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# URBAN INTERFACES: BETWEEN OBJECT, CONCEPT, AND CULTURAL PRACTICE / NANNA VERHOEFF, SIGRID MERX, MICHIEL DE LANGE

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## Introduction

In this collection of essays we wish to propose the notion of urban interfaces as a lens through which we can explore how situated media, art, and performances



increasingly performative and mediatized infrastructures and environments. Rapid and radical transformations of urban culture and urban publicness are spurred by intensified (global) mobilities, the ubiquity and proliferation of digital information and communication technologies, and the spread of datafication and platformization. On a discursive level, these transformations are heavily debated in connection to themes like, for instance, participatory culture and civic engagement, urban governance, processes of social-spatial inclusion and exclusion, changes in ownership, or their invasive influence on urban public space through a relentless push of commercialization and privatization, quantification and so on. On a 'street level,' these issues take shape within the variety of cultural practices surrounding media, art and performance. The contributions in this collection zoom in on the connection between these cultural realms.

Media, art and performance in our view offer privileged sites for investigating the challenges, frictions and questions surrounding these urban transformations, as well as their own role in (re)shaping urban public spaces. Our primary focus is on the creative and artistic design and curation of urban interfaces as cultural practices—in particular on how technological, material, and socio-cultural processes shape intersections, interactions, and interventions of bodies, spaces, and technologies and produce meaning in urban spaces and situations. To analyze how urban interfaces work and reflect on their own working, this special issue examines a range of objects and practices, such as media architecture, urban screens, and interactive installations; location-based games, augmented reality, data visualizations, and mobile mapping; and other live urban interventions, events and performances, specifically in cities in Europe, Asia, and the United States. These, however different, all bring forth often fugitive yet meaningful instances of public interfacing in and with urban spaces.

To investigate these disparate objects and practices from a more or less coherent and comparative perspective, we propose [urban interfaces] as a searchlight, its provisional character indicated by brackets. For this issue, we have invited contributing authors to analyze specific urban objects and practices as urban interfaces. In their contributions they explore how urban interfaces can function as a demarcation of a corpus and as a theoretical lens. As a heuristic tool it directs our view to specific objects and practices, and inquires how these shape today's urban, public spaces. Between object and concept and cultural practice, then, this lens of [urban interfaces] is helpful for exploring the specificities of



materiality, mediality, and performativity of interfaces as well as instances/situations of interfacing. To further develop this perspective, we discuss in more detail in the following sections of this introductory essay (1) how we approach the 'urban' in [urban interfaces]; (2) how we conceptualize 'interface' in [urban interfaces]; and (3) how instances of media, art and performance situate and activate [urban interfaces]. We conclude with a short reflection on what it implies to think theory and cultural practice together.

## **Urban Interfaces**

The urban in urban interfaces refers to how media, art and performance are situated within public spaces. This raises questions about the dynamics of, and changes within these public spaces. We may ask for example how media, art and performance thematize or provide commentary on how people in cities relate to (changes in) their environment, to other people, and to themselves. Or we may ask how media, art and performance can be used to address various urban challenges and frictions that have to do with 'the right to the city.' [1] Additionally, we are interested in how media, art and performance can elicit new views on contemporary practices of city-making: the variety of ways in which citizens, governments, and professionals shape urban environments and our interactions in and with these environments. As such, the urban in urban interfaces highlights that media, art and performance take place within cities' public spaces and also shape these spaces. [2]

Materiality, mediality, and performativity are central notions in media, art and performance theory—specifically interface theory—as well as in urban studies scholarship of public life. [3] The city has been understood as a material setting assembling bodies and objects in time and space; a medium forging connections between entities by acting as a platform for communication, memory-making and exchange; and as a stage for performing and effectuating specific identities, subjectivities and differences, and instigating transformations. By forging productive connections between urban theory and interface theory, we aim to understand how media, art and performance as urban interfaces actually 'work' within the cities.

Materiality in urban theory has been central to understanding urban public space



material design may benefit urban publicness as “life between buildings,” as per the title of his book. [5] Jane Jacobs mused on the importance of block size, building height and mixed building age in producing a sense of well-being in neighborhoods, while William H. Whyte paid attention to the ways in which public ‘street life’ emerges from certain material affordances like sunny benches and movable chairs. [6] Also within Science and Technology Studies, scholars have considered how materiality shapes urban culture. Material artifacts may, for instance, function as social sorting mechanisms, as Langdon Winner suggests of Robert Moses’ deliberately low overpasses to prevent poor (and often Black) bus travelers from reaching the beach. [7] Material artifacts may act as instruments of state power – interfaces that contain and control. [8] Urban public culture, thus, is molded by tangible design choices and their affordances, which shape (foster, prevent, condition, dissuade, etc.) social interactions. Moreover, the material fabric and physical environment of city life itself produces a specific type of urban mentality. This has been a basic tenet in urban theory, with for instance Georg Simmel in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* from 1903 speculating how the fast-paced urban experience engenders a blasé attitude, or Robert Park and his fellow Chicago School sociologists who investigated how cities as physical ecosystems shape urban public life in 1925. [9] Louis Wirth in his influential essay *Urbanism as a Way of Life* in 1938 argued that density, size and heterogeneity foster a typical urban mentality and cause urbanites to develop a sensitivity for material artifacts more than for other people, as a kind of avoidance strategy. [10] The authors in this special issue are likewise sensitive to how material design and physical environments are never neutral but imbricate political issues of in/exclusion, biases, inequalities, and ‘the right to the city.’

Mediality is also firmly rooted in urban theory, with its long-standing tradition of understanding city life both via media—i.e. maps, photos and videos, or (more recently) GPS and big and small data—and as media that communicate, inform and connect. The mediality of the city is frequently expressed by invoking specific media types to inquire how the city produces meaning, communicates and constructs urban publicness. Walter Benjamin was perhaps the first to underscore the mediality of urban life, in his assorted works on how media technologies change our way of seeing and bring about a visual regime in the modern city. [11] By emphasizing the importance of ‘legibility’ and ‘imageability’ of the city, Kevin Lynch conceptualized the city as a text that informs people



lacking legibility can make people feel uneasy, lost or unsafe in public. This city-as-text metaphor implies possibilities for different and diverging semiotic readings, opening up space for frictions and negotiations over meanings. After all, everybody makes their own idiosyncratic 'image of the city.' Moreover, the city-as-text firmly ties the realm of the imagination to our understanding of the city as multilayered and subject to continual re-reading and rewriting.

Another well-known analogy involves likening the city to the human body. This metaphor of organic metabolism conjures up all kinds of associations of flows and health but also alien contagion, (auto)immunity and disease. [13] James Scott notes how the famous Swiss architect Le Corbusier dreamt of a monocephalic city as centrally controlled from its central high rise office skyscrapers, just like the brain in a Cartesian worldview supposedly controls the body. [14] Today, we may observe a striking parallel in the smart city control room and urban dashboard, which also rests on this singular brain-as-medium analogy for centralized command and control. [15] Yet another metaphor concerns the city as a network. For instance, Scott McQuire's notion of the media city underlines the importance of networked and situated geomeia in shaping urban public life today. [16] As a final example, in Cybernetics and in the emerging field of 'science of cities' rooting in complexity theory, seemingly chaotic urban processes and dynamics are claimed to actually display a systemic logic that can be captured in mathematical models and calculations. [17] In all of these examples, the city is conceptually understood to mediate how we experience, behave in and are shaped by urban public spaces, through processes like visualizing, reading, inscribing, mapping, flowing and metabolizing, calculating, remote-controlling, and so on. This mediality features centrally in many contributions to this issue.

Performativity, as the third perspective, is also a prevalent theme in theorizing the city. From the microscopic-scale studies of everyday social interactions that are captured using theatrical terms, to more structural investigations of politics and power in the public arena, many theorists have used a vocabulary of performance and dramaturgy to consider urban public life as the unstable effect of interactions between different actors. Erving Goffman and Lyn Lofland have zoomed in on people's everyday ritual interactions as strategies to deal with the omnipresence of strangers and strange encounters in cities. [18] In their view, urban publicness is not an a priori given but rather constituted by ongoing



theatrical language to theorize public space. For Arendt, political action and speech are performances that involve drama and mimesis. [19] Richard Sennett uses the metaphor of *theatrum mundi* ('theater of the world,' the world as a stage) to describe the rise of publicness, as public figures in European cities wear a figurative (and sometimes literal) mask to signal the split between private personality and public social identity. [20] While not strictly an urban theorist, Judith Butler in her work on identity has consistently invoked theater metaphors as concepts to emphasize how gender identities are constituted through embodied and performative acts, which in turn has inspired urban scholars to focus on performativity and various kinds of 'gazes.' [21] The notion of performativity means we cannot treat urban public space as only a spatial backdrop or pre-existing empirical setting for social, political and cultural practice. Instead, urban public space in this view is as much a condition as an emergent effect. Rather than being a quality or essence, urban public space—or the publicness of urban space—is continually brought into existence and transformed through everyday frictions and ritual interactions as well as larger public controversies.

To conclude, our focus on materiality, mediality, and performativity zooms in on the ways urban public spaces appear to us, what connections they produce, and what effects they generate. [22] It allows us, and the authors in this issue, to probe deeper into the production of urban publicness and unpack the struggles and biases inherent in these processes. Importantly, it impels us, and others, to inquire into the politics of how media, art and performance shape urban public space. Questions about 'the right to the city' for instance have material, medial and performative dimensions. For instance, how do specific material design choices, biases and affordances allow some people or groups to speak but not others? How is the mediality of an object or work the result of strategic choices by some, what perspectives does it generate or exclude, and how does that shape the way we understand what urban public life is about? And how do media, art and performance generate certain effects that may be beneficial or desirable for some but not others?

## **Urban Interfaces**



and defined as a (technological) object, but theorized as a process that produces certain effects. Such a performative understanding of interfaces not only allows for a broader understanding of what constitutes an interface, as demonstrated throughout this issue, but also invites an analysis of what interfaces do, and what they are capable of producing in specific contexts. Moreover, it provides a space for thinking about interfacing beyond the static human-technology interaction scheme which has long been dominant in interface theory. [23] In what follows we will discuss some recent work on interfaces that has influenced our conceptualization of urban interfaces.

In *The Interface Effect*, Alexander Galloway proposes that interfaces are not so much objects or boundary points but “autonomous zones of activity” and “processes that effect a result of whatever kind.” [24] In the same vein, Branden Hookway in his approach to interfacing as a process stresses that interface is “a form of relation” and that describing the interface “lies not in the qualities of an entity or in lineages of devices or technologies, but rather in the qualities of relation between entities.” [25] A similar idea we find in Johanna Drucker’s “Humanities Approaches to Interface Theory,” in which she suggests that we should conceive of the interface as a “dynamic space of relations, rather than as a ‘thing.’” [26] In response to these proposals, in this issue we aim to complement the dominant attention to (fixed) objects with an additional focus on (ongoing) practices of mediation and, hence, to situated and performative conceptions of the interface as forms of interfacing. This dynamic and relational approach to interface and interfacing forms the basis of this issue and is reflected in all contributions.

Considering the relationality of the interface, many contemporary conceptualizations stress the capacity of the interface to draw different elements, entities and/or subjectivities together and to bring them into play. This is evidence of what we refer to as the interface’s mediality and performativity. For example, to quote Maria Chatzichristodoulou et al. in *Interfaces of Performance*, interfaces allow “... for interaction between two entities that would otherwise be unable to communicate with each other.” [27] However, there is a paradox at the heart of this logic, also pointed out by both Drucker and Hookway, namely the inherent separation needed for communication and interaction. Hookway argues that the “separation maintained by the interface between distinct entities or states is also the basis of the unity it produces from those entities or states.” [28] Furthermore,





disciplining and enabling, of excluding and including.” [29] This paradox thus implies notions like tension and conflict, which different authors recognize within the context of interface theory. For example, Galloway sees the interface as a “generative friction between different formats.” [30] Similarly, Hookway speaks of the interface as “a disputed zone, a site of contestation.” [31]

Chatzichristodoulou et al. contend that interfaces produce and mark “a shared space of exchange and dialogue as well as a site of contestation and tension.” [32] Hookway too points out this double or paradoxical essence of the interface, suggesting that this friction produced through the interface is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is precisely in challenging and contesting the relation between different entities that something productive is being created: The interface both “stages” and “resolves” this contestation. [33] The notion of the interface as a site of frictional mediation, or to be precise, interfacing as the possibility, production, and performance of friction, resonates in many contributions of this issue.

Understanding the interface as both a process and a form of paradoxical and possibly frictional relation prompts further inquiry into the ontology of the interface – specifically into the inter in interface. Authors like Chatzichristodoulou, Hookway and Galloway seem to understand the interface as the interaction between different entities, states, systems or formats. What is assumed here is that existing entities enter into an exchange and thus form a relation. Or, as Hookway points out, the inter in interface connotes “relations that take place within an already bounded field” and “between, among or amid elements.” [34] Understood as what Hookway terms “an inward orientation, an interiority,” from this perspective the interface is not only defined but also constrained by its bounding entities. [35] Such understanding of the interface is rather limited as it tends to obscure the performative and transformative potential of the interface. Dealing with this contradiction, Karen Barad’s distinction between interaction and intra-action offers a productive perspective. Interaction thinks relations as an encounter between distinct entities that already exist. It assumes the prior existence of distinct entities. Intra-action in contrast departs from the view that relations “are not secondarily derived from independently existing relata” but “only exist within phenomena as a result of specific intra-actions.” [36] Intra-action, Barad argues, signifies “the mutual constitution of relata within phenomena.” [37] Or: “there are no independent relata, only relata-within-



following section, invites particular focus on specific instances and situations where and when this intra-action takes place.

Whereas the mediality of the interface is etymologically contained within its prefix *inter*, the performativity of the interface maybe is most expressed in its face, derived from the Latin *facies*, meaning appearance, character, form, figure or visage. *Facies*, in turn, stems from the verb *facere*, which means to act, make, form, do, cause or bring about. “A face, then,” Hookway suggests, “is the aspect of a thing by which it presents itself.” [39] And facing, in this respect, needs to be understood as an active making of a presence, or a presencing. [40] Proposing a combined but contradictory reading of *inter* and *face*, Hookway argues that the interface therefore is “both an interiority confined by its bounding entities and a means of accessing, confronting, or projecting into an exteriority.” [41] Although the interface on the one hand carves out a limited and pre-determined space for interaction and exchange, on the other hand “it opens up otherwise unavailable phenomena, conditions, situations, and territories for explorations, use, participation and exploitation,” constantly testing and redefining its own boundaries. [42] As such, we recognize some productive alignments between Barad’s perspective on intra-action and Hookway’s perspective on *inter+face*. Taken together, they point at the interface as moment and site of possibility.

So far, we have addressed the mediality and the performativity of the interface, building on conceptualizations of the interface as a process and a form of relation that shapes intersections, interactions, and intra-actions. In ways, this is very much a systemic if not structuralist perspective. The question, then, becomes: What is produced in this process; what meanings, forms of knowledge, and affects can be the result of interfacing? In Drucker we recognize a perspective on the interface as a material and spatial apparatus that produces meaning and subjectivity beyond the known, recognizable and predictable. Drucker sees the “interface as a space that supports interpretative events and acts of meaning production.” [43] In her later article “Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface,” she states: “Interface is a space of affordances and possibilities structured into organization for use. An interface is a set of conditions, structured relations, that allow certain behaviors, actions, readings, events to occur.” [44] This set of material conditions, thus, sets the parameters for performativity. This perspective on what she calls performative materiality also implies that the design of these material conditions are



perhaps what Drucker means when she calls the interface “an event-space of interpretative activity.” [45] In the following section, we introduce the way in which various instances of these interfacing situations as event-spaces are discussed by the authors in this issue.

## **Urban Interfacing**

Addressing the intersections of materiality, mediality and performativity of urban interfaces, the contributors in this issue discuss a wide range of urban interfaces as objects and instantiations of urban interfaces as event-spaces. As demonstrated in the various analyses in this issue, urban interfaces comprise a confluence of different materials, structures and technologies that afford various intra-active and co-constitutive human/material performances. With the scrutiny of the intersecting aspects of materiality, mediality and performativity—or of what interfaces are, do, and effectuate—we aim to avoid essentialist, fixating, and techno-centered perspectives that so often inform industry rhetoric infused with functionalist aims of ‘improving’ the ‘effectivity’ and ‘seamlessness’ of new interfaces. The issue as a whole departs from this inclusive and comparative perspective by bringing together a diversity of objects, sites, and situations that take and make place in contemporary cities, with each author analyzing and discussing the material and performative specificities of their diverse cases.

In terms of diversity, the majority of authors analyze interfacing situations that involve mobile technologies and navigating subjects. For example, Heidi Rae Cooley, Marcos Dias and Matt Adams, Koen Leurs and Jeffrey Patterson, Jennifer Scarpati, William Uricchio, Karin van Es and Eef Masson, and Clancy Wilmot and Emma Fraser all discuss cases where creative, playful and/or educational mobile projects produce such ambulant situations. Scarpati and, to some extent also Van Es and Masson focus on sound, rather than image as what is interfaced by, for example, mobile devices. In addition, larger and multisensory screens are addressed in this special issue, specifically in the contributions of Stephanie DeBoer, Simon Wind and Ole B. Jensen, and Holly Willis. Others also propose analogue objects as urban interfaces. Kristy Kang introduces an art project of stickers and other signage used to intervene in, comment on, and democratize the existing official regulation of the urban public spaces. The contribution of



speculative and hypothetical design artifacts that function as interfaces for urban intelligence, including a more-than-human perspective. [46] Sabina Andron's essay deals with the layered temporality of urban surfaces and graffiti. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink brings in street-level scenographic practices that involve facades and shop windows.

These differing materialities demonstrate a wide range of possibilities of what can be interfaced by what means and to what end. For example, this can entail the ambition to visualize what may be located beyond our perceptual awareness (Catherine D'Ignazio, Eric Gordon and Elizabeth Christoforetti; Van Es and Masson; Wilmot and Fraser) or to augment urban space (Andron; Uricchio). Interfacing can also be designed to communicate the stories of people-or other species-which may be not sufficiently represented in other media (Cooley; Leurs and Patterson; Scarpati), to invite civic participation, social engagement and political discussion in and about urban design (D'Ignazio; Gordon and Christoforetti; Mattern et al.; Verstraete and Huybrechts; Wind and Jensen), or to comment on, intervene in, and offer alternatives for existing infrastructures and hierarchies (Andron; Kang; Dias and Adams; DeBoer).

Despite this broad variation of urban projects, their design shares the intention of making the invisible visible, the inaudible audible, or, in a broader sense, to make the city sensory or sense-able in new ways. Some of the urban interfaces explicitly work with the affordances of technology and scenography—here defined as a dramaturgical spatial design—for connectivity that allows 'strangers' and social dynamics to become present and tangible. For example, Leurs and Patterson frame their discussion of smartphone 'pocket archives' as means for young migrants to deal with living in co-presence with urban super-diversity. In other cases, making the invisible visible is taken very literally. Wilmot and Fraser analyze Field Trip, an app that promises "to explore the hidden city." Scarpati argues that soundwalks give access to an elsewhere in space and what we can call an elsewhere in time. Uricchio discusses Augmented Reality projects for urban annotation that work with both spatial and temporal indexicality, unveiling historical connections and layerings of the present. Dias and Adams discuss, amongst others, a performative urban interface that involves "literary surveillance cameras"—live, written descriptions of what happens in a railway station that are projected on large screens. Two mobile art works analyzed by Van Es and Masson aim to visualize the invisible digital infrastructure



produced in our cities today.

What all these instances of interfacing share is that they situate and make present various aspects of urban dynamics and frictions as results of urban transformations. This entails a fundamentally double temporal dynamic that combines change and transition with liveness and emergence, which we see as inherent in the intersection of materiality, mediality, and performativity of interfaces as event-spaces. In this sense, what these sites and situations as urban interfaces demonstrate is that they have the potential to bring forth and challenge the urban condition they take place in. As an experiential and emergent quality, this is not an a priori given that can be revealed to become known, but is produced in the performative and intra-active interfacing situation itself.

### **[urban interfaces]: A Concept in Brackets**

We started this introduction by putting forward the notion of [urban interfaces] to explore how situated media, artworks, and performances shape, reflect on, intervene in, and reimagine urban public spaces. We hope to have demonstrated in this introductory essay how from our approach, interfaces are more than devices that communicate between subjects and technology. They are not just the material apparatuses that connect us, that visualize or sonify various forms of data or content. While, as a word, interface suggests a clear object, a thingness of sorts, in this issue we also use it as a verb, understanding how interfaces open up to interfacing as practice. As a concept, then, it provides a lens to understand the performative processes of mediation that it produces within situations of interfacing. In this respect we understand interfaces both as situations and as situated: They connect between spaces, times, objects and subjects. This perspective on interfacing as cultural practice yields insight into how interfaces through these connections produce knowledge, inspire opinions, and fuel debate. As a proposal, we have used brackets first of all to emphasize the provisional character of our search light. We speak of [urban interfaces] to indicate the flexibility of the concept as it invites continuing questioning and conceptualization. Secondly, from a graphical point of view, with the brackets we hope to express the situatedness of urban interfaces, inviting a focus on concrete,



art and performance in urban, public spaces as specific instances and situations of making and relating with and within these spaces.

In sections 1 and 2 we have discussed urban and interface more or less separately. The power of the concept [urban interfaces] for us is, however, the affinity between the two terms and the productive perspectives this engenders. First, in line with Galloway, Hookway, Drucker, we emphasize the active verb-like quality of the term interface. This fits well with the medial and performative dimensions of urban public space, as discussed in the first section. Second, city culture is often theorized as a way of life characterized by the necessity to deal with strangers and differences. We feel that the concept of [urban interfaces] – theorized as connecting while establishing different identities – allows us to productively think of urban publicness as oscillating between these poles of establishing relationality and articulating differences. Urban life, we contend (as have many before us), is a continual process of interfacing. Third, and in relation to this, [urban interfaces] as lens opens up to a political perspective of contestation and tension. It allows us to see how urban public space is always fraught with friction. Indeed, many of the contributions are sensitive to the ways in which media, art and performance elicit and tease out negotiations and struggles concerning urban public space. Fourth, the urban interface underscores temporal aspects of public space. For urban public spaces are not static givens but rather, as Drucker says, ‘event-spaces.’

Zooming out in this introduction to this issue that is composed of contributions by authors that often participate in the (design of) artistic and creative practices they discuss, we see a shared reflexivity in both creative practices and scholarship. Or to be more precise, in the offered discussions about urban interfaces in this issue, we discern a possibility, or even an urgency, for us as scholars to embrace, respond, and add to the critical and political potential of creative and experimental practices. With political, we here refer to what Chantall Mouffe recognizes as the ever-present possibility of antagonisms (or what she prefers – agonisms) in all relations or forms of relationality. [47] Perhaps in line with this issue we can add: in all forms of interfacing. Thinking together creativity with reflexivity, criticality and politicality brings into focus how making is inherently about change and how in its process this can transcend the conditions of its own possibility. It is creative in the sense of designing and developing its own methods and approaches, as it seeks to navigate and explore



what these practices also work with, or from.

Through their engagement with contemporary societal and cultural issues, questions, debates, and frictions around the pervasive presence and proliferation of media technologies and assemblages in public space, media art and performance as 'design for debate,' but also propose conceptual foci. As analyzed in the contributions, the urban projects discussed make proposals. These proposals are not only agenda settings for public debate about urban issues, but precisely through these issues also for a conceptual vocabulary. They do so by their design and dramaturgy, by re-addressing and rearticulating such concepts as situatedness, dramaturgy, curation, friction, dialogue, collaboration, and other relational encounters that are relevant for understanding their own workings. As such, creative practice is also theoretical, as much as scholarship and theory is creative. Between object, concept and practice, [urban interfaces] in this issue addresses this dialogue between creative thinking and theoretical making.

### **Authors' Biographies**

Michiel de Lange (1976) is an Assistant Professor in New Media Studies, Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University, Netherlands; co-founder of The Mobile City (<http://www.themobilecity.nl>), a platform for the study of new media and urbanism; co-founder of the [urban interfaces] research platform at Utrecht University; His research interests focus on how (mobile) media shape urban culture and vice versa. Currently, he is co-lead of a NWO funded project "Designing for Controversies in Responsible Smart Cities." See <https://www.uu.nl/staff/MLdeLange/0> and <http://blog.bijt.org/>.

Sigrid Merx is an Assistant Professor Theatre Studies at Utrecht University, where she teaches in the BA program Media and Culture and in the MA programs Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy and Arts and Society. She is one of the core members of the research group [urban interfaces] and one of the initiators of Platform-Scenography, a platform invested in deepening the understanding of scenographic working and thinking. She occasionally works as a dramaturg and curator. Her current research focuses on critical performative interventions in public space that reflect on issues of the urban, publicness and



Nanna Verhoeff is Associate Professor in the Department of Media and Culture Studies at Utrecht University. She is coordinator of the Research Master's program Media, Art & Performance Studies. She specializes in screen and interfaces theory and comparative approaches to a wide variety of screen media, ranging from (early) cinema, mobile and location-based media, interactive interfaces and (art) installations, to urban screens and media architecture. After her PhD project on early cinema from a historical perspective on media change and innovation, and a subsequent project on contemporary mobile media, she currently focuses on the situatedness of screen-based interfaces and practices in urban, public spaces. Together with Sigrid Merx and Michiel de Lange she leads the research platform [urban interfaces] for research on media, art and performance in contemporary, urban spaces.

## Notes and References

[1] For some entries into the rich body of work on 'the right to the city,' see Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review*, no. 53 (2008): 23–40; Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2003).

[2] For a perspective of the city as an interface, see Martijn de Waal, *The City as Interface: How New Media are Changing the City* (Rotterdam, the Netherlands: NAI010 Uitgevers, 2013).

[3] See for instance Johanna Drucker's discussion of the interface, in which she connects the materiality of the interface as a thing to the way it performs and mediates: Johanna Drucker, "Humanities Approaches to Interface Culture," *Culture Machine* 12 (2011): 1-20. For more on Drucker and others, see section 2, below.

[4] Richard Sennett distinguishes the built environment of the ville from the lived experience of the cité: Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City* (London: Penguin, 2018).

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[6] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961; New York: Vintage Books, 1992); William H. Whyte, *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Washington, DC: Conservation Foundation, 1980).

[7] Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" *Daedalus* 109, no. 1 (1980): 121-136.

[8] See, for example, Aibar and Bijker's historical exposé of Barcelona's city wall that physically inhibited city growth until after 1854 it was torn down: Eduardo Aibar and Wiebe E. Bijker, "Constructing a City: The Cerdà Plan for the Extension of Barcelona," *Science, Technology & Human Values* 22, no. 1 (1997): 3-30.

[9] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, eds. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (1903; London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 174-185; Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *The City* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1925).

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[1] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken Book, 1968), 217-251.

[12] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).

[13] See Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006); Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (London: Faber, 1994).

[14] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 111.

[15] Various authors note the underlying diagram of the dashboard. See for instance Rob Kitchin, Tracey P. Lauriault and Gavin Mcardle, "Knowing and Governing Cities through Urban Indicators, City Benchmarking and Real-time Dashboards," *Regional Studies, Regional Science* 2, no. 1 (2015): 6-28; Shannon Mattern, "Mission Control: A History of the Urban Dashboard," *Places Journal* (2015), <https://doi.org/10.22269/150309>; Michiel de Lange, "From Real-time City



Gekker, Sam Hind, Clancy Wilmott and Daniel Evans (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2018), 238-255.

[16] Scott McQuire, *Geomedia: Networked Cities and the Futures of Public Space* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016). See also, Scott McQuire, *The Media City: Media, Architecture and Public Space* (London: Sage, 2008).

[17] Michael Batty, *The New Science of Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013); Luís M.A. Bettencourt, "The Uses of Big Data in Cities," *Big Data* 2, no. 1 (2014): 12-22; Geoffrey West, *Scale: The Universal Laws of Growth, Innovation, Sustainability, and the Pace of Life in Organisms, Cities, Economies, and Companies* (New York: Penguin, 2017).

[18] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959); Lyn H. Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973).

[19] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Charles R Walgreen Foundation Lecture (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 187.

[20] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, NY and London: W.W. Norton, 1974).

[21] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990).

[22] About materiality, mediality and performativity of urban interfaces, see Nanna Verhoeff, "Interfaces of Media Architecture," in *Media Architecture: Using Information and Media as Construction Material (Age of Access? Grundfragen der Informationsgesellschaft)*, eds. Alexander Wiethoff and Heinrich Hussmann (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2017), 43-58. For other recent work by the editors of this issue on these and related notions, see: Michiel de Lange, "The Right to the Datafied City: Interfacing the Urban Data Commons," in *The Right to the Smart City*, eds. Paolo Cardullo, Cesare Di Feliciano and Rob Kitchin (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2019), 71-83; Sigrid Merx, "Between Realities #Athens: Or how Scenography can Facilitate the Re-imagination of Public Space," *Forum+* (2018), <http://www.forum-online.be/nummers/zomer-2018/between-realities-athens-or-how-scenography-can-facilitate-the-re-imagination-of-public-space>.

[23] This point is also made by Florian Hadler, "Beyond UX," *Interface Critique*



[24] Alexander H. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), vii.

[25] Branden Hookway, *Interface* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 4.

[26] Drucker, "Humanities Approaches to Interface Culture," 3.

[27] Maria Chatzichristodoulou, Janice Jefferies and Rachel Zerihan, eds., *Interfaces of Performance* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 1.

[28] Hookway, *Interface*, 5.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Galloway, *Interface Effect*, 30.

[31] Hookway, *Interface*, ix.

[32] Chatzichristodoulou, Jefferies and Zerihan, *Interfaces of Performance*, 1.

[33] Hookway, *Interface*, ix.

[34] *Ibid.*, 6-7.

[35] *Ibid.*, 7.

[36] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 429.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] Hookway, *Interface*, 8.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] *Ibid.*, 9.

[42] *Ibid.*, 6.

[43] Drucker, "Humanities Approaches to Interface Culture," 3.

[44] Johanna Drucker, "Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to



[45] Ibid. While we embrace this perspective, we cannot help noting the ambiguity of the term “event-space” in an urban context, as many cities succumb to the pressure of becoming consumer spectacles.

[46] For this more-than-human perspective as proposal for design principles for media architecture, see Marcus Foth and Glenda Amayo Caldwell, “More-Than-Human Media Architecture,” in Proceedings of the 4th Media Architecture Biennale 2018 (MAB18) (New York, NY: ACM, 2018), 66-75.

[47] Chantal Mouffe, “Art and Democracy: Art as an Agnostic Intervention in Public Space,” *Open*, no. 14 (2008): 6-15. For more on her distinction between the (social) ‘political’ and (institutional) ‘politics,’ see Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2005).

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new artworks for an exhibition entitled Shimmer and curated by Irini Papadimitriou (V&A) at the Tobazi Mansion in Hydra, a new large choral performance titled Accursed for the Thessaloniki Biennial in Greece; and Knock, Knock, Knocking a public space installation in the Mediterranean Garden Pavilion of the New Sea Waterfront of Thessaloniki.

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