Stretching the Line into a Borderland of Potentiality.

Communication technologies between security tactics and cultural practices

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Introduction

In the Western "exploded" city, where residential, entertainment, commercial, technological and administrative poles were born in order to satisfy previously integrated functions, there seem to be two opposite attitudes towards physical public spaces. On one hand, the growing claim for security and standardization of social practices under the umbrella term of 'civility' or 'proper behaviour' have been addressed by scholars since the publication of the 'Broken Window' theory (Wilson and Kelling 1982); on the other hand, artists' initiatives emphasizing the unpredictability of different socio-cultural realms in cities have been reclaiming public domain open to heterogeneous groups (Broeckmann 2004).

With the emergence of the terrorist threat, war, insecurity and cities have been redefining each other in new ways (Graham 2004). Domestic places of civil society have emerged as geopolitically charged spaces, 'battlegrounds on which global powers and stubbornly local meanings and identities meet, clash, struggle and seek a satisfactory, or just bearable, settlement – a mode of cohabitation that is hoped to be a lasting peace' (Bauman 2003: 21, quoted in Graham 2004: 8).

As a consequence, while historically cities were born in order to assure protection for the inner population from external threats, with the urbanization of insecurity and violence the binary construction underpinning the notion of protection – namely, the basic construction of an 'us' and a

'them' – gets charged with new political and social implications. Trying to separate the 'inside' from the 'outside' in order to identify the potential menace is becoming the dominant pursuit of the new urban warfare not only for public and private security operators, but also in the everyday experience of common people. However, such an activity requires skills and information that often are not at the citizens' direct disposal (Molotch and Mcclain 2003). Therefore, the long standing construction of 'us' and 'them' – once updated – becomes a relevant source of information, able to assure a bearable degree of risk. In other words, the state of perpetual emergency (Agamben 1998) assigns a new political relevance to mechanisms of construction of an 'us V. them' binary and to the information sources fuelling this construction. Furthermore, it should be noticed that local and national mainstream media play a crucial role in creating a 'phenomenology of fear' by stretching particular groups and social behaviours into a dichotomized, potentially dangerous and unpredictable 'otherness'.

One of the dangers is that the perception of increasing insecurity is leading to the inclusion into the logic of warfare of social phenomena and behaviours that under other circumstances would not be considered criminal, and therefore to the rise of (geographical, social, cultural) borders *inside* cities (Graham and Marvin 2001) and to the general acceptation of the privatization of public spaces as a necessary evil. It is to show the limits of this trend and in order to enable an open 'borderland' where potential identities can be constructed through communicational processes and 'us V. them' binaries can be enriched that transnational artist and media-activist networks are designing politics of cultural practices. The embedding of installations, video works and performances in contested public spaces can be conceived of as an attempt to blur and subvert the usual framing of the politics of security and fear.

ICT themselves are to a great extent involved in shaping the responses to both the requests for security and openness, as a sort of interface between the familiar and the *unheimlich* of urban public environments. On the one hand, computer code automatizes the sorting of individuals and groups into categories of risk and degrees of 'otherness' (Lyon 2002). On the other hand, artist networks

activate public domains and create conditions for agency by pushing invisible interactions out on to the visibility of city streets. Here, ICT are seen as an additional communicational layer providing opportunities in order to substitute binary narratives of conflict with grassroots or just multi-faceted ones.

This paper, on the one hand, investigates how security policies led by local authorities tend to resort to ICT according to a reactive control attitude, as tools to analyse traditional spatial and social problems. On the other hand, it explores how projects aiming at experimenting in the urban domain the potentialities provided by ICT have been developed by artists and media-activists worldwide. Notably, this paper questions how information technologies can be used towards the 'inflation' of shrunk narratives and the hybridization of dominant images of what the city should be.

These reflections draw on an analysis of a series of case studies embracing interviews to policy makers and public officers operating at some local governments of the Emilia-Romagna Region[1] (Italy) as well as participant observation of artistic performances and installations held at various venues worldwide from 2004 to 2006. These case studies revealed two different attitudes toward the employment of ICT in urban spaces, sketching two different regeneration strategies for cities and communities. The first strategy implies a traditional idea of community as *gemeinschaft* to be preserved. Case studies exemplifying the second strategy, instead, consider also unstable communities where the use of ICT is not supposed to help identify pre-built subjects, but creates them through the same process of communication.

In the first paragraph urban disorder as one source of insecurity that – although not being concerned with exclusively criminal behaviours – acts as a powerful mechanism for the rise of borders inside cities is introduced through the presentation of two research projects. The first survey, governmentally led, aims at defining an interstate common taxonomy of phenomena

[1] In the last years the Emilia-Romagna regional government has been highly committed to the design of experimental projects aiming at reducing the perception of insecurity by citizens. See http://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/sicurezza/ (web site of the Department for the Advancement and the Development of Security and Local Police Policies of the Regional Government).

producing an intense demand in security by citizens. The second research project, led by a group of artists, explores the nature of urban disorder's perceptions by means of a qualitative approach and realizes an intervention aiming at the public sharing of the research's results.

In the second, more theoretical paragraph 'urban disorder' is defined as a discourse aiming to constitute mono-dimensional identities and to shrink narratives. This theoretical perspective thus allows the comparison of government-driven ICT initiatives concerning urban disorder with artist/activist projects addressing issues like the blurring of the dominant images of a city and the hybridization of identity. Within this comparison, the paper will seek to figure out how different attitudes towards spatial and social problems imply different attitudes towards the situated application of communication technologies.

In the third paragraph, wider political aspects of the discourse on security are taken into consideration. Here, three problematic aspects arising from an intense use of ICT as surveillance means to assure the smooth running of urban life are discussed. Notably, the paper focuses on the relationship between the communicational model implied by ICT applications in security policies, citizens' agency, the political pattern underpinning the discourse on urban disorder and the process of privatization of public spaces.

Finally, the fourth paragraph compares some artist and activist projects stressing the significant potential provided by ICT to foster democratic life, on condition that their use is seen as an opportunity to introduce new elements in established images of what the city is and what it should be.

Introducing Urban Disorder

'The urban impulse is an impulse toward community – an impulse toward being together, and toward accepting the idea that however different we may be, something unites us.' (Goldberger 2001)

This statement, pronounced in 2001 by Paul Goldberger during the spring semester opening speech at the University of California in Berkeley, could sound either far-sighted or provocative. It seems, in fact, to posit some 'sense of the Urban' that would characterize all those living in the city as a sort of tolerant community.

Far-sighted because, on the one hand, it is commonplace that one of the most noteworthy phenomena taking place in contemporary cities is the coexistence of different ways of life, behaviours and informal normative systems. On the other hand, with the thematisation of the urban experience and the imperative of competition among places in a global system increasingly oriented to resource delocalization, the capability of attracting city users becomes a paramount factor in assuring the wellbeing of a territory (Martinotti 1993). Therefore, many metropolitan areas as well as medium-size cities around the world evaluate the presence of diverse lifestyles as a tool to foster an image of vibrant, cosmopolitan city.

However, on the other side of the social imaginary spectrum, diverse behaviours have also shown their potential to give rise to conflict dynamics, especially when it comes to public opinion, as often reported by local mass media. In a growing number of cases in European cities, especially in town centres, coexistence turned out to be all but easy. Worried reactions against phenomena of incivility and urban disorder articulate the more or less explicit refuse by long time dwellers and city users to share public spaces with populations or individuals expressing different identities and lifestyles as far as social time, behaviour and use of public places are concerned (see, among others, Cooper 1998). Very often these reactions are accompanied by feelings of insecurity and perceptions of a decrease in urban safety, so that local authorities are requested to intervene and take into account these demands when designing political strategies or security tactics.

Even if feelings of insecurity towards different lifestyles and identities have always been part of complex forms of urban life, two aspects are totally novel when it comes to current phenomena of urban disorder and urban policies emphasizing 'quality of life' and security of the urban

experience.[2] These aspects – strictly related – are the 'virtualization of insecurity' and the new political relevance attributed to fears towards uncommon – yet often not criminal – behaviours by the same political sphere as well as the mediascape, also as a consequence of the current state of emergency threatening cities worldwide.

It is because of these two aspects that focalizing on the ways according to which ICT are used to address urban disorder (or counteract the attitude arising from this concern) reveals to be a strategic research choice that could lead to a wider understanding of the challenges to be faced by augmented urban planning.

Virtualization of Insecurity

Very often, urban disorder deals with phenomena which are not predominantly criminal or violent. Mass media, local officers and citizens groups are increasingly using the terms 'incivility' and 'urban disorder' to indicate behaviours taking place in public places which – even if not subjected to penal law *strictu sensu* – are nonetheless perceived by the majority of citizens as explicit acts of rupture with traditional, informal codes of behaving, cohabiting and taking care of common urban spaces (Barbagli 2002).

In order to better understand the citizens' sense of insecurity and map a potentially very heterogeneous range of phenomena, some initiatives have been undertaken. One of these, the

[2] In the UK urban renewal linked to neo-liberal urbanism and concerns about social sustainability of the urban domain was subsumed under the term 'urban renaissance' (see Rogers and Coaffee 2005). On a European level, the way social, economical and security aspects of urban management are interlaced sometimes still depends upon specific national contexts. The European Commission includes such aspects into the wider 'multilevel governance' framework. According to this, urban governance is characterised by three main strategies: 'decentralisation of the responsibilities and resources of local authorities, encouragement of the participation of civil society, and the creation of [public-private] partnerships with the aim of realising common objectives' (United Nations cited by European Forum on Urban Safety 2006a). For an analysis of neoliberalism as a new mode of political optimization and of agency and participation as technologies of subjectivity in Foucault's terms, see Ong 2006.

Survey on Urban Disorder and Feelings of Insecurity (*S.U.D.*),[3] led jointly by the city councils of Birmingham (UK), Malmö (S) and Bologna (IT) and developed with the support of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security, aimed at outlining an interstate common taxonomy and measurement method starting from the definition of urban disorder events as phenomena affecting urban public places and producing an intense demand in security by citizens (Nobili 2003a).

The survey was split in two phases. During the first part the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system was used to detect perceptions associated with their neighbourhoods by inhabitants of the three partner cities. According to the survey, instances of 'urban disorder', as named by dwellers, span from the perceptible[4] presence of beggars, prostitutes and punks, to traces left in public spaces by young people hanging out during night hours, drug dealers, students' social rituals, dogs, street musicians: 'These persons are considered alien to the decorum of public spaces and even dangerous since they are unpredictable, even able to commit a crime' (Nobili 2003b, translation by the author). But even disrupted roads, traffic jams, damaged phone boxes, car pollution and decaying facades are seen as occurrences of incivility.

What emerges clearly from the survey is a growing tendency in the public opinion of the partner cities towards associating very heterogeneous social and environmental phenomena under the umbrella term 'urban disorder'. Even if often not harmful in themselves – *S.U.D.* argues – these phenomena nonetheless induce a cumulative effect: if a single sign of incivility is rarely considered serious, a high frequency in uncivil manifestations becomes critical (see Roché 2002). Being usually more visible than criminal events, urban incivilities are perceived as signals of abandonment of urban spaces, thus involving feelings of isolation and insecurity.

This latter consideration partly casts light on one of the most significant results of the survey. Direct observation by researchers compared to citizens' perceptions demonstrated that feelings of

[3] Hippocrates project 2001/HIP/043.

[4] Either by sense of smell, hearing or sight.

insecurity occur even when the probability of being victimized is very low (Nobili 2003b). We propose to name this phenomenon 'virtualization of insecurity'.

Towards Politics of Cultural Practices. Sezione Zero's Visual Intervention in Contested Spaces

In order to investigate more deeply the nature of urban insecurity as emerged from the previous survey and its relation with the notion of visibility, an artistic neighbourhood-based group in Bologna realized an intervention in public perceptions using visual images. During the fist stage of the project, *Sezione Zero*'s video crew conducted a video-based ethnographic documentation involving the heterogeneous social groups implicated in the conflict for the definition of the identity of the city's allegedly most degraded spaces. The study revealed that traces and presences recognized as occurrences of urban disorder by citizens, although corresponding to very different social behaviours, had in common a semantic reference to dirtiness: being 'out of the right place' (disordered) was strictly associated to being 'dirty' (Sezione Zero 2006).[5]

This qualitative result shed also light on the 'virtualization of insecurity' phenomenon. In the context elected as case study, references to urban disorder could be interpreted as a discourse aiming at defining 'us V. them' binaries and therefore identities for both human and physical subjects (Pelizza 2006).[6]

This discourse was then made visible and was embedded in the same contested space. During the second stage of the project, in fact, people's interviews and scenes of daily life in contested areas were digitally edited by *Sezione Zero* according to a dialogic pattern, so that self-representations by students, punks, street artists, migrants and other subjects involved in the rupture of informal normative systems alternated with accounts by shopkeepers and inhabitants about their discomfort and feelings of insecurity. The resulting video was then beamed over a video wall placed

[5] We cannot account here for the vast literature dealing with pollution and otherness. A classic reference study for this literature is Douglas 1970.

[6] By 'subject' we do not imply only human actors. Rather, we refer to any agent – be it a human being, a natural element or an artifact – involved in a process of creation of meaning. See Latour 1987; Hayles 1999; Whatmore 2002.

in one of the same contested squares, thus making the terms of the disputes among space users accessible by communities and individuals involved in the struggle as well as passers-by.

Setting Up the Borderland. A First Theoretical Perspective

From an analytical perspective, data from *S.U.D.* and *Sezione Zero*'s video ethnographic research show that the perception of urban disorder deals with social phenomena (feeling of insecurity, isolation, fear of the 'other') deeply embedded in an image of the city made of multiple spatial-temporal layers. On the one hand, the process of accumulation of traces of 'dirtiness' – through direct or mediated experience – could be seen as acting as a temporal link, similarly to a back-forward technique, and as a mechanism recalling other spatial orders. On the other hand, what is striking in citizens' accounts on urban disorder is also the repetitiveness and scarcity of interpretative patterns used to describe assorted behaviours and traces.

Both cumulative effect and repetitiveness are related to the virtualization of insecurity phenomenon: insecurity is not necessarily associated to a high probability of being victimized, while the presence of particular groups or individuals is a sufficient condition for the perception of risk. It could be helpful, here, to recall what Amartya Sen points out: that violence and social insecurity are fuelled by the imposition of univocal identities on individuals through the extraction of a single affiliation becoming the only relevant feature in identity construction (Sen 2006). In our case study, the relevant feature would be, from time to time, race, nationality, socio-economic status, patterns of consumption, entertainment behaviours.[7]

The claim for civility could therefore be seen as a discourse where public spaces, communities, citizens and social practices, images of the 'real' and of the desired city, feeling of insecurity and sense of the uncanny constitute elements of *relatively closed hypertexts*.[8] All these

[7] It should be stressed that direct observation (Sezione Zero 2006) suggests a correlation between a low quality level of consumption, the belonging to a low-income class and the use of public spaces for recreational purposes.

[8] Here, 'hypertexts' are conceived of as discourses where elements placed on different layers are linked in a not linear way.

elements, in fact, are sorted – among all the virtual narratives enabled by the rupture of informal normative systems – into only one potential discourse associated with a high level of risk and implying opposing, binary identities for individuals and spaces.

If the discourse on urban disorder aims at shrinking narratives and set up boundaries, it could therefore be of some interest comparing initiatives using ICT to address urban disorder with digital projects aiming at multiplying potential narratives by activating a public domain open to heterogeneous kinds of publics. In recent years, a wide range of artistic and media-activist projects have in fact been emerging as attempts to claim public domains as sites of development of democratic forms of agency coherent with the new nature of virtual and physical public environments. The work of these artists can be seen as 'stretching the thin excluding boundary line into a thick borderland' where identities can be negotiated as part of discursive processes kept accessible. By deploying 'tactical' technologies enabling the insertion of multimedia contents into contested public spaces, they attempt to blur and subvert the dominant image of the city and allow the emergence of multi-faceted narratives.

The *Memoria Histórica de la Alameda* project, for example, shows an effort towards using ICT to recall that urban space is not only the place of a vision, but also of relation and judgement.

Challenging the Dominant Image of the City: the Memoria Histórica de la Alameda Project

Memoria Histórica de la Alameda uses a locative media platform to create an augmented space where historical information provided by a geo-referenced system counteracts with the empirical vision of the *Avenida Alameda* in Santiago del Chile.

Developed by the workgroup at the *Estética y Tecnología suave* course of the Facultad de Artes, Universidad de Chile, in collaboration with the artistic network *Netzfunk.org*, the project aims at recovering the recent painful memory of Chile by means of multimedia contents embedded into Santiago's public spaces. *Alameda* boulevard is Santiago's main street. It houses many institutional buildings and, among these, *la Moneda*, the Presidential Palace bombed on 11 September 1973 during General Pinochet's coup d'état. With the rapid normalization of the country and the amnesty,

traces of the recent past had been erased and the boulevard's name was changed into *Avenida Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins*, even if most people still keep using the old name.

The project team developed a system enabling the association between physical positioning, thanks to a GPS device, and multimedia geo-referenced contents recovered from public and private archives as well as personal memory. The *Cultural Luggage* platform, a cross media wearable system consisting of a GPS receiver, a laptop and a PDA, was used. The GPS receiver gets data describing the space crossed by the body wearing the system from GPS satellites, data are then transmitted to the laptop via a Bluetooth serial port. The laptop acts as a multimedia content server: data are decoded and stored into a real-time updated database. When the software detects the proximity of the mobile system to an area previously associated with geo-referenced multimedia contents, the corresponding multimedia file is automatically pushed to the PDA via the USB port.

The multimedia open repository contains video, photos, interviews and texts which interact with the user's direct experience within the urban area. Multimedia contents have been collected through research in official archives as well as personal micro-stories. Audio recording of Salvador Allende's last declaration, video footage showing the bombings of *La Moneda*, family photos and real time mobile-phone-generated personal memories of the same places under the military regime are all made visible and audible on headphones and on the PDA's screen along the boulevard's surroundings. Multimedia contents thus counteract the dominant image of the city centre conveyed by neo-liberal urban renewal.

In *Memoria Histórica de la Alameda* ubiquitous computing contributes to the setting up of an open system where heterogeneous and unpredictable memories take part in an ongoing discourse where identities of human beings and places get constantly renegotiated. 'Each word detaining for too long the same meaning loses its strength, its potential for action. We want to grant memory other multiple meanings in order to produce a constellation of partial and simultaneous perspectives able to create a domain for dialogue more than a definitive statement'. (Memoria Histórica de la Alameda workgroup 2005)

Patterns of Communication, Agency and the Privatization of Public Space

As previously recalled, the second reason why phenomena of urban disorder can be considered as novel conflicts is related with the new political relevance attributed to fears towards uncommon behaviours not only by local media, but the same political sphere.

Over the past few years, European cities have been involved in developing projects to face citizens' security expectations and to prevent phenomena of urban degradation on the basis of strategies linking urban regeneration with the use of public spaces as vibrant places for social contacts. These strategies undoubtedly bring with them a much more democratic flavour than securitization tactics. Yet, while it is widely known that vibrant communities are able to get rid of alien or unwanted behaviours, ruptures in informal normative systems are often seen by individuals as signals of the absence of institutions (Barbagli 1999). Distrusting, isolated, regarding themselves as potential crime targets, citizens ask local authorities to return safety to public urban spaces, which are perceived as hostile.

Very often, the demand for the re-establishment of a sense of familiarity within urban spaces is so pressing and charged with political implications that local authorities commit many political and economic resources in undertaking policies aiming at regulating a wide range of assorted – yet often not illegal – social practices taking place in public spaces. Instances, spanning from soft to hard measures, range from the Municipality of Barcelona asking people for *civismo* through site specific adverts, to the traditionally left-wing Municipality of Bologna deploying very restrictive strategies in order to restore a sense of legality and adopting preventive measures in order to limit disturbing behaviours (see Pavarini 2005).

Traditionally, local authorities' response to the growing feeling of insecurity has regarded information technologies as useful tools to get a real-time knowledge of what has been going on around the city. Especially video-surveillance systems have been viewed as technological substitutes of the 'witness', in a certain way projecting its presence over urban spaces. A growing

number of public and private CCTV systems has been recognized either as the ultimate deterrent in the toolbox of crime preventive strategies or as the first instrument of security tactics.

However, many doubts of different nature accompany the intense use of surveillance systems as means to assure the smooth running of everyday life. Some scholars pointed out that video-surveillance systems have usually been implemented according to a deterministic approach towards social problems, since the strengthening of surveillance is supposed to favour risks prevention (Pecaud 2002).

Some others stress the incoherence between political declarations in favour of citizens' agency and the asymmetry implied by patterns of information transmission enabled by digital control systems. As an example, the final *Manifesto on Urban Safety and Democracy*, adopted at the *European Forum on Urban Safety* held in Saragossa (E) from 2 to 4 November 2006 by representatives of several hundred European cities, pays great attention not only to the prevention of the social causes leading to urban insecurity, but also to the role of citizens' agency in avoiding strategies of fear.

> 1. Safety is an essential public interest, closely linked to other public goods such as social inclusion and the right to work, to health care, education and culture. Every strategy using fear is to be rejected in favour of policies furthering active citizenship, an appropriation of the city's territory and the development of collective life. Access to other rights also favours the right to security. […] 9. By means of urban regeneration and reconstruction strategies, by providing basic services in the areas of education, social security and culture, cities have the ability to act on the causes and effects of insecurity. By developing integrated, multisectorial approaches, and with the support of regional, national and European authorities, urban policies are innovative if they do not put security solely in the hands of justice and the police. (European Forum on Urban Safety 2006b)

However, when it comes to the topic of ICT, the *Manifesto* does not make any reference to the role of digital technologies in 'creating links between the city's various spaces' (*Ibidem*), but focuses on exposing opportunities ('It is unavoidable for cities to resort to technological means for ensuring the smooth running of facilities accessible to the public and video surveillance systems in particular'), and constraints ('although the results remain mixed') of CCTV systems (*Ibidem*). Nor,

during the three-day-long meeting, panels approached alternative possible applications of ICT in relation to urban security.

As this latter case suggests, it could be said that, even if supported by cutting-edge sociological and criminological paradigms on a theory level, current urban security management policies – when it comes to implementing the use of ICT – are interested in communication technologies considered as tools to analyse traditional spatial and social problems, rather than as means enabling communicational processes whereby new subjects can get constituted.

Since video-surveillance systems are based on an asymmetric pattern of information transmission, our hypothesis is that a strong correlation between the CCTV communicational model – and more generally ICT applications in security management policies – citizens' (lack of) agency, the political pattern underpinning the discourse on urban disorder and the ongoing process of privatization of public spaces can be envisioned.

As the asymmetric communicational model distinguishes between passive subjects (the ones under surveillance as well as the protected) and proactive ones (police, private guards), in a similar vein the political logic underpinning the discourse on urban disorder implies a lack of agency on the side of citizens. The interviews carried out by the author show that local officers are usually aware of the political perils a deterministic application of ICT to urban disorder problems could lead to. 'The project we are developing asks citizens to signal episodes of urban disorder by means of cell phones and allows the setting up of a priority agenda. However, there is a great risk in this: the project could produce a passive attitude, if citizens are not directly involved in the solution of the problem. ICT cannot only stimulate authorities, but should also activate citizens themselves'.

According to the discourse on urban disorder, local governments are asked to act as grantors of the access to public spaces perceived as emptied, insecure and abandoned. Moreover, especially for highly symbolic places like city centres, inhabitants often keep looking at themselves as the legitimate users, whose legitimacy comes from the repetition of practices of everyday life (*Sezione*

Zero 2006).[9] Unable to directly control access to 'their' public spaces, individuals thus ask local authorities to act as an access regulator agent.

However, spaces where access control is introduced can be seen as undergoing a process of privatization. As architect Manar Hammad points out, spaces 'are not public insofar as access to them is controlled in favour of their "legitimate owner"' (Hammad 1989, 24 – translation by the author). Besides generating boundaries, the discourse on urban disorder can therefore be conceived of as a claim for the privatization of public space enacted by local authorities in favour of long time inhabitants and retailers. In contrast with what many e-participation projects assume, privatization of public spaces is thus a process implying the partial renounce to agency by individuals. Together with this political model, the logic underpinning the application of communicational technologies to face the growing feeling of insecurity bears this asymmetry too.

Digital Cartography as Closed Form of Social Knowledge

The reactive control approach towards ICT so far drawn also underestimates a third point highlighted by many scholars. By assigning individuals and social groups into categories of risk on the basis of one single feature, computer code perpetuates and reinforces many social exclusions of our time. In other words, according to these scholars, inequalities are already embedded in electronic systems of 'software sorting' (see Lyon 2002; Graham 2005).

An initiative developed during the second phase of *S.U.D.* and then continued as part of the *Ril.Fe.De.Ur* project (Survey on Urban Disorder Phenomena) constitutes a good example of this.[10] The project made use of PDAs and databases to geo-reference non-orthodox behaviours whose presence ends up increasing the feeling of insecurity in citizens. The experiment was tested in ten

[9] *Sezione Zero*'s ethnographic research showed a profound attachment to an apparently univocal endangered identity of the city. Such attachment was expressed by statements like 'I can not recognized my beloved city anymore'. (Sezione Zero 2006)

[10] The latter project was developed by the Emilia-Romagna Region in partnership with ten municipalities and co-funded by the Italian Ministry for Technological Innovation under the national e-government call for proposals.

small and medium cities in the Emilia-Romagna area of Italy from 2003 to 2006. Resorting to PDAs, GIS and GPS systems as means to investigate the relationship between urban spaces and social behaviours, the project aimed at developing a digital evolution of crime-mapping systems.

The test was divided into three phases. During the first one, direct observation around neighbourhoods was carried on by foot by eight trained operators equipped with palm PCs. The operators conducted a census of traces of disorder observed in the assigned areas using their PDAs as a sort of notebook (De Marco 2003). A software application was developed *ad hoc*, thus enabling the geo-referencing of data related to occurrences of urban disorder. When detecting an event of incivility, operators selected the interested area on the digital vector cartography appearing on the PDA's screen. The data entry process was piloted by a grid structured by type of phenomenon and metadata about the survey (date and time of detection, street, closest house number). The urban disorder event could be classified by three macro categories (physical, social, mobility and traffic-related phenomena) and by a sub-list of fifty-one more specific items related to behaviours, damaged objects, undesired presences, littering and dirt, abandoned or occupied areas, types of pollution, etc.

At the end of every detecting session, data stored in the PDA were synchronized with the police station server via the PDA's dock. Here, a database was constantly updated with geo-referenced data coming from the operators' observations as well as from citizens' signalling by phone and web forms.

Thirdly, the system allowed queries by type of phenomenon, period of time or area and the drawing of land register maps populated with occurrences of urban disorder. These maps were then used as analytical tools for security policies design of given urban zones.

In this experiment, PDAs were explicitly used as notebooks, thanks to the acceleration they can provide to the data entry process. However, it can be noticed that the use of PDAs to represents social life lacks the flexibility of the flâneur's paper notebook. In order to be entered into the system, events of incivility needed in fact to be encoded into pre-determined categories. It should

also be stressed that this taxonomy was based on citizens' accounts collected during the first phase of *S.U.D.*

This fact could testify for the most advanced form of political participation and agency: the shaping of the same categorical organization underpinning powerful forms of social knowledge on the basis of descriptions provided by citizens.[11] However, this argument overlooks the fact that the experiment was led on the basis of 'relatively closed hypertexts': mobile technologies have been used to reinforce a discourse whose aim is the setting up of a distinction between 'us' and 'them', civilization and savagery, normality and anomaly. In other words, ICT have been used as tools to crystallize mono-dimensional identities rather than to enrich them.

Of course, the process of identity definition is a fundamental need of societies. At the heart of the issue is not so much contesting the search for identities but ensuring the open access to a public borderland where the freedom to choose what priority should be given to the different affiliations every human being detains at the same time is assured. Especially when it comes to phenomena like urban disorder and the virtualization of insecurity, the ability – also for 'uncivil' minorities – to question what features are more critical for the constitution of complex identities could turn out to be more effective than the attempt to reinforce strong dichotomized identities.

On the contrary, the digital cartography from the latter example is a form of social knowledge whose production process is not accessible. Maps give a representation of public spaces only as containers of social practices. The 'disordered other' is seen as a passive element of a discourse developed elsewhere: on mass media, on the server at the police station, on the software running on the PDAs.

More generally, the logic often underpinning applications of ICT to manage feelings of insecurity implies a traditional vision of community as stable *gemeischaft* to be preserved and does not recognize that, as for the *Memoria Histórica de la Alameda* project, augmented spaces do not

[11] Maps are powerful forms of social knowledge because the encoding of aspects of social life into maps, statistics, charts has historically been linked to the same process of state formation (see Foucault 1977).

only enable a point-to-point encoding of social practices into a digital substance. They also possess the potential to shift the line of what is possible or 'normal' a little forward. In the case of urban disorder this could possibly lead to a decrease in feelings of insecurity and in expectations towards local authorities.

Experiments Towards Re-Writing the Hypertext of the City

An approach to ICT and urban space focused on the *making* is shared by many artists' and activists' initiatives which stress the significant potential provided by ICT to foster democratic life, on condition that their use is seen as an opportunity to introduce new elements in established images of what the city is and what it should be.

Many of these projects focus on the elaboration of critical forms of representation of space like cartographies of contested areas.[12] Others integrate actions aimed at activating public spaces and re-writing in a participative way some of the elements that constitute the hypertext of the city. *Geograffiti*,[13] for instance, enables the spontaneous recording of the points of an itinerary ('waypoints') by means of a GPS device. Waypoints are then associated with accessory information like text, images, audio and video. Every online user can upload contents related to a particular place, tag accessory information or retrieve contents left by other users.

Other projects go beyond individual forms of agency to set up an investigation on connective, transient relations emerging during participation in a communicational process rather than from well-established identities. Two examples of this are the *Meta*[7]*-Medium* project realized by *Orfeo*

[12] Some examples are *Cartografia resistente* (http://www.cartografiaresistente.org) and *Transacciones/Fadaiat* (http://mcs.hackitectura.net/tiki-browse_image.php?imageId=593 and http://mcs.hackitectura.net/tiki-browse_image.php?imageId=592)

[13] http://www.gpster.net/geograffiti.html

TV-Telestreet[14] in Rotterdam (NL) during January and February 2006, and the *Khirkeeyaan* project developed by artist Shaina Anand in different neighbourhoods in and around Khirkee Extension, New Delhi over three weeks in April 2006.

The *Meta*^{7}*-Medium* project set as a starting point the overcoming of an urban sociality seen as a localized *gemeinschaft* to be preserved and recognized the city as the domain of intermittent communities. *Meta*^{7}*-Medium* was basically an integrated media infrastructure making use of Wi-Fi, internet cable, radio transmission and air-broadcast to link different public spaces in the city of Rotterdam: *Tent – Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Arts*,[15] Rotterdam's *Blaak* library, the main market square, a dedicated website, two nomadic video-equipped crews acting on streets and an indefinite number of locations crossed by people spontaneously involved in sharing their images of the city through contents produced using their cell phones and uploaded on the website.

[insert Figure 1.1 here – portrait]

Figure 1.1 Spatial layout of the media infrastructure of *Meta*^{7}*-Medium* project. Courtesy *Orfeo TV-Telestreet*

[14] Telestreet is a self-organized network of TV stations producing and broadcasting on a neighbourhood area. Single street televisions are widespread all over Italy and, since the stations are open to everybody, allow the short-circuit between the creation and the consumption of media. They broadcast on narrow areas using 'shadow cones', frequencies granted to commercial networks but unusable because of territorial obstacles (http://www.radioalice.org/nuovatelestreet/index.php). Since the beginning, while single TV stations used to air-broadcast on a specific urban area, the networked got constituted on line, for example using peer-to-peer systems and bit torrent files to mutually exchange videos. By so doing, the networked combined low and high-technologies for video distribution and social networking. Orfeo TV is the first born of the Telestreets.

[15] The Centre hosted the installation and the media centre as part of the wider *Exploding Television* section of the Rotterdam International Film Festival.

In the project every virtual or physical location was designed to act both as a receiving and as a transmitting hub. The project tried to let the process of documentation of city life open by allowing a short-circuit between the creation and consumption of media. For some days, the sites involved (and their notion of community) were 'staked out' as openly accessible. As a result, passers-by, sellers and buyers at the market, library users, visitors at the *Centre for Contemporary Art* as well as internet users and nomadic mobile users enacted symbolic forms of appropriation of urban spaces by publicly sharing their images of the city. At the same time, these images set reciprocal connections and contributed to the re-writing of the meanings associated with specific places.

KhirkeeYaan[16] is another experiment where the TV image was transformed from the box of passive viewing into an immediate self-reflecting device which could be looked into and looked out of. The aim of the project was the exploration and employment of an 'open circuit TV system' as a local area network, feedback and micro-media generation device within Khirkee Extension in New Delhi.

Cheap CCTV and cable TV equipment was laid out to set up temporary communication systems for the use of the communities of the neighbourhood. Four sets of cameras, TVs and microphones were positioned within a 200-metre range of each other. The audio-video from the four venues were connected to a quad processor and audio mixer. This quadrant comprising of sound and image from all four locations was then fed back to the TV sets, allowing viewer/performer to interact with others in the frame.

[insert Figure 1.2 here – landscape]

Figure 1.2 Woman interacting in front of the TV quadrant. *KhirkeeYaan* project. Courtesy the author.

[16] http://www.chitrakarkhana.net/khirkeeyaan.htm

As in surveillance systems operated for security purposes, here the process of filmmaking was automatic, made possible through a local network of mirror views, eye-level communication and the absence of cameraman and editor. However, unlike traditional use of CCTV, here the process of information transmission was visible and kept accessible: negotiations were unpredictable, made possible by immediate micro-contacts, while the intervention was unplanned and collaboratively organized.

Conclusions

Although ICT driven security policies can result in an efficient answer to citizens' need for institutions' visibility, they seem to fail in addressing more general issues regarding the complex nature of hybrid public urban spaces.

First, the implementation of ICT in urban disorder management policies endorses a political model according to which citizens are seen as passive subjects delegating local authorities the role of granting access to the public domain. If we assume that physical and virtual spaces are private in so far as access to them is controlled in favour of the legitimate user, initiatives using mobile devices to control access policies reveal a role in the process of privatization of public realms, not very differently from the one played by video surveillance systems.

Secondly, information technologies are often seen as mere tools to analyse traditional spatial problems, thus reinforcing many social exclusions of our time. By assigning individuals and social groups into categories of risk on the basis of a point-to-point digital encoding of social practices, digital crime mapping and CCTV systems perpetuate an idea of urban space as mere container for social behaviours and prevent minorities from affecting the overall image of the city. This approach shows a reactive control attitude, rather than the proactive commitment to create ICT-mediated opportunities for the negotiation of adversarial interpretations of urban environments, especially when it comes to phenomena of insecurity not strictly associated with crime events.

However, the evidence that finding mediation between different lifestyles is becoming an increasingly critical issue for urban planners as well as for local officers and social operators cannot be underestimated. This paper argued that planning with ‘lines’ shapes subjects placed on one of two opponent sides of the line: that is to say, antithetical subjects involved in a relation of mutual exclusion. Planning with ‘borderlands’ means on the contrary thinking of thick, open zones of potentiality where urban subjects can get constituted through a communicational process.

By examining suggestions on how artists are experimenting with ICT as means to try and activate the public domain, it can be argued that such attempts to create new conditions for agency in common spaces should not be relegated to intermittent demonstrations. The challenge for urban designers and planners, as well as for local authorities, deals with the developing of imaginative urban policies which will ensure that ICT will play an important role not only in assuring safety for ‘capsularized’ zones, but also in inclusively design the image of everyday cityscapes.

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List of Figures

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