their reinstatement and consolidation.

Rafael's analysis highlights the Rheingold's tendency to imagine that people will act together *because* they possess new technology. But new technology has never been a sufficient condition for social change, and is in fact more

likely to be integrated into existing social hierarchies. Rheingold's snappy 'smart mobs' tag rapidly acquired marketing leverage, illustrating the potential for the social possibilities of mobile networks to be reduced to schemes for viral marketing, e-commerce, and invitations for groups of strangers to perform 'wacky' gaming activities together. In order to transform public space, a deeper critique of the public uses of new media is necessary.

Playing in public space

In their 1960 proposal to construct a labyrinth at the Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum, the Situationists planned a three-day *dérive* through the city, employing walkie-talkies to link drifters with the mobile radio truck of the 'cartographic team'. The radical edge of such technological capabilities, which were once the prerogative of the police or military, is now far less clear. If the prevalence of mobile digital media is the condition for the profusion of 'locative' media projects in the present, it also indicates the limited political purchase of projects which claim to 'intervene' in public space simply by foregrounding the technical possibilities of mobile communication. The issue of the social potential of locative media in particular, and public space new media arts in general, came to the surface in the wake of the 'Interactive city' event at ISEA in San Jose in 2006. Common criticisms of the artworks showcased there included the fact that most projects were short term, that they emphasized technology rather than social interaction, and that they were often functioning simply as R&D for next generation telecoms.[24] At a deeper level, there was a perception that, in a society of conspicuous consumption with an emerging 'experience economy', the concept of play inherited from the Surrealists, the Lettrist International, the Situationists and others, had lost its radical potential. As one contributor rather poetically put it:

> I have visions of techno-hipsters with bluetooth headsets jammed in their ears, capturing 15-second video clips of the urban 'condition' on their phones and txting knowing messages to their hipster-doppelganger pals in line behind them on the flaneuric boulevard of derives. (Beaudry 2006)

Some of these criticisms seemed to demand far too much from what were, after all, temporary and relatively small-scale artistic interventions. Nevertheless, awareness that a project cannot be expected to single-handedly override historically sedimented urban hierarchies of race, ethnicity, gender and class should not mean abandoning all expectation. A crucial role for new media art in public space is the potential to avoid the filter of sites such as the art gallery, and thereby engage audiences who might never cross that threshold. This indicates the new function of art in the contemporary media city: not as the belated response to an already existing social world, but as an integral part of the construction of social relationships.

Taking up Sennett's metaphor of play – albeit not necessarily in the way he intended it – we need to think about uses of media which are directed to producing new forms of public relationships. Andreas Broeckmann (2000: 167) has argued:

> The challenge to the creative use of media technologies is fostering the diversity of public actors and terrains and to develop strategies of articulating the new public domains that connect physical urban spaces and the potential public sphere of the electronic networks. This public sphere will only come into being if there are complex forms of interaction, of participation and learning, that use the technical possibilities of the new networks and that allow for new and creative forms of becoming visible, becoming present, becoming active, in short, of becoming public.[25]

As Sennett and others have emphasized, public sociability is not natural; it needs to be learned, nurtured and practised. In an era in which public space is dominated by spectacular 'brandscapes' and pacified by the distributed technology of surveillance, new forms of public interaction facilitating qualities such as collective participation and unpredictable collaboration hold increasing social importance. In this context, the role of artists using new media to construct experimental interfaces in public space can assume strategic value.

One of the most striking and sustained explorations of the nature of public space in the media city has been the various 'Relational Architecture' projects undertaken by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and his long-term collaborator, Will Bauer (see Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3). I want to discuss two works which were specifically designed for public plazas. The first, *Vectorial Elevation*, was staged in Zócalo Plaza (the common name for the massive Constitution Plaza) in Mexico City from 26 December 1999 to 7 January 2000.[26] *Vectorial Elevation* consisted of eighteen powerful searchlights mounted around the plaza, with the alignment of the individual lights remotely controlled by an internet interface. Internet users could log on to the site and design a lighting configuration to be displayed in public. The light patterns changed every 6 seconds, creating an aesthetic experience in which the intervals of movement were as important as the designs themselves. The software also automatically compiled a web page archive for each user, showing their design, camera pictures of its realization in the square and providing a space for their comments on the project.

The context of the work is important to appreciate. It belonged to the genre of 'millennium events' that gripped the world in the approach to the year 2000. *Vectorial Elevation* sat alongside other events, such as the live global telecast '2000 Today'. It took place on a public site overdetermined by multiple intersections of power. The Zócalo provides an architectural nexus for the dominant stakeholders in contemporary Mexico: the massive Cathedral, the National Palace and the Supreme Court abut the elegant jewellery shops of nearby luxury hotels. Yet the plaza is more than

these official icons of religious, State and economic power. As Monica Mayer (2000: 225) comments:

> But to this same *zócalo* comes feminists, gay rights organizations, religious groups, taxi drivers, policemen, street sweepers, punk rockers, nurses, Zapatistas, students, professors, and representatives of every political party, all with their proposals and demands. In the Zócalo the mass celebrates Independence Day every September 15.

Figure 6.1 *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, 'Vectorial Elevation, Relational Architecture 4', 1999–2004 (Interactive installation at the Zócalo Square in Mexico City and at www.alzado.net. Photo by Martin Vargas.)*
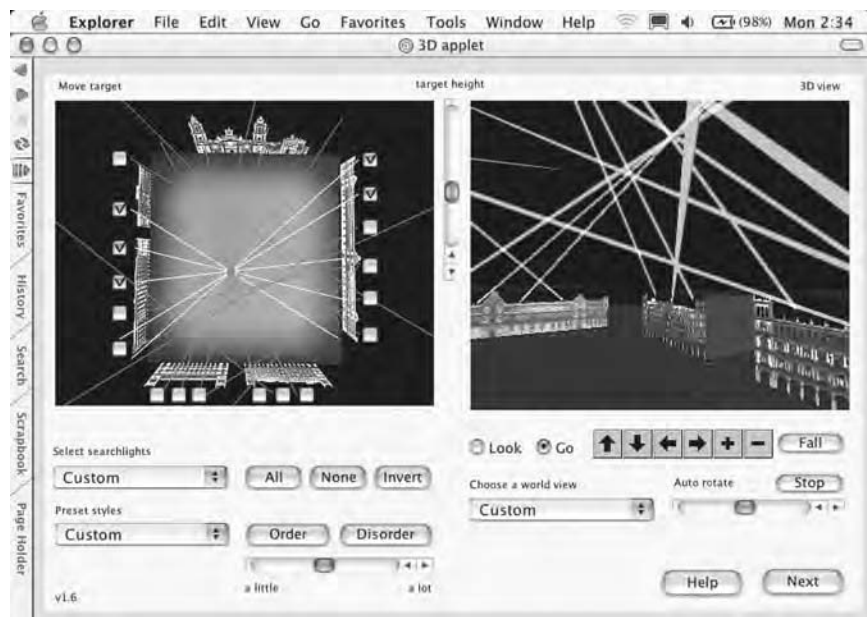
Figure 6.2 *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Interface from 'Vectorial Elevation, Relational Architecture 4', 1999–2004 (Interactive installation at the Zócalo Square in Mexico City and at www.alzado.net. Photo by Martin Vargas.)*

Finally, *Vectorial Elevation* drew on the history of large-scale light display. Lozano-Hemmer (2002) explicitly evoked Albert Speer's notorious 'light dome' created for a Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg in 1935, arguing: 'In Speer's spectacle of power, people were props, just like the searchlights were.' In contrast to such centrally controlled spectacles, which were designed with the aim of exerting maximum impact on the 'masses', Lozano-Hemmer aimed to use media networks to redistribute social agency in public space. As he later put it: 'I tried to introduce interactivity to transform intimidation into intimacy' (Lozano-Hemmer 2003). In contrast to what he called 'cultish extravaganzas whose effects were created to overwhelm the senses, to evoke false unity, or to provide a backdrop for mob rallies', Lozano-Hemmer's ambition was to create a 'dynamic agora' (Lozano-Hemmer 2003).

The key to realizing this ambition was facilitating widespread public participation. Instead of a spectacle mysteriously controlled from above, the work utilized the decentralized capacity of the internet to offer participants the ability to intervene, even temporarily, in a public space of great scale. Arguably, it was more successful in this endeavour at 'net' rather than 'street' level. Erkki Huhtamo (2000: 108–11) notes: 'Giving any net user the opportunity to create a massive display for a real-life public space was

a gesture that radically disrupted the logic of traditional public light shows.' The internet also enabled the emergence of a politically oriented, participatory public sphere in a Habermasian sense.[27] However, while user-configuration of the searchlights via the web created a more varied and whimsical light show than an 'official' choreography would have, at street level *Vectorial Elevation* was still primarily experienced as a spectacle.

The element of participation in public space was realized more successfully in Lozano-Hemmer's *Body Movies*, first staged in 2001 at the Schouwburg Square in the centre of Rotterdam.[28] *Body Movies* utilized large-scale images, comprising over 1000 portraits taken on the streets of Rotterdam, Madrid, Mexico and Montréal, which were projected onto the façade of the Pathé Cinema building using robotically controlled projectors. However, the portraits were rendered invisible due to powerful xenon lights saturating them from ground level. It was only when people walked through the square that the silhouettes of their interposed shadows 'revealed' the projected portraits. This emphasis on the physical presence of participants' bodies plays an important role in limiting the work's appropriation as abstract spectacle. *Body Movies* was more concerned with creating a ludic public space. This shifted the nature of 'interactivity', from its common guise of choosing from a menu of often predictable consequences, to a far more open horizon in which contingency and unpredictability assumed a greater role. Instead of the logic of 'taking turns', where single users controlled the apparatus or produced representations that others could see, many people could participate in *Body Movies* at the same time. Participants could alter the scale of their shadows by moving closer to, or further away from the building, creating silhouettes ranging from 2 metre to 25 metre in height. A camera-based tracking system monitored the location of the shadows in real time. When shadows matched all the portraits in a given scene, thus revealing the entire image, the control computer immediately changed to the next set of portraits. This complex interface created a delicate balance between personal participation and collective interaction, between active engagement and reflective contemplation. While it employed 'real time' interactivity, *Body Movies* was not simply about intensifying the 'now', but enabled a more diverse set of temporalities to emerge.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of *Body Movies* was the playful engagement it sustained among groups of erstwhile strangers who came together in public space and discovered that, by enacting a collective choreography, they could affect the visual ambiance of that space. Here it is worth recalling Benjamin's argument that the radical impact of cinema in the context of the modern city depended – like architecture – on the fact that it was consumed in a 'distracted' state. Since the film image acted at the margins of conscious perception, it was able to circumvent the habitual defence shield each city dweller erected so as to protect themselves from the excessive sensory demands of urban life. *Body Movies* occupies a similar liminal terrain. Passers-by aren't sure what to make of it; the interface is striking but

Figure 6.3 *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, 'Body Movies, Relational Architecture 6', 2001–06 (Large-scale interactive installation featuring over 1200 giant portraits that are revealed inside the shadows of passers-by. First installed by V2 at the Schowburg Square in Rotterdam. Photo by Jan Sprij.)*

not immediately comprehensible. Habit is suspended in favour of experimentation. Unexpected conjunctions emerge.

In contrast to the paranoia towards strangers that constitutes so much official rhetoric post 9/11, *Body Movies* celebrates the spontaneous alignments that can make genuine *public* encounters – in Sennett's terms encounters with *strangers* – so memorable. These kinds of tactical interventions into urban space provide a striking comparison to more manufactured 'media events', where the media simultaneously uses the lure of spontaneity in order to attract an audience, but generally occludes the spontaneous by imposing standardized frames in order to minimize the risk of 'nothing happening'. Rather than adhering to the cybernetic goal of informational speed and transparency, media technology in *Body Movies* becomes the basis for affective experience capable of sustaining *reflexive* public interactions. *Body Movies* takes the openness of relational space as the starting point for developing a dynamic and participatory social space. As Timothy Druckrey (2003) argues:

> It is an evocation of the kind of social space in which active participation is not a by-product, but the driving force in the creation of dynamic agora in which every position is established in an open system that ruptures hierarchies and dismantles the notion that the public is an undifferentiated mass, the media not the harbinger of a utopian global village, interactivity not the opiate of shoppers.

Art which pursues this kind of trajectory is sporadic and marginal, and may well remain so. 'Transformable', 'responsive' and 'intelligent' architecture employing sophisticated new media is more frequently used to produce spectacle and facilitate individual consumption than to critique it. While experimental zones for space creation by 'nomadic inhabitants' have been built in many cities, they tend to be limited to highly controlled situations – theme parks, shopping malls, or 'events' such as rock concerts and dance parties. Yet refusing to recognize even limited possibilities for change is to help ensure it will not occur. Lozano-Hemmer's 'limited' games might well have been ridiculed by the Situationist International, who, in their ambition for the unlimited game of the radical transformation of life, might have taken comfort in the conclusion that the situation was not yet ready for total revolution. For those interested in a less *pure* politics, changing contemporary culture demands changes in the dominant social relations sustained by technological images. Practices which forge new ways of engaging with others in public are a critical element of any such change.

Notes

1 Venturi 1966: 133; Koolhaas 1996: 45.
2 The live global telecast '2000 Today' was a media event of Warholian duration, linking 60 countries over a 24-hour period as midnight struck around the world.
3 Similar use of large screens has now become a staple for large sporting events, including the 2002 World Cup in Korea which saw massive crowds congregate around large screens in Seoul, and the 2006 World Cup in Germany for which every host city erected large screens, and million strong crowds gathered around screens in Berlin's centre.
4 Following Walter Benjamin (2003: 3–93), who had earlier recognized *Paris Spleen* as an ur-text of modernity Berman reads two texts in particular: 'The Eyes of the Poor' (1864) and 'The Loss of Halo' (1865). Both were written at the height of 'Haussmannization' and published as *feuilleton* pieces addressing the new reading public generated by mass newspapers. 'The Eyes of the Poor' concerns the transformation of public visibility by the glass-windowed café culture of the boulevards, while 'The Loss of Halo' directly concerns the new conditions of public mobility, and the threat to life and limb of fast moving vehicles on macadamized roads.
5 The extension of mutual anonymity underlies Dupin's reasoning in Poe's (1938: 189–90) 'The Mystery of Marie Roget' (1842):

> For my own part, I should not only hold it possible, but as far more than probable, that Marie might have proceeded, at any given period, by any one of the many routes between her residence and that of her aunt, without meeting a single individual whom she knew, or by whom she was known.

6 While Sennett does not use the term 'spectacle', his analysis of the increased social passivity in public life shares common ground Debord's concept. For Debord (in Knabb 1981: 25), the very principle of spectacle is 'non-intervention'.
7 In this respect, Sennett's periodization of the rise and fall of public space is close to Habermas' account of the birth and demise of the public sphere. Habermas (1989) situates the emergence of the public sphere firmly in the

context of the decline of feudal absolutism. The waning of estate-based authorities meant that 'private people', facing a permanent administration and a standing army, needed to forge a new relation to public authority. The invention of 'civil society' was thus a response to the rise of depersonalized State authority (see Habermas 1989: 19). However, by the mid-19th century, increasing commercial control of the press had become the 'gateway' through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere, creating the conditions for what Habermas (1989: 195) terms its 're-feudalization'.

8   Crucially, 'playacting requires an audience of strangers to succeed, but is meaningless or even destructive among intimates' (Sennett 1977: 28–29).

9   As I noted in Chapter 2, a whole range of social practices, from photography, detective novels and physiognomy to ethology, phrenology and Bertillon measurements, emerged at this time as aids to 'reading' personal appearances in public urban space. Subject to such scrutiny, people became fearful of emitting public signs revealing their inner feelings.

10 Sennett (1977: 196) certainly points to the modern convergence between politics and performance, arguing: 'Politicians began to be judged as believable by whether or not they aroused the same belief in their personalities which actors did when on stage.' But Benjamin's analysis of the hollowing out of older political spaces such as parliaments in favour of the new media spaces such as radio and cinema offers greater purchase on this trajectory. Paralleling Sennett's emphasis on the rise of public 'intimacy', Benjamin (2003: 255) points out that *distance* is eroded above all by the rise of technological media. In contrast to Benjamin's attention to the ambivalence of the 'testing' function of modern media, discussed earlier in Chapter 3, Sennett produces a uniformly negative evaluation of their political effects. I will discuss the contemporary political role of 'intimacy' further in Chapter 8.

11 This view extended well beyond architectural circles to embrace the 'Technocracy Movement' in the USA, and apostles of rational economic planning from Thorsten Veblen to H.G. Wells.

12 Most of CIAM's principles were not put into practice until after World War II, by which time progressive architects were critiquing many of their precepts. But, as Sadler (1998: 45) notes, the principles had an after-life: 'Even as mainstream modernism was on the wane in avant-garde architectural circles, it was reaching its apogee in building production worldwide.'

13 This is certainly how Berman (1982: 164–67) treats the issue, arguing that the modernist polemic against the crowded and chaotic street is symptomatic of 20th-century attempts to displace, rather than resolve, the conflicts of modernity and tradition.

14 Giedion (1967: 822) argued:

When Haussmann undertook the transformation of Paris, he slashed into the body of the city – as a contemporary expressed it – with sabre strokes. [. . .] In our period even more heroic operations are necessary. The first thing to do is to abolish the *rue corridor* with its rigid lines of buildings and its intermingling of traffic, pedestrians and residences. The fundamental condition of the contemporary city requires the restoration of liberty to all three – to traffic, to pedestrians, to residential and industrial quarters. This can be accomplished only by separating them.

15 See McQuire 1998: 235–40.

16 Some representative film *noir* titles include *Naked City*, *Dark City*, *Captive City*, *Panic in the Streets*, *City of Fear*. Writers such as Krutnik (1997) and Dimendberg (2004) have argued persuasively that *noir* emerged less from the

exigencies of Cold-War politics than from the experience of urbanization, and the profound spatial transformation of the US city caused by highway construction, suburban development and urban redevelopment.

17 This is discussed further in Chapter 8.

18 See Chapter 8.

19 In his 1960 lecture on 'Unitary Urbanism', Constant (1960: 134) underlined the historical importance of the street as 'collective living space':

> Historically, the street was more than a mere traffic artery. Its additional function, which may have been even more important than its role as thoroughfare, was as a collective living space where all the public events – markets, festivals, fairs, political demonstrations – took place, as well as encounters and contacts between smaller numbers of individuals, in short, all those activities that do not belong to the more intimate, private domain. The inn and café which sometimes spilled over into the street, were continuations of this collective space, public places where people were able to get away from the traffic on the street. The tremendous increase in traffic robbed the street of this social function. As a final refuge, there remained the café, but the street itself became a traffic route and thus a sharp dividing line between isolated units of housing. This might perhaps account for the cultural significance of the café in the last century.

20 For example, the inaugural issue of *Internationale Situationiste* defined psychogeography as: 'The study of the specific effects of the geographic environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (reprinted in Knabb 1981: 45). The Situationist advocacy of a libidinal economy of pleasure over the capitalist economy of production drew on varied theoretical resources from Bahktin's concept of the carnivalesque, to Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947, and earlier *avant-garde* movements such as Surrealism and Lettrism. Sadler (1998: 56) makes an explicit analogy between *flânerie* and the *dérive*, describing the Situationist 'drifter' as the 'new *flâneur*' who preferred the slower backwaters of old Paris to Haussmann's rationalized boulevards. He also argues that the Situationist International's stance had similar limitations to *flânerie*, particularly in its lack of engagement with the ethnic subcultures occupying the 'slower' spaces, coupled to a romantic view of their poverty.

21 See Chapter 7 below for a further discussion of glass construction.

22 Graham and Marvin (2001) point to an early AT&T ad showing a man in the office able to phone his wife to let her know he is going to be home late. This sort of image helped to consolidate the division between the 'masculine' public space of work and the 'feminine' space of the home.

23 de Souza e Silva (2004: 18) notes various studies describing the way people are considered to be 'present' at social occasions when they participate via phone.

24 Here I am drawing on internet discussion on lists such as Empyre [URL www.subtle.net/empyre/ (accessed on 18 September 2006)] and iDC [URL http://distributedcreativity.org (accessed on 19 September 2006)].

25 Inke Arms describes the ambition of the 'reactive architecture' project *Blinkenlights* designed by the Chaos Computer Club in Berlin, 2003 in similar terms: '*Blinkenlights* is not concerned with the aspect of dynamic architecture as media supported ornamentation, but precisely with the maximum possible visibility of a participatory impetus in urban space. It is concerned, in other words, with an emphatic notion of what is public' (cited in Dietz 2004).

26 *Vectorial Elevation* was subsequently staged in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain in 2002, in Lyon, France in December 2003, and most recently in Dublin, Ireland from 22 April and 3 May 2004 using 22 robotic searchlights. See www.alzado.net/ (accessed on 21 March 2006).

27 Lozano-Hemmer writes:

> The web pages for Vectorial Elevation were created automatically for every participant and the comments field was there so that people could personalize their design with dedications, poems, political statements, etc. Those comments fields were completely uncensored, which was quite a feat at the time because the zapatistas were quite active electronically at that time. [. . .] I convinced the politicians that if we censored that then the piece would become only about censorship and that they needed to stop having a paternalistic and condescending view of the general public and trust that they will send interesting texts. Sure enough we had many Zapatista messages (thank goodness for that!) but also marriage proposals, soccer scores, etc. The point being that those comments were an important aspect in the takeover of a public space. (personal communication to the author 24 March 2006)

28 *Body Movies* has subsequently been staged in Lisbon, Linz, and Liverpool in 2002, Duisburg in 2003 and Hong Kong 2006. A video archive is at www. fundacion.telefonica.com/at/rlh/video/bodymovies.html