

statements resemble advertising jingles. However, by amplifying and rendering these expressions of insecurity interactive, we endeavour to make it possible for these reflections and reactions to be re-experienced and reinterpreted in the public realm.

Portraits of participants appear via webcam and wireless connection as backgrounds to the statements on large-format screens in the same public space, so participants can see themselves 'watching' through a text-window. Other participant's statements are linked to each personally rendered image, and hence an interpretive space is created, which accommodates the threat of difference.

From Agora Phobia (Digitalis) to StalkShow

In Agora Phobia (digitalis) the audience is invited for an intimate dialogue. StalkShow makes an opposite move: it exposes these intimate dialogues to the outside urban space, and projects them on urban screens. In Agora Phobia (digitalis) people are invited as 'specialists' on 'a safe and unsafe space.' All participants are the authors of the dialogue texts. Their saved dialogues show a way of 'communicating in circles': they show a personal, 'logic' form of communicating, on the subject of 'rejecting communication'. For StalkShow we transformed this circular forms of communication into circular texts. They call these texts 'mind-loops'. As a reference for this format they used RD. Laing's *Knots*, which contains circular texts like: 'Jill is afraid that Jack is afraid. But Jack is afraid that Jill is afraid that Jack is afraid. So Jill is afraid...'.³ These texts result in evermore complex, self-confirming *hallucinatory* structures. Every line in the texts seems logical and begins with 'because', 'so', 'but' and 'that's why'. We selected parts of the circular communication of Agora Phobia (digitalis) and formatted them as they are in *Knots*. In this way we created series of statements that together form a script. At the end of each script the audience is invited to a next script, with the question: 'but do you want to feel safe again?'

A Critical Play Zone

Stalkshow is performed in public spaces where urban screens communicate news items and are used for crowd control and advertising. It aims to re-activate the role of urban screens in social space and hence, audience interaction is vital. As Renee van de Vall⁴ has argued in relation to interactive art, 'what affects you is presented in the reflexive experience of your own actions. [...] By performing the act, you discover something about yourself, the world around you and your relation to and presence in that world'. Through interaction with the installation, notions such as control and manipulation become objects for reflection, and the participant re-personalizes public space.

The urban screen in StalkShow is a critical play zone designed to rethink the dynamics of over-regulated behaviour, mental projection, and the desire to eliminate violence. StalkShow is inspired by Michel Foucault's texts on panopticism and power structures. Foucault described enclosing and excluding disciplinary systems such as family, school, factory and prison.⁵ However, in the contemporary panopticon of ubiquitous digital networks, notions of 'inside' and 'outside' in relations of power are shifting, as are the notions of 'insider' and 'outsider'. In our longing for safety and attempts to control the self and the potential 'other' we increasingly demand total transparency in our public spaces. However, this very fear is self-perpetuating – we are constantly expecting a potentially present, threatening, but (still) invisible 'other'. In this context, Paul Virilio writes about the speed by which 'others' appear in virtual space, as visible or invisible information, creating the paradoxical expectation of the unexpected. This potentially present stalker or terrorist

³ R. D. Laing, *Knots*, London: Penguin, 1970.

⁴ Renee van de Vall, 'The Body As Interface', Netherlands Media Art Institute, December 15, 2006.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1975, New York: Vintage Books, 1995. Trans. Alan Sheridan 1977.

can be everywhere – in physical and virtual space. Virilio describes this social experience of fear and desire we create together as 'Panic; as a social event'.⁶

StalkShow attempts to intervene in this space of by posing the questions: Where is the invisible 'other'? Where is the stalker? Can we use urban screens to project and meet the stalker – as social platforms for dialogue? To understand the projection of the 'invisible other' in our society, we turned to Julia Kristeva's famous essay, 'Powers of Horror'.⁷ Kristeva describes the potentially present, invisible 'other' as a mental projection that is continuously reconstructed as a phobic object by means of hallucinatory projections.

The urban screen in StalkShow is designed to be a home of these of these Kristevan hallucinatory projections. In StalkShow the 'other' is absent, replaced by projections on the urban screen. Here the 'invisible others' in society – prisoners, homeless people, people living illegally in the city – inhabit the screen with their stories, haunting public space like stalkers. However, by interacting with StalkShow, participants can both identify and play with these stalkers. Participants in StalkShow play with all the roles of Kristeva's phobic system. All participants, including the projected 'other' on the urban screen, are invited to play the role of object, voyeur and stalker. Together, these roles render visible the phobic dynamic of the contemporary panopticon.

Conceptual and Technical Development

The technical development of StalkShow commenced in 2003, and has involved intensive screen and user testing in close collaboration with V2_Lab for Unstable Media in Rotterdam⁸ and Foundation DasArts⁹ in Amsterdam. At this time, of course, we did not have ubiquitous wireless technology and there were very few truly interactive urban screens in public space. Indeed, until 2005 we brought our own local wireless networks to each performance, and projected on the walls in a way that the projection seemed to be integrated in the architecture of the (commercially oriented) public spaces. At the same time we 'duplicated' this projection onto the wearable, interactive billboard screen. In this way we made the projected screen on the wall accessible and interactive for the audience.

Fortunately, cities and technology developed within the frame of StalkShow's conceptual development, and in 2006 in Moscow for the first time StalkShow used a semi-live, interactive urban screen. Festival Outvideo invited StalkShow to perform at Sverskaya square, a busy shopping boulevard in Moscow near the Red Square. The Outvideo organisation had made an arrangement with the commercial urban screen company for a timeslot of during one minute, every 7 minutes, across a two-days period. The portraits, and the statements (in Cyrillic) formed a compelling juxtaposition to the repetitive advertisements in which they were embedded.

Interactivity

In order to invite active participation with StalkShow we created a mobile, wearable billboard with a touch screen interface. The mobile nature of the project is extremely important, in that it emphasises the ubiquitous character of the 'stalkers' in the project. The experience of fear and desire for stalkers also inspired the development of a touchscreen in the billboard. 'Touching' creates a specific, physical awareness of presence, in juxtaposition to the absence of the character of the stalker. Through touching the touch screen, the participant (indirectly) touches the urban screen, and hence, 'touches' the stalker.

Our desire for a tactile and mobile interface resulted in a wearable billboard with touchscreen. The body of the host of the wearable billboard plays an important role in this touch-interface. When touching the screen the participant starts a tactile relation with the back

⁶ Paul Virilio, *Art As Far As the Eye Can See*, London: Berg Press, 2007. Trans. Julie Rose.

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez.

⁸ V2_Lab for unstable Media Rotterdam, www.v2.nl.

⁹ <http://www.dasarts.nl>.

of the stranger carrying the billboard, initiating an intimacy with the vulnerable body of a stranger. This generates alertness, attraction or repulsion. In this way the intimacy of the body plays a compelling role in the use of the interface. When touching the screen, participants often ask: 'Am I not hurting him?' This sensitivity to the well-being of the host becomes part of the interface-experience.

To make this body-touch-interface as accessible as possible, at each different site a local is asked to carry the billboard. However, touching, and touching technology, mean different things on different locales and contexts. For example, in Seoul, technology and media is ubiquitous and usually commercially related. So, while the spectacle of two Europeans carrying the billboard through the streets may have distinguished the project from the commercial mediascape, Korean participants seemed much more comfortable interacting with the touchscreen when it was carried by a local.



Fig 2. StalkShow wearable billboard Seoul, Korea.

____ The interaction in StalkShow comes about as soon as a spectator sees someone else participating. The spectator sees the image on the screen, reads the text, sees the performance and comes closer. Some people contemplatively read all texts. Some play collectively with the billboard, watch, read, choose, exchange. Others participate superficially and leave. Some do not touch at all, but stay to talk with the host and watch endlessly to see what's happening. All these reactions together form the audience of Stalkshow.

As a spatial scenario for the audience gazing at each other, StalkShow uses a triangle model. The gaze of the participant of the billboard 1), the projected gaze on the urban screen 2) and the gaze of the surrounding audience 3) cross and haunt each other. This triangle confronts the public space as a 'triangle gaze', generating a playful and confronting, voyeuristic relation. Who is the Stalker? One could argue that the participant of the billboard is stalking a stranger. Or that the participant on the public screen is the stalker. Or that the surrounding audience is the stalker-voyeur. Or, that the carrier of the billboard is stalking the surrounding audience.

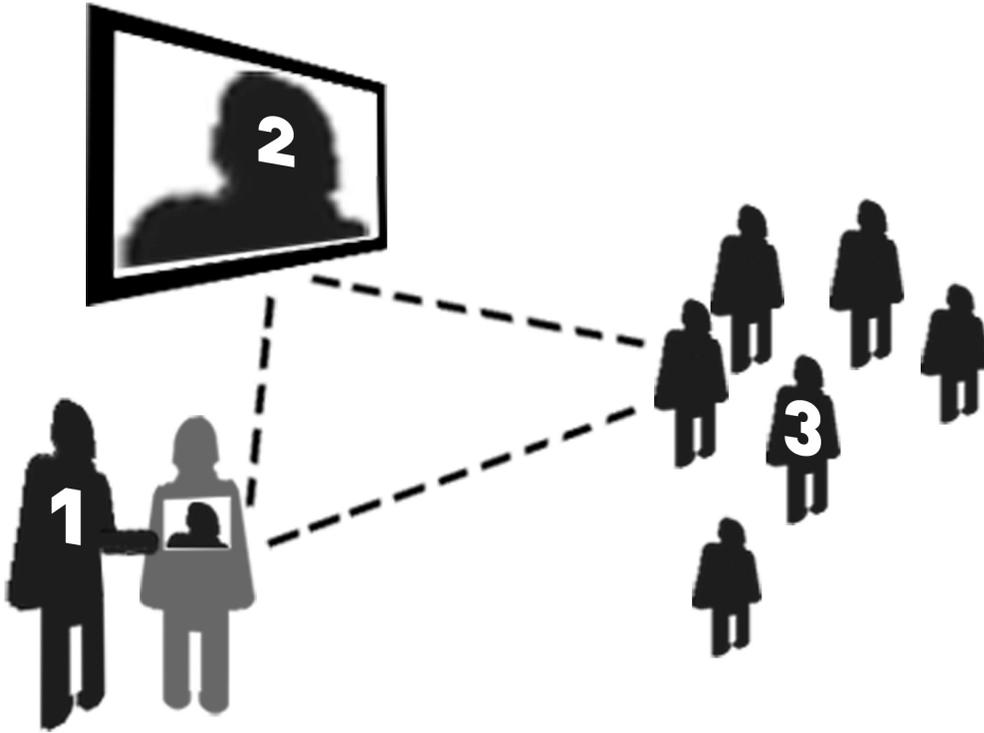


Fig. 3. Diagram for StalkShow Interactive

StalkShow Around the World

In 2007 StalkShow was developed further in Seoul due to the relatively advanced wireless technology in South Korea. In an inspiring collaboration at Art Center NABI with Director Soh Yeong Roh and curator Dooeun Choi, we were able to activate the facade of the highrise building of SK Telecommunication, designed by OMA architects. Its facade incorporates a series of urban screens, so it was possible to animate the skin and interior of the building with live projections.



Fig 4 and 5. SK building with StalkShow portraits, Art Center NABI, Seoul Korea 2007.



The cultural specificity of each public space where StalkShow takes place determines the reception of the project and the particular codes of the audience participation and interaction. Over the years we have presented the project in a number of different locales that have generated very different responses. In Helsinki for example StalkShow met two audiences. One the one hand the

international audience that had come for ISEA04 were concerned with the socio-technological and media-theoretical context. On the other hand, local Helsinki inhabitants reacted in very emotional ways to the installation, and conversations were often related to the social-psychological tensions around notions of alienation and desire anchored in the texts and the StalkShow personas.

In 2005 Stalkshow was shown in Beijing on video in a museum context because of a prohibition on the display of critical art in public space. Consequently, most of the conversations generated by the screening concerned censorship and what it is about the content of StalkShows' texts that might mean that they were not permitted to be shown in public. These conversations in turn led to reflections concerning conceptions of individuality in China, on insiders and outsiders, and the ways in which social structures are changing in China due to the rapid transformation of Chinese cities. It is instructive to reflect, however, that as recently as 2003 when StalkShow was to be screened at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, negotiations faltered in the context of the events of 9-11. Management attitude was that, 'StalkShow deals with being unsafe. Schiphol Airport is not unsafe'. Other art works, such as Jenny Holzer's text-based projections, were also cancelled.

StalkShow was received very differently in Hong Kong, where it was treated more like a kind of social game, with large numbers of people playing collectively. Closely pressed to one another, audiences followed the participant in front of the touch screen. They even added another media layer, making pictures of each other with their mobile phones, while using the StalkShow and while appearing as a portrait on the urban screen. Hong Kong Arts Center director-curator Conny Lam told us that in HongKong there is no such thing as a public space because urban space is so pervasively privatized. Subsequently Hong Kong Island inhabitants do not experience danger in the same way as in Europe, where public space is relatively more democratised. Hence, StalkShow became in this context a catalyst for reflection on Added to this, Hong Kong inhabitants share a rather small space, making people more concerned with protecting a small physical space to themselves, than exploring the space around them. Here Lam invited StalkShow as a social experiment for personal physical space – in relation to public exposure on the urban screen of StalkShow.

StalkShow's most recent presentation was at Urban Screens 08 at Federation Square in Melbourne Australia, on a screen of 65 square meters, which displays largely non-commercial cultural content. Because Federation Square occupies a central and dynamic position in Melbourne it offers the potential for artists to deepen the social meaning of urban space and explore the possibilities of the new networked socio-spatial dimensions of public space.



Fig. 6 Images from the StalkShows database containing audiences portraits with texts scripts



Fig. 7 Stalkshow at Urban Screens 08, at Federation Square Melbourne.

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