

Broadcasting Text Outdoors

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Broadcasting text outdoors

Focusing on individual text broadcasting outdoors, the main subject of this project is inspired by a project called “Bikes Against Bush”¹. The artist describes the project with this article:

“Bikes against Bush is an interactive protest/performance occurring simultaneously online and on the streets of NYC during the Republican National Convention. Using a wireless Internet enabled bicycle outfitted with a custom-designed printing device, the Bikes Against Bush bicycle can print text messages sent from web users directly onto the streets of Manhattan in water-soluble chalk”
With this example I will try to examine the creative text broadcastings outdoors and the networks we are using to broadcast informations.

Paranoiac Networks

As Marshall McLuhan² defines in his “The Gutenberg Galaxy book: The Making of Typographic Man” book, people are living in a Global Village which is the metaphor for the networks we are using to receive and broadcast information like internet. The networks are build by lots of information channels. These channels create a diagram of interests by the demands of people which is kept as a database. The critical point is, these databases contain personal informations which can be mapped by the administrators. This mapping structure can create a secondary database which eliminates the privacy of the people by the possibility of being sold to the companies and the governments.

As McLuhan writes about the electronic age we are living now:

“People of literary and critical bias the shrill of de Chardin as disconcerting as his uncritical enthusiasm for the cosmic membrane that has been snapped round the globe by the electric dilation of our various senses. The externalization of our senses creates what de Chardin calls the “noosphere” or a technological brain for the world. Instead of tending towards a vast Alexandrian library the world has become a computer, an electronic brain, exactly as an infantile piece of sciencee cosmic membrane that has been snapped round fiction. And as our senses have gone outside us, Big Brother goes inside. So, unless aware of this dynamic, we shall at once move into a phase of panic terrors, exactly befitting a small world of tribal drums, total interdependence, and superimposed co-existence. Terror is the normal state of any oral society, for in it everything affects everything all the time. In our long striving to recover for the Western world a unity of sensibility and of thought and feeling we have no more been prepared to accept the tribal consequences of such unity than we were ready for the fragmentation of the human psyche by print culture.”

As McLuhan describes the Electronic age as a part of four epochs of history, The Electronic age is a move from individualism and fragmentation to a collective identity, with a “tribal base” Which collective identity means a centralized information system behind the computer system which is similar to the networks like facebook and internet shopping websites.

Paranoiac users

The connection between the danger of living the real 1984 story of George Orwell³ becomes more and more obvious each day. The news about the webusers who are being arrested by the police because of the websites they are surfing and the comments they write, creates a new generation of paranoiac users. They started to get afraid of their own conversations which they speak with a passionate in everyday life.

1. Bikes against Bush project, (2004-2007), <http://www.bikesagainstbush.com/blog/>.

2. Marshall McLuhan (1949): Gutenberg Galaxy: London. p.32

3. George Orwell (2004), (25 June 1903 – 21 January 1950), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Orwell.

As George Orwell writes in his “Nineteen Eighty-Four“ book:

“The thing that he was about to do was to open a diary. This was not illegal (nothing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws), but if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced-labour camp. Winston fitted a nib into the penholder and sucked it to get the grease off. The pen was an archaic instrument, seldom used even for signatures, and he had procured one, furtively and with some difficulty, simply because of a feeling that the beautiful creamy paper deserved to be written on with a real nib instead of being scratched with an ink-pencil. Actually he was not used to writing by hand. Apart from very short notes, it was usual to dictate everything into the speak-write which was of course impossible for his present purpose. He dipped the pen into the ink and then faltered for just a second. A tremor had gone through his bowels. To mark the paper was the decisive act. In small clumsy letters he wrote...”⁴

The scenario of Nineteen Eighty-Four takes place in a totalitarian country named Oceanian. (the new form of England) The party in Oceanian uses propaganda and instructions to control the people with a machine called telescreen, like an interactive television which is everywhere even in the houses. With these machines they can hear people and collect information to judge people which makes it impossible to share political thoughts and knowledge among the people. The main character Winston Smith works for the government as a civil servant who is responsible for the usage of memory hole. The memory hole is a collecting system, works as a trash can which destroys all the information for the good of the politics of the party.

The Memory hole ⁵ and the e-books

The fictional information management system called Memory Hole, is gathering all the information from separate difficult mediums like sound, video and handwritings. These mediums can be classified between the Gutenberg galaxy age and the electronic age as McLuhan calls it. Which means the informations are mostly shared through press and minimal electronic machines with a television. Compared to the mediums people were using before, we are at the age of mind hole technologies. We are using electronic machines which is easy to write and delete. People are using digital medium types like sound image and video because it is easy to edit.

The e-books are the new kind of digital book formats. E-books are using e-book readers with a duo-tone screen type to mimic the contrast of the letters and paper of the books. The companies like Amazon are adding some features like 3g ⁵ and wireless to the e-book readers to give the flexibility to buy books without the need of a computer. So Amazon and other online e-book stores know who are interested in which books and because they are trying to take over the paper with the new screen technologies, they are able to publish the new books without a paper print out. Digitalizing the books is a really dangerous and critical point. Ebooks are giving information of people’s world view and because they can be edited easily, it is possible to apply censor to the ebooks. After a time if it is not good for the goods of the companies and governments, it will be easy to delete a book from the servers without an effort. It is the same thing with burning a specific book at all the bookstores at the same time.

Technically this paranoid essay subject of burning all the books is not possible if somebody prints them but also it can be possible because of the synchronisation and encryption systems. There is a big similarity between playstation gaming system and the ebook readers. As the speed of the connections increases, it becomes possible to send big packages of encrypted game files through

4. George Orwell (1949): Nineteen Eighty-four: London. p.6

internet. Sony Playstation built an online game store which is open only to the owners of the playstation in 2006. With this store if a client wants to buy a game from the store, he can buy it and store it in his playstation3 machine. If the user wants to play a game, the user has to synchronize and update his machine to play the game. If the machine is not synchronized, it is not possible to play the game. Which means it is very easy to prevent the client from playing the game just with a restriction because the machine has to be online to play the game. If the game company doesn't want people to play some games, it can easily be done with adding some protocols to the new update. If we take the play station 3 as an example, it was relased in 2006 and it is still not hacked officially. Also the new play station portable "GO" version has no UMD drive on i,t which means people have to buy the games through internet. The near future prediction for the play station portable can be to remove the hardcover games from the stores.

Broadcasting digital texts outdoors

As Mcluhans separates the history with four epochs. The first age is the Oral tribe culture which the informations are being shared among the people with poems, songs, stories without writing them. The second level is the Manuscript culture where people starts to read and write. The third level is the Gutenberg culture where the sharing starts with the printing techniques. The fourth level is the electronic age culture which people can share information with electronic machines.



Photo 1.1
Joshua Kinberg

If we focus on decentralizing the books, it is possible to formulize these four epochs to create a new motivation to read them. If we take the digital text medium of the electronic age and combine it with the hardcover culture of Manuscript, it is possible to see the similarity of streetart which is using the underground culture like the oral tribe culture and pass the information with the tools of manuscript and electronic age without a centralized network.

Street art : Poetric Terrorism by Hakim Bey

“Go naked for a sign.

Organize a strike in your school or workplace on the grounds that it does not satisfy your need for indolence & spiritual beauty.

Graffiti-art loaned some grace to ugly subways & rigid public monuments--PT- art can also be created for public places: poems scrawled in courthouse lavatories, small fetishes abandoned in parks & restaurants, xerox-art under windshield-wipers of parked cars, Big Character Slogans pasted on playground walls, anonymous letters mailed to random or chosen recipients (mail fraud), pirate radio transmissions, wet cement...

Dress up. Leave a false name. Be legendary. The best PT is against the law, but don't get caught. Art as crime; crime as art.”⁵

There are several examples from different street artists and activists who are using street art and activism as a different point of view to this situation .

The first example is the project of Joshua Kinberg who graduated from Parsons School of Design and invented the chalk writer bike which was writing e-mails from web users, on the sidewalks. The story of the project is really interesting and inspiring with all the happenings and the reactions.

The interview of Joshua Kinberg with Ron Reagan at msnbc.com :

“I'm now sitting in the MSNBC trailer at Herald Sq., NYC, with Ron Reagan and Joe Trippi after spending 24 hours in the “Tombs” with several hundred Critical Mass cyclists, who were arrested the night before.

Joshua Kinberg: I was arrested while Ron was interviewing me about my invention— a bicycle that prints text messages on the street in water-soluble chalk. While we were conducting the interview, the police stopped me and asked for my ID. After I produced identification, the police waited for their sergeant to arrive before placing me under arrest without stating the charge. I was doing nothing more than describing my invention to the media and explaining my disagreements with the Bush administration.

When I arrived in the Tombs, I was placed in a cell with around 30 other cyclists. They had spent the previous night in a location they were affectionately calling “Lil' Gitmo,” a makeshift detention center on the West Side piers converted from a former bus depot. Lil' Gitmo had cells sectioned off with chain link fence and razor wire, and a floor covered in motor oil, transmission fluid, and other toxic chemicals. The cyclists detained there were forced to sleep on this hazardous floor wearing nothing more than bicycling shorts and t-shirts. Consequently, several developed serious skin rashes the following day. After 36 hours most of the cyclists had been released with a pending court date. Several had been arrested when specifically following police directions to exit the peaceful bike ride. Others had not been part of Critical Mass, but had simply been on the streets with a bicycle at the wrong time.

I was released after 24 hours in detention with a court date set for Friday. Unfortunately, all my equipment— bicycle, laptop, cell phone, and custom designed electronics— has been confiscated. Thus, the Bikes Against Bush performance, where I would accept and print messages sent from web users, is likely to be cancelled. A volunteer lawyer from the National Lawyers Guild is confident that my case will be dismissed on grounds of the First Amendment, but we will have to wait

5.Hakim Bey, Poetric Terrorism , http://www.woostercollective.com/2004/01/what_the_hell_should_we_call_i.html

until Friday to see. A video of the arrest recorded and edited by Yury Gitman has been posted online (BitTorrent), and the story of my arrest has already been blogged on SlashDot, BoingBoing, Kottke, and JuliaSet. (What's a BitTorrent?)”⁶

There are two problems with broadcasting text messages on the streets. The first problem is the police. It is illegal to write or broadcast anything on the streets without a permission. This is a big problem because this situation makes it impossible to perform anything on the streets. The second problem is writing the text parallel to the sidewalk direction which makes it also hard to read the text. The inspiring and intelligent approach of this project is broadcasting other peoples thoughts which are being sent from the web users. So this solution makes it impossible to be evicted with the main political subject of the project. An other interesting thing about this project is Kinbergs situation with the police. Because he was kept in the same place with the Critical Mass cyclists who were bicycling to protest the governments politics about global warming. An other weird thing was about the bomb experts because they were complementing on the mechanism of the machine he invented.



Photo 1.2
GraffitiWriter

The second example is the graffiti writer from the institute for applied autonomy.

“GraffitiWriter is a tele-operated field programable robot which employs a custom built array of spray cans to write linear text messages on the ground at a rate of 15 kilometers per hour. The printing process is similar to that of a dot matrix printer. GraffitiWriter can be deployed in any highly controlled space or public event from a remote location.

The advent of next generation military/police technologies for urban use has made engaging in active social insurgency an increasingly risky venture. Real-time video surveillance systems ⁸, net-

6. The interview of Joshua Kinberg with Ron Reagan, (2004), <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5850151/?#040829e>

7. Kanade, Collins and Lipton. “Advances in Cooperative Multi-Sensor Video Surveillance”. Robotics Institute, Carnegie Mellon University, 1998.

8. US Army Research Laboratories, “Pandora: A Robotic System for Operations in Urban Environments - Final Design Document”, official contract report submission, March 1998.

worked databases, urban infiltration robots ⁹, and a flurry of “nonviolent” restraint and subjugation technologies threaten to have a chilling effect on traditional methods of cultural resistance, particularly the creation and dissemination of subversive texts. The Robotic GraffitiWriter (GW) was developed in response to the need for a high speed, teleoperated, portable platform that operates beyond the line of sight (BLOS) to disseminate unsanctioned content in the dynamic adversarial urban environment. In repeated testing, this system has proven its effectiveness on such high risk/high profile targets as the U.S. Capital Building as well as numerous urban commercial and municipal spaces in the US and abroad.

Following its first full year of active service, an in-depth technological assessment was performed on GraffitiWriter. During this time several significant upgrades were made to GraffitiWriter including a full mechanical and electronic sub-system overhaul. With these improvements, GW now meets the requirements of strategic transportability, operating with extreme confidence in standard threat scenarios including public parks, federal buildings, and shopping malls.”

This is a very clever solution because they don't have to face with police officers. The device is fast and not traceable, the only thing is if somebody catches the machine it will be a big loss of equipment. The institute for applied autonomy is usually inventing machines for activists. They have other inventions like a big van which is capable of writing big letters on the roads. A cell-phone which is capable of sending text messages to a big mass of people.



Photo 1.1
Joshua Kinberg:

9. GraffitiWriter, (1998), <http://www.appliedautonomy.com/gw.html>

The third example is “National Bestseller” from Publicadcampaign.com by NYghost: “I’m always happy to see people noticing PublicAdCampaign work as it can often be overlooked by people trying to ignore the overwhelming amount of advertising they are forced to look at every day. It seems as if the National Bestseller Campaign has been catching peoples eye recently, randomly appearing on The Street Spot, Wooster Collective, and 12oz Prophet. Because of this I wanted to give everyone a quick heads up. I have recently been evicted along with the rest of my building and am in a state of limbo for the next month or two. As of now 30 books have made their way to the streets with many more to follow. The eviction doesn’t mean I will be stop this project, it just means things might happen a bit slower. For this I apologize.”¹⁰

The National Best seller project takes place in New York. NY ghost builds collages out of best seller books and replaces them with phone booth billboards. I find the project really successful because it is hiding in front of the advertisements and it is keeps people minds in a struggle between an artwork and an advertisement.



Photo 1.1
Joshua Kinberg:

Fence Font by Autobahn:

This project focuses on fences to write on them. Autobahn uses a pixelated font type to match the mesh structure of the fences. And the fonts create a feeling of flying writings on the fences which is very contrast and easy to read.

The conclusion

People are limited with the mediums to communicate, write, and store their informations which are under centralized control systems. So broadcasting individual texts on the streets are important and it is possible with creative solutions to increase the motivation and the interest of the society to their individuality and freedom. In the end mixing the oral culture with manuscript culture to build a sub culture to broadcast text on the streets without the need of a secondary protocol is important because the rituals of using the centralized medias are dangerous and it has to be stopped with other rituals.

10.National Best Seller, (2009), <http://www.publicadcampaign.com/labels/National%20Bestseller.html>

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