knowbotiq

merely there, obscure

opaque participation under post-medial conditions[1]

In modern society, communicative transparency and visibility, which used to stand for democratic openness, are increasingly becoming conditions for being technically controlled and administratively available. Almost unnoticed, spaces for transparent action and social friction are being absorbed into the surface worlds of technically controlled processes.

In the context of these spatial appropriations, knowbotiq is working on performative test cases in which a culture of the highly conspicuous and eventful is translated into an ambivalent, counter-flowing interplay of manifestation and vanishing, into a temporary withdrawal into the opaque. These are practices, things and moments of incalculability, of the non-predictable, for which knowbotiq has been inventing/finding experimental situations for some time now.[2]

In several works in recent years, knowbotiq has initiated unannounced events beyond traditional exhibition spaces, or exposed things in daily life, e.g. a technologically "invisible" boat (be prepared! tiger!), a non-deliverable truck delivery (NEWBORN, undeliverable) or a camouflage suit left in different urban situations (MacGhillie). No interventions were staged; instead, things were left testing *on their own* in everyday situations. There was no audience in the classical sense.[3] The test cases activated casual passers-by through opaque, undecodable signs and materialities.

knowbotiq is designing an artistic practice that negotiates the political space of the public domain with the obscure and the cybernetically impalpable.

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[1] The post-medial condition does not reflect the medium itself (media specificity), but the factors contributing to its individuation: discourse, institutions, physical support structures and their technological implications – that is, verbal and non-verbal elements, a machine-like framework. See also: Rosalind Krauss on differential media specificity in "Sinn und Sinnlichkeit" (1973). In *Minimal Art. Eine kritische Retrospektive,* ed. Gregor Stemmrich. Dresden 1998.

[2] Isabell Lorey, Roberto Nigro and Gerald Raunig. *Inventionen 1*. Zurich, Berlin: Diaphanes 2011.
Note by knowbotiq: Whereas the intervention interrupts existing force fields of the societal and modifies them within the given context, and thus, by extension, reaffirms them, an invention concentrates the chances of finding a different (life) form.

[3] Erika Fischer-Lichte. *Kunst der Aufführung, Aufführung der Kunst*. Berlin 2004, p. 22.

Test case 1

MacGhillie - Just a Void enabled people to visit urban places with a publicly deposited freely available camouflage suit. The wearer of this garment became the "figure" of MacGhillie, who was conspicuous neither as an individual nor as a person. The 'Ghillie Suit', a camouflage suit from the 19th century, was originally invented for hunting and later deployed in the First World War. It concealed the person inside it while making the figure of MacGhillie himself hyperpresent. Through its opacity, the camouflage suit that no longer camouflaged created a conspicuous anonymisation. The conspicuousness of "figures without qualities" such as MacGhillie, Bloom, or Bartleby takes on an ambivalent urban character, tilting indecisively between affirmation of the spectacular, visual randomness, neutralisation and withdrawal.

Test case 2

The Blackbenz Race, a nocturnal car race right through the Kosovan-European migration area does not seem to have started to this day — did it remain a *non-event*? knowbotiq originally wanted to transform the transfer of a group of cars right through the Balkans into a medial semi-fiction of a race, and accordingly translated the fiction of the Blackbenz Race into concrete local test cases that investigated the possible conditions for the race at specific places: at a Hand Car Wash in London, in front of the UNMIK office in Pristina, in the Schiphol-Den Haag corridor on the way to the UN Yugoslavia Tribunal, at a burn-out party in front of the football stadium in Pristina and at a glaciological station in the Swiss Alps. In these test cases disguised as film sets, the borders oscillated between unpredictable encounters, eluding artistic staging, pseudo-events and political fictions — spreading a rumour about irregular behaviour (illegal motor racing), and reorganizing the social pattern in such a way that it could also be used by those who do not have the correct (Schengen) documents created free spaces at the different locations for generating more than one kind of narrative.[4]

The test cases of social immersion and disappearance allow existing ways of behaviour to be overwritten with obscure forms of behaviour (becoming MacGhillie, the semi-

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[4] knowbotiq has investigated these forms of intangible presence in the mix of lived everyday reality, physical transport systems and electronic networks und means of communication under the heading of translocal practice: research project with Felix Stalder at the Institut für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich: *Translokale Praktiken*, *Künstlerische Praktiken in vernetzten Räumen*, 2009.

fictitious nocturnal race). Existing social, cultural codes and grammars (the illegal race, the car burnout parties), legalistic proscriptions (the ban on wearing face coverings), protocols (security dispositifs of the KFOR troops in Pristina), narratives (black limousines in the context of migration) and ordinances (the requirement to have a face in public space), can be temporarily abandoned in these artistically initiated public situations. Due to the opacity of the situation, the participants enter testing beside the primary event and take an active part in singular sub-events with extended, different possibilities of perception and action. The persons "behind" the MacGhillies deposited their own clothing in public lockers, fast food stalls, boats and back yards. They often spent days going around disguised as MacGhillie, extremely fragile and vulnerable in the mere "shell" of their own perception and physicality: exploring new spaces in the city, between the normed perception patterns, sometimes going unhindered through checks at concerts and museums, ignored at bar counters, sometimes wanting not to be seen by other passers-by, now and then evoking animalistic fear, moving unhindered between the security personnel in a bank, and then again, provoking a police operation at the airport in the wake of their action.

— Terminology
In the following second part we intend to examine the artistic experiences from these test cases as experimental development of terms, "groping blindly" in the sense meant by Heiner Müller ("As long as a force is blind it is a force. The moment it has a program, a perspective, it can be integrated and belongs").[5]

In the context of these test cases, performativity does not mean the kind of practices of an art of the public domain that merely amounts to the appropriation, repetition and performance of medial sign systems and meanings. Rather, we are concerned with the art which infiltrates and extends semiotically overcoded urban space by means of opaque embodiments, materialities and presences that are to be invented.

opaquely embodied

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[5] Heiner Müller. *Schriften, Werke 8*. Frankfurt a. M. 2005, p. 245.

The opaque can be designed in relation to its materiality and mediality:

— as non-transparent, blocking the passage of energy or light fluxes and

— as obscure, difficult to understand and decode.

The opaque potentially conceals that which withdraws from systematic thought. What opens up is unrecognizable, a withdrawal from the cybernetic theorem of visibility that aspires to record social cohabitation continuously, to analyse, predict and thus completely exclude all its risks through prognoses. This theory goes together with a positivist faith in a kind of knowledge production based on computability, calculation, and individualisation. "By conceiving mental defects and social pathologies as information, cybernetics establishes a new politics of the subject based on communication and on transparency for itself and for others."[6]

unpredictably blending

Perhaps the important thing will be to create empty interstices of non-communication, disturbing interruptions, to escape control.[7]

Medial interruptions and the absence of events and identities are not laid down in the dominant ideas of urbanity. When the pressures towards cybernetic visibility are infiltrated, which form of offside, beside the event, can become virulent through artistic practice?

All the participants of a cybernetically conceived society are compelled, in the sense of the current Marlboro command, "Don't be a maybe", to communicate continuously and thereby constantly to differentiate themselves individually. The intention is to reduce insecurity and incalculability in the social structure, strengthened by the actors' extended degree of medial freedom, and to increase their identifiableness and visibility. "Cybernetics is the project of a new creation of the world through the infinite mutual reaction of these two moments — separating representation, and binding communication again. The first deadens life, the second imitates it."[8]

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[6] Tiqqun. *Kybernetik und Revolte*. Zurich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2007.

[7] Gilles Deleuze. "Kontrolle und Werden." In *Unterhandlungen 1972–1990,* p. 252.

[8] Tiqqun. *Kybernetik und Revolte*. Zurich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2007.

In medially codified spaces people tend always to be visible — on CCTV monitors, on radar scanners, in the search engine filter, in the matrix of the RFID receiver. Public, private and social media spaces converge topologically, but clandestine[9] interstices between these hybrid spatial constructions are also increasing. We can activate the virtuality of the space between: "as a tear without anything that tears, as a crack without anything that cracks, as a break without anything stopping and starting again, as a deviation without anything deviating…"[10]

something is happening clandestinely that is not (yet) a situation

The challenge of becoming imperceptible through opaque, obscure presences demands a delicate, inconspicuous link between that which exists as unseen and that which is still blind to it.[11] Such a link in the act of becoming imperceptible, however, also invokes a paradox: One must visibly draw attention to what is invisible in order to make the invisible effective. In this sense, an artistic gesture can draw an observer's attention to what he or she does not see.

between the unseen and the still blind

Possible forms of withdrawal from the knowable situation are outlined in the artistic situations activated by knowbotiq:

knowbotiq sees the withdrawal as only apparent inactivity, only an apparent non-event. Withdrawing is an active sharing and shifting of the situation and its existing grammars. The withdrawal opens options, e.g. forms of decline, of submerging, of "going blind", and thus possibilities of making new connections between other qualities and hitherto contradictory forces in the situation, as well as together with other actors and things. In this tactical sense, participation is realized as a sharing of oneself that makes people sensitive to the different qualities of the participants and keeps these differences open.

knowbotiq sees the test cases as sensitizing people to what is not knowable without wanting to transfer this into mechanisms of knowledge production. The field of the non-

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[9] Michèle Sinapi. "The displacements of the shadow line." *Social Science Information* 2008.
[10] Bernhard Waldenfels. *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*. Frankfurt a. M. 2002, p. 174.
[11] Fuller, Matthew. "The Cat seemed to think there was enough of it now in sight." In *Opaque Presence, knowbotic research,* ed. Andreas Broeckmann. Zurich: Diaphanes, 2011.

knowable[12] is also formed inside the cybernetic apparatus of surveillance, control and prognosis: the more the records of analysis and profile formation, and the claim of being able to know everything become concentrated and smoothed out, the more what can be calculated at any time will become unpredictable, and the more the indistinguishable, impalpable, and irrepressible will become present alongside this concentration.

Non-knowable is not a partitioning/an inclusion of the existing, but that which still remains when all the analysis records have been applied:

diffused
completely visible and completely invisible at the same time
submerged in
part of society
that
which cannot be appropriated
merely there, obscure

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[12] Engbersen, G. "The Unknown City." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology 40*, 1995/6.