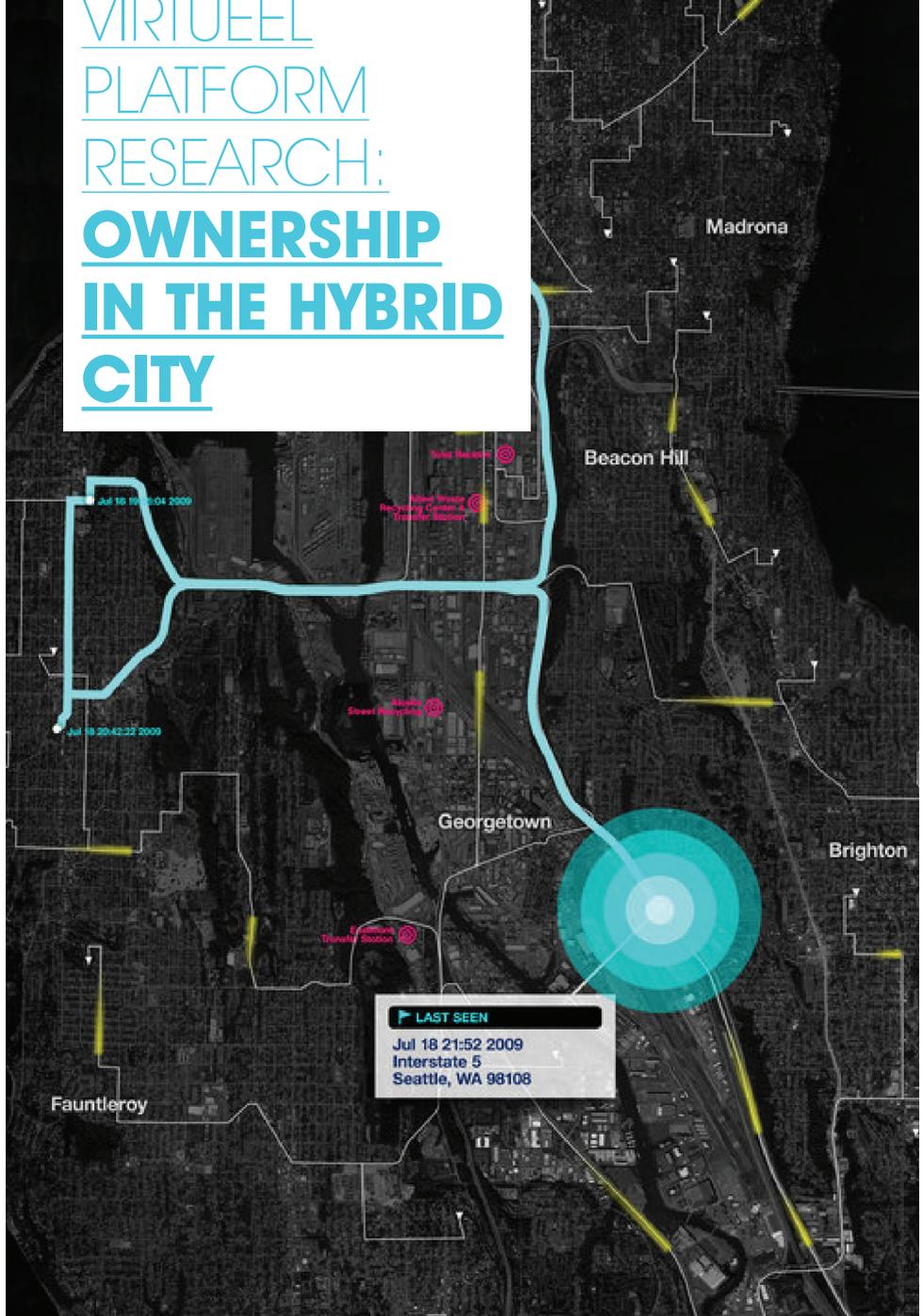


VIRUEEL PLATFORM RESEARCH: **OWNERSHIP IN THE HYBRID CITY**



Michiel de Lange & Martijn de Waal
Commissioned by Virtueel Platform

virtueel_
platform

2012
Virtueel Platform



FOREWORD

This study explores the concept of ownership as a design approach for the contemporary city. Digital media technologies are becoming increasingly influential in daily urban life. How can we implement these technologies in such a way that they make and maintain the city as a liveable and vibrant environment? How can we best design urban areas where citizens feel at home, feel empowered to engage with shared issues and interests, and feel a sense of 'ownership' in these issues? In what ways can the e-culture sector contribute to bolstering a sense of ownership in urban society?

Virtueel Platform is the sector body for e-culture in the Netherlands. It commissioned mobile media and urban design experts Michiel de Lange and Martijn de Waal from The Mobile City to conduct research into this field. Virtueel Platform's goal is to create a theoretical framework for a wide range of projects and developments in Dutch cities, concentrating primarily on work by artists or researchers in the area of digital culture. Virtueel Platform organised the Stad_Spel_Data_experts meeting that took place on 27 May 2011. It focused on the question of how new media and the rapidly expanding availability of data in the city can stimulate city dwellers to become more involved in their immediate living environment, and it was in this context that The Mobile City presented its research. Virtueel Platform will continue to develop the theme of ownership in the coming period. The results of the study are published here along with a selection of projects from the Netherlands and abroad that serve as practical examples. ←

2.2 FACE YOUR WORLD: CO-CREATION IN URBAN DESIGN

Face Your World is a long-term project by the artist Jeanne van Heeswijk in collaboration with architect Dennis Kaspori (<http://www.faceyourworld.nl>). It involves young people and members of the local community taking on the role of urban designer by participating in an artwork that brings together town planning, computer technology and creative linking. The first phase of the project started in 2002 in the U.S. town of Columbus, Ohio, where children from deprived neighbourhoods were taken on a bus tour of various downtown districts. Using computers and digital cameras, they were able to upload their own material to a 3D computer environment called the Interactor. Here, they could work together with other users and negotiate about the design of their own living environment. The results were displayed on screens in the public space – at bus stops.²⁸ The second version of the project took place in Amsterdam in 2005 and in Rotterdam in 2006. In Amsterdam, Van Heeswijk and Kaspori created the Face Your World Stedelijklab (Urban Lab), a practical educational model focusing on enabling primarily lower-stream secondary school (VMBO) students to participate in the Staalman Park urban regeneration project taking place in the Slotervaart district. The project focused on a 13,500m² park planned for the heart of the Staalman Square area. Van Heeswijk and Kaspori set up camp in a disused school building near the planned location and transformed it into a city laboratory where local residents, interested parties and experts collaborated for six months on an alternative proposal for the design of the park. They presented their plan to the local authority, which accepted it with only minor modifications. The project brought together a variety of urban issues including urban regeneration, practical education, community participation and art in public space.²⁹ The park was officially opened on 6 July 2011.

HELP@DELOOTLONDON.CO.UK
CITY OF LONDON

delootlondon.co.uk

Following the riots in London in the summer of 2011, a number of people took the initiative of setting up a site where citizens could upload their stories about specific shops that had been looted. Local residents were encouraged to shop in these stores to provide them with moral and practical support and to breathe life back into the area, or as they put it: 'Now it's our turn to deloot them: by spending our money there and helping our neighbourhood businesses get back on their feet'.

In what ways are new media technologies used?

The design software used is called the Interactor. This multi-user environment represents the urban living environment and allows users to add and adapt elements such as photographs. It differs from other simu-

28] See <http://www.jeannetworks.net/> > projects > Face Your World, 2002.

29] See <http://www.faceyourworld.nl/slotervaart.php>.

lated environments such as SimCity in that there is a direct relationship with the user's own living environment. Van Heeswijk explains that the Interactor had to be sophisticated because people from deprived areas would not be prepared to work with clunky software. The project in Amsterdam differed from the one in Ohio, where learning to work with new technology formed part of the goal, and the Interactor was used primarily as a tool. The second version was more complex, including as it did an integrated chat function to support collaboration. The first version of the software was designed with the help of V2_ in Rotterdam; the second version was made by IJsfontein and Blixem Media with the support of the Foundation for Art and Public Domain (SKOR).

What forms of organisation and approach are being used?

The project ran for six months, four hours a day, with two meetings each week per group' a total of 60 young people participated. It started with a preset curriculum exploring what design entails. As the project progressed, the participants contributed to the form of the curriculum. Van Heeswijk explains that when they realised that the project was actually going to be carried out, the young people started to bring along family members and other local people to discuss the future of their neighbourhood. She notes that many commissioning organisations prefer tight planning, with clear steps marked by the design proposal, the final design, implementation and completion. This impacts negatively on the playful component and limits the possibility for iterative learning. Some describe Van Heeswijk as an 'urban curator', but she herself would no longer use this term, characterising her role not as director but as co-participant.

Which underlying concept of ownership does this convey?

Van Heeswijk believes that cities need inclusive forms of organisation. She is particularly interested in what she describes as proto-urban conditions – the fabric of the city. The city is a field of interactions and relationships between physical space and the emotional experiences of its inhabitants, argues Van Heeswijk. Her projects examine those relationships and seek out



Bomenkap.nl is an initiative set up by Milieucentrum Amsterdam (Amsterdam Environment Centre) to inform citizens of plans to cut down trees in the city. Local residents can submit their e-mail address to receive messages when trees in their local area have been nominated for felling, enabling them to take action to protect the local green environment if desired. The site, which was developed by Apps for Amsterdam, also provides information about tree-felling permits and public consultation procedures (see also apps-foramsterdam.nl).

how they can best be set in motion. In this context, media art is there to literally give oneself a visible presence in the public domain and thus gain traction on everyday reality. Van Heeswijk denounces the 'cleansing' of the city, a process whereby mono-functional and purely utilitarian spaces are created under the pretext of improving security and aesthetics. Van Heeswijk counteracts this ideal of a simplified frictionless city by attempting to create moments of engagement through getting people to contemplate participating. She believes that making the public space accessible and transparent to the citizen enables the citizen to form it and place him or herself within it and in relation to it. In this project, there are again two forms of actorship: engagement as a co-designer in one's own physical environment, and visualisation of one's physical environment and place within it, thereby transforming oneself from a passive consumer in our mediated world into an active producer.

What can we learn from this?

Around 600 people participated in the Slotervaart Face Your World Stedelijkklub and over 3000 people attended various related events. Van Heeswijk stresses, however, that in her opinion the success of a project such as this cannot be quantified using such statistics. She believes it is all about contributing to society through a long-term involvement in the public domain, and that media art should more frequently engage with public space. It was of crucial importance to Face Your World that the makers physically 'set up camp' in the area and built up a long-term relationship with local people within the framework of the common issue.

2.3 IMPROVE THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: INVOLVING NEW AUDIENCES IN THE COMMUNITY

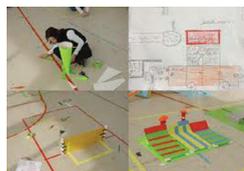
Improve the Neighbourhood (Verbeterdebuurt, www.verbeterdebuurt.nl) is a residents' platform that is intended to draw the local council's attention to problems in their area and to suggest improvements. Improve the Neighbourhood makes a distinction between the reporting of existing problems ('public space reports' in municipal terminology) and suggestions for improvement. After the person reporting the problem has been sent an e-mail verification, →



BaasopZuid.nl
(Boss of the South)
is an online game in which players take administrative decisions relating to the renovation of suburban South Rotterdam. Should they renovate, or build regular apartment blocks or detached residences? Players have a limited budget, so money used for creating new car parks is no longer available for youth facilities, for example. In this way, the players gain an understanding of the complex issues that have to be considered in the management of their neighbourhood. They also have an opportunity to pass on suggestions for improvements to the local authority.



↑ Face Your World is a project by
Jeanne van Heeswijk and Dennis Kaspori.
<http://www.faceyourworld.nl>



↑ Face Your World, 2005, photy by: Dennis Kaspori

↑ Young people create a new urban planning design for the future Staalman Park. Photo: IJsfontein.



↑ Commissioned by Slotervaart district council and Alliantie housing corporation, Face Your World organised this art project together with residents of Amsterdam's Slotervaart district, young people from Streetwise and De Blaauwe Olifant. The artist Florentijn Hofman designed the statue.