easyCity

Neoliberal Urbanism and Spectacle

Tone Huse
Master Thesis in Human Geography
Institute of Sociology and Human Geography
University of Oslo
2007
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Vincent de Jong for introducing me to the intricacy of the easyCity action, and for taking the time to answer my questions along my exploration of the case. I also want to thank Robin van t’ Haar for his surprising, and unique, contribution to my investigations of the easyCity action. Rozalinda Borcila, the insights you have shared with me have been a crucial reminder of my own privileged position – your reflections, I hope, also became a marker in what I have written. Also, I would like to thank others that somehow made my fieldwork possible, and influenced my ‘learning’ of activism and culture jamming. Of these I would especially like to thank Nina Haukeland for introducing me to the politics of activism, Kirsti Hyldmo for reminding me of the realities of exploitation, Åse Brandvold for a skilled introduction to the thoughts and tools of culture jamming, and Maria Astrup for showing me the pleasures and powers of aesthetics. Also, I would like to thank the Norwegian Adbusters Network, and the editorial groups of Vreng. To my main advisor Professor Kristian Stokke, I would like to thank you for the excellent support you have given me throughout my master studies. Your insights have been of grate value, and I cannot thank you enough for continually challenging me. Also, the feedback from Olve Krange, my second advisor, was crucial at the early stage of developing the thesis, to defining its object of inquiry, and finally when writing my conclusion. I would also like to express my appreciation to Professor Oddrun Sæther for an excellent introduction to the field of cultural studies, to Professor Matt Sparke at the University of Washington for demonstrating the intriguing complexities of political geography, and to PhD candidate Stephen Young, for proof reading and fruitful inputs at the final stage of writing. Finally I would like to give a special thanks to Berit Kristoffersen and Martin Aaserud. Berit, for teaching me the importance of telling a story, for your continual interest in, and patience with, the ideas I have pursued, and not the least, your invaluable knowledge and understanding of political processes and constellations of power. Martin, besides from your help, I would like to express my appreciation of our many explorations of ideas on creative resistance, for stressing the presence of possibility, and above all, for insisting that there is sound in silence and that I should understand the richness in listening.
**Table of Contents**

Chapter 1 – Thesis Introduction ............................................. 4  
Plan of Thesis ........................................................................... 10  

Part I  
Chapter 2 – A History of Research ............................................ 14  
Project Design ........................................................................... 15  
A Multi-sited Fieldwork of Ethnographic Character .................... 18  
Barcelona .................................................................................. 20  
Milan and Bologna .................................................................... 22  
Amsterdam and EasyCity ........................................................... 25  
Concluding Remarks .................................................................. 29  

Chapter 3 – Culture Jamming .................................................. 30  
An Assorted Genealogy ............................................................... 31  
Communicative Play ................................................................. 38  
Conclusion .................................................................................. 46  

Chapter 4 – Writing Worlds ...................................................... 48  
Dominance and Contestation .................................................... 48  
Cultural resistance .................................................................... 52  
Democratic Contestation ............................................................ 55  
Space ......................................................................................... 57  
Concluding Remarks .................................................................. 60  

Conclusion Part I - A Framework .............................................. 63  

Part II  
Introduction Part II – easyCity .................................................. 66  

Chapter 5 – Jamming the Evidence of Materiality ....................... 69  
Narrations of the Neoliberal Production of Space ....................... 70  
The Political Economy of Neoliberal Urbanism .......................... 72  
The Present of the Future easyCity ............................................. 74  
The Unsettling Materiality of the easyCity Action Space ............. 78  

Chapter 6 – Jamming the Urban Economy of Experience .......... 82  
The Symbolic Economy .............................................................. 83  
Jamming Objects of the Urban Order ......................................... 84
‘Branded New World’ .................................................................................. 86
Art and Spatial Politics ................................................................................. 89
Conclusion Part II – Jamming the Urban Landscape ................................. 93

Part III
Introduction Part III – The Promise of Democracy .................................. 98
Chapter 7 – The Neoliberal Political and Spectacle ................................... 100
‘The Neoliberal Political’ ............................................................................ 101
The ‘Politics’ of Spectacle ........................................................................... 105
Conclusion Part III – The Neoliberalisation of Democracy ......................... 116

Chapter 8 – Thesis Conclusion .................................................................. 120

List Of Illustrations

Figure 1: A Trojan horse on the Amstel ....................................................... 4
Figure 2: easyCity opening-preparations ..................................................... 7
Figure 3: A Diesel ‘spoof’ ad ..................................................................... 14
Figure 4: San Precario, ............................................................................. 23
Figure 5: One of the shop’s visitors ............................................................ 26
Figure 6: The easyCity logo ...................................................................... 27
Figure 7: Billboard alteration ................................................................. 32
Figure 8 Mobilisation for anti-war demonstrations .................................. 35
Figure 9: Lady in Pink .............................................................................. 37
Figure 10: Billboard alterations) ............................................................... 39
Figure 11: Anti-gentrification struggles ..................................................... 41
Figure 12: A fictitious movie poster ......................................................... 43
Figure 13: easyCity shop opening ............................................................. 79
Figure 14: The easyCity postcard ............................................................. 87
Figure 15: In the easyCity shop, at the counter ( .................................... 99
Figure 16: From Hackney London (photo courtesy Martin Aaserud) ...... 106
Figure 17: Also from Hackney in London ............................................... 106
Figure 18: From inside the easyCity shop ............................................... 112

Cover Design
Maria Astrup
On the 26th of September, year 2001, a rather unusual vessel made its way up the canal Amstel of Amsterdam (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). On a floating platform stood a beautifully crafted, six meters tall wooden horse. Its height demanded the raising of bridges, its escort of six boats carried rather jolly crews who hopped ashore by the bridges to let passers-by in on the intension of this rather odd transport. Landing at the square in front of City Hall, the council in meeting this day, the crew staged a minor spectacle of speeches, dance, and play and vanished. Left on the square was the horse, hollow as the famous gift offered the Trojans, though not carrying soldiers, but ideas. The bringing of this creature marked the launch of the book *Laat 1000 vrijplaatsen bloeien. Onderzoek naar vrijplaatsen*. The book documented struggles over occupied spaces in Amsterdam and was delivered with personal messages from representatives of the city’s many squats. Pretty as it was, many stopped to admire the horse. However, it became a puzzle to City Hall and, the symbolism being rather odd, the council decided to burn it. The gift offered came from a group within the squatter movement of Amsterdam, Vrije Ruimte (translated Free Space). Manifesting their resistance to the council’s privatisation politics, the group stated that free public spaces are still in demand and will be claimed.
The Amsterdam activists’ challenge to City Hall resonates with a geographically and politically extensive field of activist groups. Contesting the commodification of urban environments, these groups have made public space both the site and the objective of their resistance. Though far from a coordinated, coherent movement, they share an agenda: Claiming urban space through a direct action appropriation that temporarily transforms the cultural functions of the city. Since the early 1990s, groups like the carnivalistic Reclaim the Streets in London\(^1\), the bicycle-oriented Critical Mass of San Francisco\(^2\), and the theatrical Surveillance Camera Players in New York\(^3\) have developed concepts that have been adopted and transformed by groups in cities across Western Europe and North America. Also, outside these ‘activist nodes’, alternative, smaller scale forms of urban activism have emerged\(^4\), like guerrilla gardeners’ temporal transformation of asphalt spaces into green spaces. Seeing urban spaces as deprived of their social, cultural, and political function these groups contest the commodification of cities by disrupting the status quo of public life.

The present work explores this urban field of politico-cultural activism through the analysis of a one-week, direct action called easyCity. The action was initiated by the Amsterdam group Vrije Ruimte, and was carried out drawing on the same strategies as the abovementioned forms of contestation. Often called culture jamming, this mode of resistance combines traditional activism with a manipulation of cultural expressions. The easyCity action group identified two forces as hegemonic in the production of contemporary cities: Neoliberal urbanism and spectacle. Whilst neoliberal urbanism was made to represent a limitation on cities’ political and cultural function, spectacle was made to signify how these limitations are represented, ordered, and lived in the neoliberal city. Using this case to analyse the culture jammer perspective, the thesis explores the two following questions of research:

*How were neoliberal urbanism and spectacle depicted and contested by the easyCity group? And, how do neoliberal urbanism and spectacle produce limitations on antagonist urban activism?*

\(^1\) http://rts.gn.apc.org/ (19.12.06)
\(^2\) http://www.critical-mass.org/10/ (12.01.06)
\(^3\) http://www.notbored.org/generic.jpg (19.12.06)
\(^4\) http://www.schnews.org.uk/diyguide/billboardsubvertising.htm (12.01.06)
http://www.primalseeds.org/guerrilla.htm (12.01.06)
http://poeticchemistry.blogspot.com/2006_03_01_poeticchemistry_archive.html (12.01.06)
http://www.graffiti.tv/ (12.01.06)
http://www.streetstv.com/ (12.01.06)
http://0100101110101101.org/home/nikeground/intro.html (12.01.06)
Culture Jamming

Culture jamming is an elastic mode of resistance that draws upon art, semiotics, and direct action to stage deconstructive, playful pranks. These culture jams are aimed at disrupting the fixed cultural frames that constitute our perceptions of what is real and possible (Duncombe 2002), and from this, create situations that destabilise settled political and cultural representations. Denominated less by strict ideology, than by a loose set of ideas and action strategies, the culture jamming is applied in fields as far apart as media collectives and workers movements. The culture jammer term applies to a multitude of politico-cultural practices and signifies a broad range of countercultural and political subcultures. Culture jamming emerged as a critique of how values of commercialism have saturated the public sphere, pushing unpleasant and radical dispute to the margins of society. Using a variety of communication strategies, often described as ‘guerrilla communication’, culture jammers play with mainstream images and icons to draw attention to these ‘politics on the margins’. Outcomes of these performances can be located in a variety of expressions: Parking lots turned into temporary gardens, altered advertisement billboards, street theatre, performance, demonstration tactics, street carnivals, public art installations, or street art.

EasyCity

The easyCity action was initiated by the Vrije Ruimte group the autumn 2002 (de Jong Interview 01.01.06). The Vrije Ruimte organisation functions both as an alternative think tank on urban development and as an activist group. The group’s main demand is for ‘free space’ – spaces for alternative living, cultural activities, and political assembly that are neither state controlled, nor under private ownership. Planning the easyCity action, the Vrije Ruimte mobilised a wide range of participants: Political activists, artists, performers, dancers, hackers, and architects. This turned the design and

---

5 http://www.sniggle.net (16.11.05)  
6 http://www.contrast.org (16.11.05)  
7 http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org (16.11.05)  
8 http://www.joeyskaggs.com (19.12.06)  
9 http://sniggle.net/Manifesti/notes.php (19.12.06)  
10 http://www.tvac.ca/about/manifest.html (22.01.07)  
11 http://euromayday.org/ (15.02.06)  
12 http://www.culturejamming101.com/truthisavirus.html (16.11.05)  
13 http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/Culturejamming.htm (12.01.06)  
14 http://www.guerrillagardening.org/ (19.12.06)  

---

www.billboardliberation.com  
http://www.notbored.org/the-scp.html (19.12.06)  
http://clownarmy.org/about/about.html (19.12.06)  
http://0100101110101101.org/home/nikeground/index.html (19.12.06)
implementation of the action into a loose, Vrije Ruimte coordinated, network collaboration. By the effort of this group, the easyCity action space was made into an art exhibition, a place of political debates and cultural events\(^\text{15}\), and an ongoing performance built on a number of different culture jams. The action space was an occupied shop that had been empty for about a year. Squatting in the early morning, the activists opened in the afternoon, inviting their ‘customers’ to an out of the ordinary shopping experience.

![easyCity opening-preparations](photo credit Bas van de Geyn)

Furnished like a shop and presented as a travel agency, the easyCity group pretended to be selling tickets to easyCity: A carefully controlled ‘consumer haven’ in where anything could be bought, including sex and impulsivity. The fictitious spaces for sale were branded as easyCity spaces, sold by activists pretending to represent the easyCity enterprise\(^\text{16}\). Little by little the experience of the scam shop would give way to its political nature, the salesmen inviting shop visitors to engage a dialogue over urban developments. Throughout the week the easyCity shop hosted over a thousand visitors who became part of the group’s performance and its critical examination of neoliberal urbanism and spectacle.

\(^{15}\) [http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/program_en.html](http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/program_en.html) (05.01.06)

\(^{16}\) [http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html](http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html) (05.01.06)
Neoliberal Urbanism and Spectacle

In virtually any Northern American or Western European urban centre today, political claims to public space entail engaging with neoliberalism (Sites 2007). The ascendency of neoliberalism originates in the early 1970s crisis of capital accumulation (Leitner, Sheppard, Sziarto & Maringanti 2007a). Then a force of contestation, neoliberal proponents managed to transform the widespread discontent with state controlled economics into a pervasive support of their agenda. Achieving hegemonic status across national boundaries, political parties, and ideologies (Harvey 1989a), neoliberal programs of privatisation and deregulation have displaced apparently deep-rooted welfare states (Leitner et al 2007a). At scales ranging from the supranational to the municipal, neoliberal practice is now a signifier of ‘good-governance’.

Its stronghold in cities is exceptional, and has produced a complex of neoliberal urban frontiers (Leitner, Peck & Sheppard 2007b). The initial neoliberalisation of cities relates to economic globalisation, and to a reduction of state responsibilities that has made cities financially dependent upon mobile capital flows (Harvey 1989a, Leitner et al. 2007a). By this dependency, cities’ political economies have gone through a significant restructuring, making interurban competition over the spatial fix of capital the driving force of their economies (Peck & Tickell 2002). Processes of neoliberalisation have also lead to a transformation of cities’ political institutions. These are now orientated towards a growth-first, innovative, and risk-taking mode of ‘governance’, characterised by ‘entrepreneurial’ activities (Leitner & Sheppard 1998): Corporate development strategies that are argued to strengthen cities in the increasingly hostile environments of globalisation and interurban competition (Harvey 1989a).

Within regimes of entrepreneurial governance, flexible public-private partnerships are the centrepiece agents. Their constitution originates in ideas pushed by Margaret Thatcher, who set up ‘quasi governmental’ institutions, like urban development corporations to enhance economic growth (Harvey 2005). From this early idea of public-private collaboration, businesses and corporations have also become strongly influential in writing legislation, determining public policies, and setting regulatory frameworks. In these partnerships, public actors often assume much of the risk, whilst the private sector is allowed most of the profits. Also, Harvey argues, the interests of corporations are further supported by coercive legislation and policing tactics that are targeted at dispersing or repressing collective forms of opposition to corporate power.
Just as there is an economic entrepreneurialism to neoliberal urbanism, there is also a strategic cultural entrepreneurialism affixed to it (Peck 2005). Cultural strategies work according to the same doctrines as the above activities and are seen as integral to cities’ competitiveness and economic growth. Cities’ cultural entrepreneurialism is mainly directed at repositioning cities in the spatial division of consumption, and at creating desirable environments for members of ‘the Creative Class’; individuals who’s creativity is seen to make out the driving force of economic development (Peck 2005). By its favouring of the Creative Class, Peck explains, the political strategies of cities are changed in a number of ways, challenging them to

“understand what makes the members of this class tick, how they like to spend their money and their (precious) time, what they want. As the source, apparently, of all good economic things, the Creative Class must be nurtured and nourished, its talents must be harnessed and channelled. And the stakes could hardly be higher: in addition to getting the technological basics right, companies and cities must make purposive efforts to establish the right ‘people climate’ for the favoured class of creatives” (Peck 2005: 744/745).

Through how it consumes the city, the Creative Class is also seen to generate the commercial spectacles that give cities the necessary ‘edge’ to become winners in the null-sum game of interurban competition. A range of characteristics has been assigned to spectacle that describes its delusional power and its hierarchical, non-egalitarian structures (Debord 1994, Baudrillard 2001, Duncombe 2007). Seen as an instrument of the powerful, ‘spectacle’ has come to describe grand events and symbolic performances throughout history, from the Roman Circus Maximus (Harvey 1989b) to the marching troops of Nazi Germany (Duncombe 2007). When integrated in the cultural fabric of cities, however, the spectacles of neoliberal urbanism assume a character different from flamboyant spectacles of political power. Rather, spectacle is merged with the everyday life of cities and becomes the lived experience of its central public spaces (Harvey 1989a, Deutsche 1996). Produced by the Creative Class, and favoured by city authorities, the commercial spectacles of neoliberal urbanism are becoming the dominant signifiers of cities’ public culture (Zukin 1995, Peck 2005).
Plan of Thesis

Answering the two questions of the thesis, the role of cities in social change is investigated by seeing neoliberal urbanism and spectacle as contested modes of producing, using, and disciplining urban space (Leitner et al. 2007a). Contestations to the settlement of neoliberalism in cities have been widespread, and are not restricted to Western cities. Nor are they bound to a particular set of criticisms. Hence, investigating the questions of the thesis through the easyCity case, a specific geographical and political orientation is set to how neoliberal urbanism and spectacle are approached. The case choice also sets an analytical focus, as culture jammers emphasises the aspect of ideological constructions, representations, and symbolic power to contestation.

The thesis is divided into three segments: Approaches to Culture Jamming, easyCity, and The Promise of Democracy. Part I, Approaches to Culture Jamming, includes chapters two to four, and provides the background against which the two questions of the thesis are answered. Chapter two, A History of Research, explains the methodology applied to researching culture jamming and easyCity. Chapter three, Culture Jamming, presents what could be described as an assorted genealogy of culture jamming as a mode and field of resistance. The fourth and last chapter to this segment, Writing Worlds, outlines the thesis’ analytical framework. Specifically, the chapter explains the grounds upon which dynamics of contestation and dominance are understood (Laclau & Mouffe 1985), positions taken within debates over cultural resistance (Duncombe 2002), and how public space can be seen as a both a site and an object of resistance (Lefebvre 1991, Deutsche 1996, Mitchell 2000, 2003). The conclusion of Part I gives a short outline to how these three chapters make out the framework of the thesis.

The analysis in Part II, easyCity, is tied to the thesis’ first question of research and investigates the perspectives of the easyCity group. In this analysis, the easyCity case is seen to represent both a culture jammer resistance, and a contestation of neoliberal urbanism and spectacle. Two questions guide the analysis: How does the easyCity narration of neoliberal space describe contemporary cities? And, how do the action’s culture jams depict the symbolic production of space? The two chapters of Part II explore these questions through two distinct, yet interrelated angles. Chapter five, Jamming the Evidence of Materiality, analyses the easyCity action space in light of the political economy of neoliberal urbanism. Both the spatiality of the fictitious easyCity sales office, and the action space is emphasised. Chapter six, Jamming the Urban
Economy of Experience, investigates how the action worked to contest the cultural formations of neoliberal spectacles. In this analysis, three structures of symbols are emphasised: Objects that give meaning to the order and control of pseudo public spaces, cultures of branding, and the use of art as a means of spatial politics. The conclusion of this analysis argues that the neoliberal production of space can be seen as described by the multitude of meanings suppressed through its commodification of space.

Part III, The Promise of Democracy, analyses the thesis’ second question of research, and asks how easyCity can be seen to reflect limits set to the democratic use of public space. This analysis makes out the thesis’ chapter 7, The Neoliberal Political and Spectacle. The chapter begins to question how the settlement of neoliberalism in cities has concurred with changes in their democratic institutions, and how these changes relate to the suppression of antagonist contestation (Mouffe 2005, Mayer 2007). From this, the analysis moves to discuss the role of spectacle in settling the ‘politics’ of neoliberal urbanism (Peck 2005). Investigating different structures in the spectacles of the Creative Class, and the subversive easyCity spectacle, the analysis discusses how spectacle can both negate, and create, urban public space as a democratic, political space.

Chapter 8, Thesis Conclusion, gives an outline of the arguments made throughout the thesis, and points to how a political exploration of urban geographies can be made to include experiences that cannot be captured by existing frames of reference.
Part I

Approaches to Culture Jamming
Chapter 2 – A History of Research

Figure 3: A ‘spoof’ ad made as a commentary to Diesel’s ‘rebel’ fashion campaign

Culture jamming is a resistance that mixes play, pranks, and humour with politics. In practice this could mean clowns trying to feather-dust riot police (Utrecht Festival 28.01.06), a fake Ronald McDonald making a fool of himself in a McDonald’s restaurant (personal observation), or the landing of a Trojan horse in front of the Amsterdam City Hall (de Jong Interview 01.01.06). What these actions have in common is their engagement with socio-cultural constructions of what we perceive as ‘real’ (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Using the armoured police body, a ‘restaurant’, or the urban scenery as an action space, they question how our perceptions influence how we experience, interpret and act upon reality and possibility (Duncombe 2002). Seeing these frames as upheld by cultural signs, symbols, images, codes, and icons culture jammers aim to act as agents of disruption.

Researching and analysing the easyCity action does therefore imply an openness to exploring the social construction of ‘reality’ (Laclau & Mouffe 1985), and in turn, to how the meanings attributed to space and its cultures have political consequences (Zukin 1995, Deutsche 1996). The methodology applied delving into this field should
therefore provide for the exploration of meaning as something that ‘becomes’ rather than ‘is’, and thus is never stable (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Flyvbjerg 2001). This is not to say that subsequent choices of methodology can fully acknowledge these ideals: Independent of how the research processes is carried out, its findings and their analysis will be ‘contaminated’ by my construction of these as objects of inquiry, and by the situatedness of the knowledge through which I do so (Katz 1992). Yet, it is my aspiration that the methodological choices and priorities made, and how I write about them, reflect the above contentions.

**Project Design**

**Initial Challenges**

Writing the present thesis, designing and conducting research presented me with a number of ‘first time choices’. From what grounds, in the manifold fields in human geography, was I to formulate my research? From which (philosophical) position should objects of inquiry be identified and defined? My starting point became the rich literature on the urban transformations that have taken place in the wake of extended capital mobility (Harvey 1990), related changes in the symbolic economy of cities (Zukin 1995) and the effect this has on urban public spaces and cultures (Mitchell 2003). Connecting the political economy of urban centres to their ‘symbolic fabric’ authors such as Rosalyn Deutsche (1996), Don Mitchell (2000, 2003), Sharon Zukin (1995), David Knox (1993), Mike Davis (1994), David Harvey (1989b, 1990) and Stephen Duncombe (2002), introduced me to the politics of landscape, concepts of symbolic power, and finally, issues of cultural resistance. Hence came my fascination with culture jamming, which came to engage me both academically and politically. The latter having obvious effect on the former, this presented me with yet another dilemma: On what grounds could I argue my positionality?

My political involvement with culture jamming through the Norwegian activist network *Adbusters* subsume the partaking and planning of a number of culture jammer campaigns, and establishing and producing the ad-free magazine *Vreng*. By this involvement, my research is representative of what Buroway describes as “a model of science that embraces not detachment, but engagement as the road to knowledge” (Buroway 1998: 5). This ‘research by engagement’ clearly acknowledges, and argues, the unavoidable complicity of the researcher (Katz 1992), taking the position of Buroway that: “As social scientists we are thrown off balance by our presence in the
world we study, by absorption in the society we observe, by dwelling alongside those we make ‘other’” (Buroway 1998: 4).

There is still quite some distance between the type of complicity that situates the researcher in the social context of her field, and the positioned intentionality of an actor in it. I shall therefore be quite direct, or explicit, with respect to my own ‘agenda’: I aim to explain culture jamming in two regards: First, with respect to culture jamming as a mode of cultural resistance and political activism, and second, in terms of jammers’ analysis of the relation between spectacle and politics (Mouffe 2005, Duncombe 2007). I have chosen to do so because I believe that culture jamming highlights features that are important in understanding the politics of cities’ symbolic fabric, and how they are related to neoliberal modes of producing space. However, though I share with Deutsche (1996) a belief that there is an emancipative potential in the complex, ‘postmodern’ aesthetic of contemporary urban centres, I do by no means seek to write an affirmative account of culture jamming as a strategy of resistance. It is the nature of the antagonisms that culture jammers provoke, and how the political can be thought through these, which is of interest to me.

Nonwithstanding, I decided to not conduct any research in Norway. Researching culture jamming in Norway I would be dealing with respondents whom foremost associate me with Adbusters. There would, in my opinion, be no means by which I could enter the field as a researcher and maintain the responsibilities this entails (Saugestad 1997, Kvale 2001). Despite the artificiality of the social scientist’s role – “unequally initiated, situationally lopsided, spatially dislocated, temporally isolated, extrinsic in purpose – it oozes with power” (Katz 1992: 496) – it would be the only honest one. Also, as my knowledge of culture jamming in Norway by large is learnt before I put the ‘researcher hat’ on, I would face the (impossible) task of discerning what information the network would have shared with me as an activist, and not with me as an scientist (Saugestad 1997).

Re-contextualising myself removed the prejudice of the field upon me, but not mine upon the field. Having engaged with culture jamming I had developed my own understanding of what it entails and not. Finding a way to draw on my knowledge of this resistance, without confining new knowledge within the understandings I had come to as an agent in it, has therefore been an important factor in designing the project. My starting point was an extensive research on the Internet, as it is on the web that most accounts of culture jamming actions, manifestoes, and articles are published. These are referred to in footnotes throughout the thesis. A range of questions arose from these
readings: Is there a common denominator that provokes the resistance of culture jammers? Why do jammers find their strategies of resistance the most apt? Do jammers view themselves as culture jammers\textsuperscript{17}, pranksters\textsuperscript{18}, snigglers\textsuperscript{19}, cultural agonists\textsuperscript{20}, con artists\textsuperscript{21}, or performers\textsuperscript{22}? Do they connect an identity to their resistance at all? Are they part of the general activist scene? Or, of the alter-globalisation and anti-war movements that have dominated the radical political landscape since the demonstrations in Seattle, 1999? Gradually, multiple, and often contradictory, answers emerged. The notion of culture jammers as a movement of micro-movements\textsuperscript{23} began to make sense. Coming to terms with the multitude of culture jamming as a field of research, I realised that to answer the thesis’ questions I had to begin by answering the above questions. Never fully answered, this contention translated into a qualitative research project, by which I eventually arrived at my ‘object’ of research.

**Methodological Positions**

The application of qualitative methods in social science is often constructed as a choice of this methodology over that of quantitative methods (Hammersley 1992, Grønmo 1996). Devaluing the latter, either in terms of its utility, or with respect to epistemological questions, arguments are often made stating which methodology could produce the most valuable knowledge. My arguments for applying qualitative methods reflect both these levels, but I do not take the stance that qualitative methods should stand in a binary relation to quantitative methods of science, nor that there should be a hierarchical relation to their relevance to producing knowledge (Gronmo 1996). Qualitative methodology can be underpinned by a wide range of philosophical principles, like those of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and postmodernism (Kvale 2001). These are as mutually exclusive as those that often set qualitative and quantitative methods apart. Any methodological design does therefore reflect positions and perspectives on how society is constituted, and ones own role within it. This, in turn, is reflected in what one seeks to know more about, and on what terms one seeks that knowledge (Katz 1992).

\textsuperscript{17} http://sniggle.net/Manifesti/notes.php (16.11.05)
\textsuperscript{18} http://www.joeyskaggs.com/html/manif/index.html (16.11.05)
\textsuperscript{19} http://www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
\textsuperscript{20} http://www.yomango.org (16.02.06)
\textsuperscript{21} http://01001011101101101.org/ (07.03.06)
\textsuperscript{22} http://www.notbored.org/generic.jpg (19.12.06)
\textsuperscript{23} http://www.culturejamming101.com/truthisavirus.html (16.11.05)
The present paper is exceedingly influenced by poststructuralist thinking about what knowledge is (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). I return to this theory in chapter four and, for now, concentrate on how this translates into the principles upon which my choices of methodology rest. As argued in the introduction to this chapter an investigation of culture jamming should allow for the exploration of the frameworks we interpret political and cultural realities through. Investigating politico-cultural performances that aim to disrupt the status quo upheld by the phenomena they contest, without acknowledging the contingency of such representations, would automatically dismiss and put closure to the relevance of culture jamming. The analysis of discursive practices is not simply a method in which tools of research are given and justified, it is as much, and perhaps more, a philosophy of science that states upon what grounds we should seek and understand the social (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999). In this respect, the culture jammer mode of resistance, and the theory through which I constitute it as an object of research, share a core principle that describes how dominance can be achieved and challenged. In poststructuralist thought, this agenda is formulated by arguing that the social is constituted through language. Language is in turn seen as closely bound with specific knowledge, and thus, as implicated in particular regimes of power (Foucault in Barker 2003). Culture jammers’ contention to turn the symbolic markers of these regimes of knowledge against themselves, thus signals a shared conviction with poststructuralist thinking, as both see the contestation of representations as a potentially effectual political act.

However, the translation of the above contentions into a practical project of research is not straightforward. How does one research the symbolic fabric of the city as a field of contestation? And equally, how can the ambiguous, deconstructive performances of culture jammers be investigated as contestations? In the remains of this chapter I will account for how these challenges were translated into a practice of methodology, and for how the process of research moulded the questions pursued throughout the analysis.

**A Multi-sited Fieldwork of Ethnographic Character**

The larger body of my material rests upon participant observations made during fieldwork. This fieldwork does not, given ideals of in-depth, long-term observation and participation, meet the criteria that are conventionally associated with ethnographies, or fieldwork in general (Geertz 1973, Herbert 2000). It lasted for 30 days only and, with the exception of Amsterdam, I was never in one place for more than five days. Yet, my
observations were undeniably made of- and in the field, and my approach was ethnographic in that I sought to, as Herbert puts it, examine “what people do as well as say” (Herbert 2000: 552), and expose myself to ‘unknown universes of meaning’ (Saugestad 1997).

With the exception of two nights in Bologna, Italy, I spent all nights either on trains or in buildings that were squatted, or previously occupied, now legalised squats. Being in the field, I met a wide range of activists – ecological environmentalists, computer hackers, rebel clowns, squatters, designers, filmmakers, artists, performers, samba-band drummers, and media pranksters. Spending time in squatted social centres (often the venues in which activists plan their actions, meet to watch films, have collective meals, arrange concerts), but also going ‘outside’ these autonomous zones together with activists, I was introduced to their manifold uses and experiences of urban space.

The interviews I made during fieldwork were mainly with key-people in groups I wanted to learn more about. Most of the interviews were of an informal character and all took place in a setting chosen by the respondents. The qualitative interview, like the ethnography (Herbert 2000), is built upon principles of investigating the construction of meaning and representations (Kvale 2001). In terms of postmodernist thought, it is seen as a situation in where knowledge is produced through dialogue and narratives. This knowledge is contextual, as it is constituted in relation to the social reality of respondents and the situation it is articulated within. The dialogues I entered into during fieldwork can roughly be divided into two. The first took the form of semi-structured interviews, and lasted for an average of four hours. I took notes during them, and transcribed and emailed the interview to the respondent within a few days, usually with follow-up questions. The second category, which makes up the main bulk of my material, includes mainly informal, loose conversations with both activists that I had contacted and that I met by chance. Throughout these conversations I did not try to steer towards specific subjects, nor did I take notes, as I did not want to restrain conversation to topics already familiar to myself. Yet, I always made that sure those I spoke with knew that I was doing research and on what (an overview of the fieldwork material is attached as Appendix 1).

More and more ethnographers perceive their objects of research as mobile and multiply situated, giving any ethnography of such an object a comparative dimension (Marcus 1998). The geography of the ethnography can as such become that of travel, guided by strategies of “following connections, associations and putative relationships”
(Marcus 1998: 81). Following the phenomenon of creative urban resistance, I learnt its complex multi-sitedness\(^{24}\); campaigns spread, people move between different groups, gather for larger happenings\(^{25}\), and form more or less loose networks. In my travels I also had the opportunity to observe the multi-sitedness of the hegemonic forces these activists contest. Evidence of its reflections, like gentrification, image building, or increased public space surveillance met me in all the places I stayed, or stopped for a change of trains. My way of transportation, an open, ‘Interrail’ train ticket, gave me the opportunity to shape the trail of my travel, the boundaries of Europe and time being the only limits, and explore these connections.

What I followed was struggles over public space in which culture jamming strategies were employed. Hence, leaving from Oslo for my only predetermined destination – Barcelona – I had an open-ended plan, which could result in staying there until my return, or, as happened, travelling from Spain to Italy, back north to the Netherlands and then home. I will not recount all events of this travel here, but try to give an insight to key-observations and conversations, that somehow have given shape to the thesis and my understandings of culture jamming.

**Barcelona**

A month before I came to Barcelona the municipality had passed a new civics law enforcing strict prohibitions on the use of the city’s public spaces (Ariola Interview 14.01.06). The news of this law had provoked the formation of alliances between activists, sex-workers, skaters, graffiti artists, and neighbourhood associations, who congregated into assemblies and demonstrations. Meeting with the long-time activist and filmmaker Jordi Ariola, who had been part of organising and documenting events of the protests, I was introduced to a long history of struggles over the use of public space in Barcelona. This meeting became decisive in the formation of interests pursued throughout my fieldwork, and to the formulation of the questions asked in the thesis.

What Ariola emphasised was the political function of public space, and how controlling it relegates civil society from its spaces of representation, negotiation, and contestation. Increased policing, directed by the demands of commercial actors and political elites, Ariola contended, would lead to a democratic reduction on two levels.

\(^{24}\) [http://www.yomango.org](http://www.yomango.org) (16.02.06)
[http://www.lutherblissett.net/index_en.html](http://www.lutherblissett.net/index_en.html) (12.01.06)
[http://clownarmy.org/recruit/recruit.html](http://clownarmy.org/recruit/recruit.html) (12.01.06)

First, he explained, a law that encompasses all sides of public life would make the role civil society plays in shaping these spaces abundant.

“When there are people there is always conflict. The police set people apart, kidnapping our possibility to act and solve problems between us. When civil society gets to solve the problem it feels empowered, that it has a role. The new law takes this from people. Rather than mediating, or allowing for people to solve their own problems, the law prevents dialogue. And preventing dialogue it prevents important civil society mechanisms, reducing negotiation into a question of how the law defines ‘who is civic and who is incivic. Or, ‘who acts properly and who acts improperly’. The solution they propose is that when a problem occurs, people should call for the police to put fines.” (Ariola Interview 14.01.06)

Second, Ariola was afraid that the law would become a much too handy tool for both the municipal and national government in hindering political demonstrations. He explained this concern referring to the experience of how the acampadas were met very differently by the local government. The acampadas refers to three actions held in 1994, 2003, and 2004, through which activists attempted to occupy and protest in Barcelona streets by putting up tents and living in them. During the first action, challenging the socialist government to raise their endowments to developing countries to 0,7 % of Spain’s GDP, the number of tents grew to over 2000. Events were peaceful, and though the government did not meet their claims activists saw the action as a successful mobilisation of public opinion.

In 1999, a national law was passed without any public attention, prohibiting camping in the street. The law was later argued as a matter of public security, but was not enforced by the socialist local government when protesters set up a new acampada, protesting the Iraq war policies of the then right-wing, ruling party. On the contrary, the local government expressed its support of the activists.

In 2004, the socialist party was again the national ruling party. Faced by a third acampada, which commemorated the first by again demanding 0,7 % of Spain’s GDP to development countries, their response stood in stark contrast to the support given to the anti-war campers a year earlier. “We were met by the police”, Ariola explained, “They told us that if we went forward with the action they would attack. And they did. We could not sleep in the street that night.” The new civics law, Ariola contended, negates all negotiating powers of civil society, enabling political elites’ policies of ‘intervention by convenience’, like the one applied against the acampadas. “Imagine”, he argued,
“that when you want to hold a demonstration you have to guarantee that you can pay for potential damages, and cleaning up all litter. These are the realities of the new law. The government now has the legal umbrella to act when it wants to, to intervene when it is important for them.” (Ariola Interview 14.01.06)

Ariola’s reflections upon rights to expression and political contestation in urban public spaces, insisting upon the potential political instrumentality embedded in the private control of these spaces, did in many ways redirect my attention. Previously, I had focused my attention upon the dominance of consumption discourses, and how they order urban landscapes (Zukin 1995, Mitchell 2003). My ‘critical’ attention had been devoted solely to the interests of private actors, ignoring the gains achieved by political elites – elites that largely accept the neoliberal free market agenda, driving the processes by which cities are transformed (Peck & Tickell 2002, Leitner et al. 2007a, Sites 2007).

Having started out with the intention of expanding my understanding of culture jamming, I began to realize that my way of seeing this ‘object’ of research, emphasising its features of cultural-symbolic resistance, in many ways silenced the political aspect of culture jammers’ urban contestations.

**Milan and Bologna**

Yet, leaving for Italy my contention was still to expand my understanding of culture jamming as a strategy. The Milan based *Chainworkers* network, a grassroots workers movement that apply culture jamming in their work, seemed a good place to start. Targeting the increasing vulnerability of people’s everyday lives in the face of flexible labour markets, Chainworkers had created the saint San Precario. *Precario* is an Italian term that is used to describe socially marginalised people who are seen to pay the cost of flexible production and reduced welfare26. Playing on the Italian Catholic Church’s many saints of different virtues, San Precario was made to signify the protection of the precarious. The icon, reproduced on little ‘saint-cards’ that mimic those of the Church, and featured in political actions (Chainworkers representative Interview Date), was initially nothing more than a graphic expression, and obviously, not a saint of the church. Still, in some senses, Alex Fonti from Chainworkers Milan explains, San Precario has become true.

---

26 [http://euromayday.org/](http://euromayday.org/)(15.02.06)
“He’s become, even in the mainstream mind, the embodiment of this social condition. There have been hundreds of struggles, actions and agitations all over Italy in the name of San Precario. Also, he represents a network of physical places where you can go to and get assistance. At squats, where he’s placed or hung, you know you can find people, to get vindication, and be with others organizing collectively”

Figure 4: San Precario, invented by Chainworkers to protect those marginalised by flexible production and the exacerbation of the welfare state (Source: Chainworkers, Milan)

From Milan I travelled to Bologna to meet the creators of another character with Italian roots, the phony artist Darko Maver (Mattes Interview 23.01.06). In 1998 rumours that

27 http://adbusters.org/the_magazine/62/Why_We_Steal_An_Interview_with_Yomango.html (20.09.05)
a brilliant artist was to be found in decaying Yugoslavia, creating crushed plastic dolls that bore resemblance to tortured people, began to circulate amongst underground artists in Europe. Thanks to an Italian web-magazine’s review of his art and difficult life, Maver became famous. As his situation worsened – he was accused of anti-patriotism, his work was censured, and he was persecuted – the attention around Maver grew, and copies of his work were exhibited in Italy and Slovenia. When it became known that he had been imprisoned and charged with ‘propaganda against the regime’, the Campaign for the Freedom of Art broke out on the web, calling for Maver’s release. Five months later came the tragic end: Darko Maver had died in prison, reasons unknown. Adding to his popularity, Maver’s death was ensued by galleries in Rome showing his retrospectives, and articles were written about his work. Finally in 1999, he was presented at perhaps the ‘highest’ place of art, the Venice Biennale, which featured a documentary film about his work. When the Biennale ended, another dimension was added to the tragic life of Darko Maver, the subversive group of artists 0100101110101101.ORG announcing its deception: Through sophisticated web-propaganda and cooperating with a few art magazines they had invented Darko Maver. The group claimed that the aim was to expose that an artist does not require supposedly divine inspiration and a tortured soul, as the attention of magazines, critics, and galleries was equally important. “Life imitates art and art imitates itself. Creation is always a certain plagiarism”, claimed the members of 0100101110101101.ORG, adding that the world of art, making artists into brands more important than their art, had it coming.

Chainworkers are primarily ‘precarity activists’ (Chainworkers activist Interview 21.01.06); 0100101110101101.ORG are as closely affiliated to the world of art as to that of cultural resistance and political activism (Mattes Interview 23.01.06). Still, both groups engage with culture jamming strategies in their resistance. Comparing these two very different examples of culture jamming I could now begin to answer the questions I raised prior to my fieldwork. First, there is not one culture jammer identity. Its performers can simultaneously be actors, artists, engaged with ‘traditional’ political issues, or issues that are not considered political at all. And these identities are often more explicit than that of being a culture jammer, in fact, none of those I spoke to described themselves as one. More than a political identity, culture jamming signifies a mode of resistance. Second, it is not a mode of resistance that can be attributed any

http://0100101110101101.org/texts/haaretz_maver-vati-hell-en.html (07.03.06)

http://0100101110101101.org/texts/haaretz_maver-vati-hell-en.html (07.03.06)
specific political stance. As its fields of contestation can range from the world of art to the struggles of the precarious, it can neither be said to signify a specific social class, a subculture, or an ideological platform. What it signifies is rather a social, political and cultural collage of articulations, appropriations, demands and expressions, created by individuals and groups that draw upon the strategies of culture jamming to produce their contestations. Lending support to Geertz’ (1973) notion that ethnographic research is like trying to read a manuscript, “foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries” (Geertz 1973: 10), my findings lead to a third realisation.

After 15 days of fieldwork, I had gathered numerous narrations of cultural resistance, all of which in some way or another related to the control of democratic public space – but each demanded its own analysis. There was no manner in which I could manage to contextualise and analyse such divergent accounts without reformulating the project. To keep with the questions I wanted to inform I had to focus my research. Recalling the interview I made with Jordi Ariola, I realized that I had to orient my attention to acts of culture jamming resistance that directly respond to, and not only are part of, the dynamics of public space and spectacle. Having made contact with the Vrije Ruimte group, that has utilise culture jamming in many of their campaigns for ‘free space’ in Amsterdam (amongst them the Trojan horse action described in the introductory chapter), I decided to make the Netherlands my final destination.

Amsterdam and EasyCity

Amsterdam is a special city when it comes to activism. Its largely liberal ideas, and a unique law system that actually protects squatters, have attracted an international activist scene. Squatted film clubs, pubs, restaurants, and even a spa make out its social fabric, and accommodate a wide range of groups that belong both within the alter-globalisation ‘movement of movements’, and that work locally. In the sense of a European activist scene it is one of few nodal points, and the Amsterdam activism is often taken as a forerunner to wider trends. Within this landscape, Vrije Ruimte makes out a local group with good connections to politicians, to the traditional activist squatter scene, and to groups and individuals that are more culturally attuned. Its in-between role is not overly accepted, as some of the squatters see their cooperation with the council to establish ‘free spaces’ as an aid to gentrification policies (Amsterdam squatter 1 Interview 02.02.06). Over the last two years extensive plans to privatise social housing
have been launched, Amsterdam’s place promotions have become more aggressive\(^{30}\), and its most central areas are undergoing rapid processes of gentrification (Utrecht Festival 29.01.06). Following these developments, the relationship between the squatters and the City Council has been worsening. Within this the Vrije Ruimte plays an ambiguous role, sometimes collaborative and sometimes subversive. The easyCity action is an example of the latter, and was carried out with the distinct purpose of illegitimately appropriating a building and taking it off the market. The squatted shop’s lies in the Kinkerstraat shopping-street in a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood of western Amsterdam.

Figure 5: One of the shop’s visitors, listening to a sound installation (photo credit Bas van de Geyn)

As mentioned in the thesis introduction, the easyCity action was instigated by the early morning occupation of a shop locale (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). By afternoon the same day, the space was opened to the public, inviting its visitors to an experience that confronted them with issues that are not part of their usual round of shopping (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). “We squatted a first-floor shop locale on a hot spot in the city to make it easy to get a lot of people and attention, we wanted to make a spectacle”, de Jong explained, “but we also wanted it to have a political content”.

The shop experience was constructed in mainly two ways. Firstly, it functioned as an art exhibition, presenting a large variety of installations that dealt with four

\(^{30}\) http://www.metamute.org/en/Extreme-Makeover (12.01.07)
themes: The city as economic company, the city as control, the city as multicultural, and city senses. These works, Vrije Ruimte initiator de Jong explained, became an important bridge between the activists and the general public.

Styled to attract a large audience, the shop was made out as a branch of the multinational corporation Easy, known in Europe for cheap flights, Internet shops, and car rentals. The services of the company are advertised with terms such as easyCar, easyJet and easyEverything, the logos of the different branches all designed in a striking colour orange with chubby white letters.

Figure 6: The easyCity logo (source: Vrije Ruimte)

Transforming the empty shop into a counterfeit branch of Easy, the action constructed the shop space as a stage of performance. When entering the shop, ‘customers’ were presented to a fictitious travel agency, offering trips to an urban world manufactured by the easyCity enterprise: A fragmented city composed of urban spaces scattered over the landscapes of a fully globalised world. The spaces of easyCity were advertised as an experience of the urban in where all sides of life become the object of consumption: Food, housing, experience, impulse, sex. Upon their closer examination, however, ‘customers’ were presented to the group’s critical engagement with urban developments; “easyCity made the development of public space a subject to discuss, and an inspiring subject for action” (de Jong Interview 01.01.07). Inviting its visitors to an experiential dialogue, the easyCity group drew upon art and performance as a way of approaching the general public.

I was first made aware of the easyCity action by contacts I already had in Amsterdam. My initial contact with the Vrije Ruimte group was made via email, upon which my main respondent, Vincent de Jong, replied. De Jong has been one of the two coordinators of the easyCity action. Throughout the Interrail I kept in contact with both him and other activists in Amsterdam, and made appointments to meet with several of

31 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
them. As my first interview in Amsterdam was with de Jong, I also had the opportunity to discuss the topics raised during the interview with other activists engaging with the same political issues. Most of these are part of the squatter movement and had attended the action as visitors. Participating at an activist festival in Utrecht, a thirty minutes travel by train from Amsterdam, I also got to meet people that belong to other fields of the Amsterdam activist scene and use culture jamming in their work. I have kept in contact with de Jong throughout the process of writing the thesis, and he, with others that have been interviewed or otherwise involved, has had the opportunity to read the present text before its publication. Via him, and the via the easyCity website\(^\text{32}\), I have also been able to approach other participants, of whom two are referred to in the text – the artist Rozalinda Borcila, and the photographer Robin van ‘t Haar.

There are two general weaknesses to the research material gathered. First, I have not had the chance to conduct proper, face-to-face, interviews with any of the participants other than de Jong. This is partly outweighed by having spoken to a number of activists that visited the shop, and my correspondence with Borcila and van ‘t Haar. Also, the statements made by de Jong do, in my opinion, reflect the information I have obtained from other participants and attendants to the action. Yet, as the participants had very different approaches to the action, the analysis would be strengthened by a more extensive exploration of their perspectives. The other weakness to the research is more difficult to ‘get around’. As I did not attend the action myself, I have not been able to get in touch with any of those who were visitors to the shop. These make out approximately one thousand people that were mainly residents of the gentrifying neighbourhood in where the shop is located: “a mixture of newcomers, richer and migrants, old inhabitants complaining about the disappearance of the old structure, and young migrant kids bored with the new infrastructure and commodities in the neighbourhood” (de Jong 01.01.07). Questions as to how the public perceived the action is a ‘screaming silence’ in the analysis, setting quite obvious limits to what it can discuss. In some ways I circumvent this by keeping to questions informed by the material I have. Still, there is probably a whole range of dimensions to the questions I raise that could have been informed differently given knowledge of the ‘visitor’ experience of the shop.

\(\text{32} \) http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
Concluding Remarks

I chose to call this chapter *A History of Research* because I wanted it to reflect that the material presented and analysed in the thesis did not emerge out of some perfectly designed, smoothly executed, project of research. On the contrary, the process of researching urban culture jamming has in many ways been as much a process of learning the practice of research, as it has been of learning the practice of culture jammers. As the above writings reflect, both my approach to the ‘object’ of research, and the orientation of my analysis, was altered throughout the trails of this learning process. Yet, it is my contention that the material gathered meets (qualitative) social sciences criteria of accountability, reflexivity and transparency, and that the ethical standards set by the academic context within which it was gathered have been met.

The understandings produced of culture jamming in the present thesis, build upon my interpretations of an extensive body of secondary material, fieldwork observations and interviews, and conversations. Composed on the two levels of the general and the specific, culture jamming as a resistance strategy, and the easyCity action respectively, my interpretations give meaning to culture jamming as a mode of resistance, and as an event of contestation. Yet, as the former is built on abstractions of the latter, which in turn can only be given meaning that exceeds its descriptive qualities through the abstractions made, these two levels are far from separable, nor even distinguishable, and will together constitute the object of study.

And last, some of the names used in the thesis are the real names of those involved. Initially this was not an intention of mine, as the practices of culture jamming often are carried out in the ‘grey’ zones of law. Most of those I interviewed though, declined when I suggested changing their name with a pseudonym of their own choosing. Though uncomfortable with the idea that anything written here could affect someone negatively, I also find that I must respect this. Since the contestations in question were performed by people who see their subversive use of public space as a right, I have come to the position I should not silence their openness.
Chapter 3 – Culture Jamming

“Do you seriously think that we shall live long enough to see a political revolution? – We, the contemporaries of these Germans?” (Ruge to Marx March 1843 cited in Debord 1994: 129) Explaining the cynicism of his question, posed in a letter to Karl Marx, Arnold Ruge clarified his contentions on the question of political transformation by writing the following,

“My friend, you believe what you want to believe…Let us judge Germany on the basis of its present history – and surely you are not going to object that all its history is falsified, or that all its present life does not reflect the actual state of the people? Read whatever papers you please, and you cannot fail to be convinced that we never stop (and you must concede that the censorship prevents no one from stopping) celebrating the freedom and national happiness that we enjoy…” (Ruge to Marx March 1843 cited in Debord 1994: 129)

Insinuating that revolution would be prevented by the delusions of popular culture, Ruge pointed to the first of two core convictions underlying strategies of cultural resistance: That the power to define the culture of a given place, or community, is one of the very foundations upon which legitimacy to rule over the ‘subjects’ of that culture is achieved (Mitchell 2000, Duncombe 2002, 2007). Yet, rather than assuming the pessimist position of Ruge, advocates of cultural resistance refuse to succumb to notions such as Marx’s ‘false consciousness’ (Marx & Engels 2002), or its twin pessimism expressed in a nostalgic longing for long-lost authenticity (Mitchell 2000). Pointing to the second principle of cultural resistance, that culture, as much as ‘pure’ politics, can be a means of social change, culture jammers claim the grounds for an emancipative potential in popular culture (Duncombe 2002, 2007).

Maintaining this claim, culture jammers manoeuvre between arrogant rejection and popular acceptance of commercial culture, appropriating, co-opting, and transforming the techniques of spectacle into tools for social change (Duncombe 2007). Their ways of constructing this ‘in-between’ path are strategies of resistance that draw on arts33, semiotics34, and direct action35 to subvert manifestations of symbolic power.

33 http://www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
34 www.contrast.org/KG/nett20.htm (16.11.05)
35 www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org (16.11.05)
that are embedded in the different streams of popular culture. The playing field of culture jammers could be any arena in where public discourse is made, upheld, negotiated, and struggled over. It is, however, usually to be found in places characterised by top-down, one-way modes of communication, like the commercial mass media\(^\text{36}\), urban spaces of consumption\(^\text{37}\), and spaces of ‘high’ culture\(^\text{38}\). Refusing the passivity of reception and spectatorship in their encounters with the postmodern ‘cacophony of information’ (Harvey 1990), culture jammers’ resistance is a claim to active, and public, participation\(^\text{39}\).

This chapter presents what could perhaps be described as an assorted genealogy of culture jamming. Tracing a line from the coinage of the term to the multitude of groups and actions it now signifies, the chapter explores the principal forms of communication that jammers draw on, and outlines philosophies of resistance that these may rest upon.

**An Assorted Genealogy**

The term ‘culture jamming’ was conceived in 1984 by the sound-collage band Negativland from San Francisco to describe various forms of media sabotage\(^\text{40}\). Though the band itself never took on an active role as media pranksters, activists appropriated the term as a label to their endeavours of media manipulations. Culture jamming was spotlighted in the 1993 July issue of Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, featuring the key-essay *Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping the Empire of Signs*\(^\text{41}\) by the cultural critic and writer Mark Dery. Writing for a predominantly Northern American public, Dery argued tenaciously that the US had become a nation controlled through the television screen, a “TV Democracy”\(^\text{42}\). Dery saw this mode of control, chiefly felt in the realms of journalism and politics, as lamentably evident in the home front’s coverage of the Persian Gulf War. Through Nintendo-like imagery, and an almost total blackout on protest marches, TV channels managed to turn the war into an edible prime-time spectacle, suited for frequent commercial breaks. The culture of television, Dery claimed, was symptomatic for how cultures of consumption had come to dominate the

---

\(\text{36}\) http://adbusters.org/home/ (12.01.06)
\(\text{37}\) http://www.spacehijackers.co.uk/html/manifesto.html (04.07.06)
\(\text{38}\) http://rts.gn.apc.org/ (19.12.06)
\(\text{39}\) http://www.critical-mass.org/10/ (12.01.06)
\(\text{40}\) http://0100101110110111.org/home/darko_maver/index.html (07.03.06)
\(\text{41}\) www.contrast.org/KG/nett20.htm (16.11.05)
\(\text{42}\) http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture_jamming/#000005#more (17.10.04)
public sphere. Following Dery’s contentions, culture jamming arose from a time of an “ever more intrusive, instrumental technoculture whose operant mode is the manufacture of consent through the manipulation of symbols” 43.

The roots of culture jamming are mainly to be found in the Northern America, and amongst media activists (Klein 2000). Examples range from the San Francisco Billboard Liberation Front 44, that have carried out a number of ‘billboard manipulation’ campaigns, to the media prankster Joey Skaggs’ numerous hoaxes performed at the expense of corporate media channels 45, and the Canadian Adbusters Media Foundation whose ad-free magazine Adbusters 46 has been crucial in the development of culture jamming as a media activist practice. Describing the emergent movement of culture jammers, Dery 47 presented an assortment of methods used by these media activists: ‘Subvertising’, ‘billboard banditry’, ‘media hoaxing’ and ‘audio agitprop’. While subvertising points to the production and propagation of manipulated or false ads, often critiquing the company featured 48, billboard banditry points to the similar alteration or eradication of billboard images 49.

Figure 7: Billboard alteration (photo courtesy: Martin Aaserud)

43 http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture_jamming/#000005#more (17.10.04)
44 http://www.billboardliberation.com/ (13.12.06)
45 http://www.joeyskaggs.com/ (13.12.06)
46 http://adbusters.org/the_magazine (13.12.06)
47 http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture_jamming/#000005#more (17.10.04)
48 http://www.anthrobase.com/Txt/N/Nome_D_01.htm (12.01.06)
49 http://www.billboardliberation.com (13.12.06)
Media hoaxing entails often carefully researched, and elaborately staged pranks, seeking to deceive journalists into covering a plot. These are mainly carried out with an aim to undermine the authority of the corporate media, or to promote issues that normally do not receive attention. Subvertising and billboard manipulations are concentrated on visual alterations, and the forms of media hoaxing described by Dery are mainly about sneaking a message into corporate media channels. Audio agitprop is somewhat different in that it foremost challenges copyright law, utilizing digital samplers to de- and re-construct media images. In all cases, if successful, the media images are distorted, disrupted and dislocated (Howarth 2004). In an interview by Dery for Adbusters, media critic and professor Stewart Ewan describes this activism as both a reaction, and as an alternative:

“not only are mass media images intrusive into nearly every second of people's waking lives but... increasingly, these images are penetrating into the most intimate recesses of people's inner lives, their fantasy realms of desire and fear. We need to recognize that media images, increasingly, are sales pitches; that, rather than merely depicting or entertaining, they are instrumental in the sense that they are designed to gather audiences, designed to motivate certain kinds of behaviour. So not only is our culture a pervasive media culture but... a media culture which has at its heart ideas of behaviour modification, and I would say, to some extent, social control...Culture jammers draw upon the given facts of our society, this cacophony of fragmentary media images, to describe things as they are. But I think that at the heart of their reassemblings is the hope that there could be another kind of world, a world where rather than incoherence there could be coherence, rather than a devaluation of the human in favour of the commodity there could be an understanding of the commodity in the service of the human.”

Turning to the issue of culture jamming as practice, Dery posed the subsequent questions: “How to box with shadows? In other words, what shape does an engaged politics assume in an empire of signs?” Was it to be found in the semiological guerrilla warfare imagined by Umberto Eco? Who envisions the right to control communication as reclaimed by groups of communication guerrillas, restoring “a critical dimension to passive reception”? Or should it have a distinct shape at all, when the formations resisted are driven by the cooptation of culture by capitalism, giving it a continually changing character? Unable to counter the enormous amount of resources

50 http://www.joeyskaggs.com (13.12.06)
51 http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture_jamming/#000005#more (17.10.04)
52 http://www.sniggle.net/theory.php (16.11.05)
53 http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture_jamming/#000005#more (17.10.04)
54 http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture_jamming/#000005#more (17.10.04)
invested in logos, the selling of styles to live by, or producing political mass-media spectacles, jammers had to find ways of penetrating the one-way streams of communication they were criticising (Lasn 1999). Still, as one of their main contentions was to remove themselves from the role of the spectator in the direction of participation, culture jammers also had to find ways of communicating that did not reinforce the general public as a spectatorship. Rather than appropriating the means with which to send, or the channels of transmission, culture jammers thus began to develop methods aimed at turning the power of communication structures against themselves.

Co-founder of Adbusters, Kalle Lasn (1999), explains this philosophy as a political jiu-jitsu for the masses, using the enemy’s own power to topple it. In No Logo Naomi Klein (2000) argues that this goal is far from achievable by the means of culture jamming. The disruptive elements introduced by jams, she claims, are most certainly deemed to drown in the roar of ads competing against each other. Adding to this, marketers have co-opted subvertising to give their commodities the ‘edge’ feel of rebellion or underground authenticity. Klein’s reaction, when finding logo-jammed t-shirts and stickers for sale on West Broadway in New York, is that what started as a way of talking back at ads has turned into a feeling of total colonisation. It seems, she concludes, that culture jamming became nothing more than “a drop in the ocean” (Klein 2000: 303, my translation).

Coinciding with others who have mounted scepticisms against the belief that one can topple big business by teasing its image, there is much validity to the criticisms Klein makes. Her arguments describe not only the problem of dismantling the masters’ house with the masters’ tools (Mitchell 2000), they also illustrate the precariousness of subcultures, and their exposure to being transformed into a short-lived fashion. Still, her claims fall short with respect to culture jamming as a phenomenon, in Klein’s case by failure of definition. Culture jamming, she contends, is defined by the practice of “parodying advertisements and altering and destroying billboard messages” (Klein 2000: 286, my translation). Including only the most conventional, and often least sophisticated forms of culture jamming, her criticism reaches only so far.

How culture jamming has become more than what it started out as is evident already in Dery’s essay, in which he connects media activism with other forms of creative resistance such as street theatre. One of the more famous groups that has

---

55 www.contrast.org/KG/nett20.htm (16.11.05)
56 http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content_1000/ent.htm (12.01.06)
57 http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture_jamming/#000005#more (17.10.04)
performed its jams drawing on this intersection is The Yes Men\textsuperscript{58}, a group of culture jamming activists who practice ‘identity correction’ by pretending to be powerful people representing organizations such as the World Bank. An example of their endeavours is how they pulled a rather expensive prank on Dow Chemicals, owner of Union Carbide, and therefore responsible of the Bhopal chemical disaster that killed thousands and left over 120,000 requiring lifelong care\textsuperscript{59}. Performing the role of ‘Jude Finisterra’, a Dow Chemical spokesman on BBC world, Yes Man Andy Bichlbaum, announced a plan to raise $12 billion by liquidating Union Carbide. This money, Finisterra announced, was to pay for medical care, cleaning up the Bhopal site, and fund research on potentially harmful Dow products. Dow stocks dropped, and after two hours of wide coverage, Dow issued a press release denying the statement. Other examples of how culture jamming has expanded both in terms of fields of contestation, and methods applied, are the New York Surveillance Camera Players\textsuperscript{60}, who perform pantomime theatre in front of surveillance cameras, the Spanish Yo Mango group that made a brand for stolen goods (Yo Mango activist Interview 15.01.06), the Milan Chainworkers (Chainworkers activist Interview 21.01.06), 0100101110101101.ORG in Bologna (Mattes Interview 23.01.06). Or the London Space Hijackers’ numerous public space actions (Space Hijackers agent Interview 21.09.07), like the one featured beneath:

![Figure 8 Mobilisation for anti-war demonstrations autumn 2006, London (source: Space Hijackers)](image_url)

\textsuperscript{58} http://www.theyesmen.org/hijinks/dow/(12.01.06)
\textsuperscript{59} http://www.studentsforbhopal.org/WhatHappened.htm#KeyFacts (12.01.06)
\textsuperscript{60} http://www.notbored.org/sep.html (16.11.05)
Traces of culture jamming can also be found in the alter-globalisation ‘movement of movements’ that has dominated the radical political landscape since the massive Seattle demonstrations in 1999. Emphasising play, enjoyment and fun in political action, and translating this into a rejuvenation of carnival, these movements have emphasised how jamming the frames of their cultural context can make their struggle an inclusive, creative, and successful one.

“The festive atmosphere of a great action could be bridged with the transformative aspirations of the carnival. Beyond the status-quo ceremony of the usual protest, the carnival could create the liminal in between spaces, the communitas generated within rituals capable of shifting power hierarchies...Within this festive revolutionary theatre, progressive elements of political change would be linked with notions of social renewal. Moving spectators to join the fun, to become part of the concrete action of social change. Spectacle is linked to practical shifts in people’s lives (Ornstein, 1998, xiv-xv, 6-9). Party as protest thus becomes an invitation to a possibility.”  

For many European activists, the value of this statement was clearly demonstrated by the first day of action during the Prague demonstrations in 2000, teaching them the lesson that it is not so easy to stop a lady dressed in pink (personal observation). In collaboration with International Noise Conspiracy, the samba band that had its ‘breakthrough’ in streets of Seattle in 1999 (We are Everywhere), the British ‘pink and silver block’ was one of the three main marches of the demonstration. Elsewhere in the city the so-called ‘black block’, the Italian Ya Basta, and other protestors were (both with and against their will) engaged in direct confrontations with Czech riot police. People in pink probably seemed like the last of worries to a police force of roughly 11,000. Equipped with water-canon cars and gas, the riot-police was close to loosing control over the city to the insistent masses pressing towards the convention centre hosting the meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Meanwhile the pink and silver block danced its way through narrow streets, around and eventually through police blockades. So, while commercial media concentrated on footage of masked, stone throwing young men, one photo of triumph dominated the independent media channels: A lady in pink, feather-duster in her hand, silver gas mask attached to her hip, riot police behind her, well inside the blockades.

61 http://slash.autonomedia.org/analysis (16.02.06)
There are dimensions to the creative resistance of this ‘movement of movements’ that exceed what culture jamming is about, and there are sides to culture jamming that are not evident in carnivallistic movements like the Pink and Silver Block, Reclaim the Streets, and the Rebel Clown Army. Yet, what both the evolution of culture jamming and the creative resistance of the alter-globalisation movement demonstrates, is that the powers and pleasures of culture are not only becoming a tactical tool of political struggle, but also the stake in counter hegemonic struggles. In central activist scenes across Europe and North America disrupting, dislocating, and resettling the frames of dominant culture is now integral to activist strategies. By my understanding, culture jamming is thus, a phenomenon of fragments, sometimes merged with other resistance strategies, other times not, and should perhaps, in the name of clarity, be given new, more specific names. This, however, will not be a project of the present text. Rather, I delineate the culture jammer mode of resistance through an outline of its models of communication, and their co-respondent philosophies of resistance.

---

63 http://rts.gn.apc.org/ (19.12.06)
64 http://clownarmy.org/ (15.02.06)
65 http://216.122.222.203/pugwash/duncombe_2004_1.asp (04.07.06)
Communicative Play

When asked about the origin of culture jamming the creator of the extensive prankster website www.sniggle.net answered as following:

“God drops a tree in Eden, says ‘don’t eat the fruit, kids, cause that’ll give you the knowledge of good & evil, and you wouldn’t want that’. Ulysses yells over the walls at Troy — ‘okay, okay, we give up. No hard feelings, okay? Here, have this big wooden horse. We’re outta here’. Trickster sneaks up on the Goddesses at the party and tosses a golden apple toward them engraved with the message ‘a gift for the prettiest one’.”

Far from providing a history of subversive humour, irony, and play the point made is still obvious: The political history of culture is probably as old as relations of power, domination, and subjugation (Duncombe 2002). And likewise, the element of jamming is all but novel to the cultural mêlée. Its sources of inspiration can be as different as Greek mythology (de Jong Interview 27.01.06), Medieval and Renaissance carnivals, the Situationist and Dadaist avant-garde, Russian Samizdat, or hippie street theatre.

Yet, as the likeness of these examples is limited to a set of general common denominators, culture jamming is also a component to this continuum that inhabits its own, distinct qualities. These are primarily expressed through its communication strategies, and by how culture jammers aim to subvert hegemonic discourses by jamming their cultural markers.

The construction of a jam is a multi-staged process aimed at producing multi-layered expressions. Its outset could be the experience of a problem, a sense of disagreement, or provocation producing contestations. The ‘materialisation’ of these contestations originates in the identification of symbols, signs, and images expressive of what is experienced as inequitable. It is in the critical interpretation of how these constitute our cultural frames that the ‘precondition’ of culture jamming is to be found. They represent the ‘raw material’ of the jam. The criticisms produced might as well point to the nature of the cultures they are entrenched in, to goals achieved by

66 http://www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
67 http://clownarmy.org/about/about.html (12.01.06)
http://rts.gn.apc.org/ (19.12.06)
http://216.122.222.203/pugwash/duncombe_2004_1.asp (04.07.06)
68 www.contrast.org/KG/nett20.htm (16.11.05)
69 http://www.markdery.com/archives/books/culture_jamming/#000005#more (17.10.04)
70 http://www.sniggle.net/theory.php (16.11.05)
71 http://sniggle.net/Manifesti/notes.php (16.11.05)
72 http://01001011110101101.org/texts/haaretz_mave-vati-hell-en.html (07.03.06)
culture as means, or to the very subordination of culture to these goals (Lasn 1999). In the article *Notes on Culture Jamming*, David Cox\(^{73}\) places communicative experimentation at the core of the culture jammer aesthetic. Jammers, Cox claims, conduct a two-way conversation between the cultural expressions they engage with and their worldview to produce manifestations that points to a critique of ‘*consensus reality*’.

“Culture Jamming releases meanings from pieces of the media puzzle and re-transmits them into new contexts where they can run free. It removes from the scene of the crime a film, literary, video or sound work. Lifted from its once fixed intended socio-cultural place and time the culture jammed media particle is made to throw its voice from the past into the present. Secrets can be explicitly revealed, hidden stories uncovered”\(^{74}\).

![Figure 10: Billboard alterations by photocopier techniques (photo courtesy Martin Aaserud)](image)

The act of ‘jamming’ could be described by a number of different verbs – diverting, rerouting, hijacking, embezzling, appropriating, or corrupting (Sadler 1998). The clarity with which the jam can be interpreted varies – an altered billboard being easier to interpret than a Trojan horse making its way up the Amstel. However, jams are seldom straightforward, they aim to provoke critical reflection rather than realisation. Still, non-dependent on jam’s ‘point of arrival’, its ‘points of departure’ are the images, signs and

---

\(^{73}\) http://sniggle.net/Manifesti/notes.php (16.11.05)  
\(^{74}\) http://sniggle.net/Manifesti/notes.php (16.11.05)
symbols that constitute and give meaning to the realities constrained and enabled by power. How jammers move from the latter to the former varies, and cannot be properly captured by abstraction. The four communication strategies ‘noise in the signal’, ‘meme warfare’, ‘guerrilla communication’, and ‘ethical spectacle’ that are presented below, should thus be read as ways of understanding how culture jammers produce their contestations, rather than fully descriptive of this mode of resistance.

**Noise in the Signal**

As discussed above, the early forms of culture jamming mainly targeted communication channels that dominate the public without being open to it, by criticising the density of advertisements in mass-media, and the commercialisation of public space (Klein 2000). As described earlier in the chapter, one of the most pertinent challenges of culture jammer resistance is to penetrate one-way streams of communication. Culture jamming is not a resistance with aspirations to power, or to exercise an authority over what it contests. It is rather a resistance that seeks empowerment, in the sense that it applies its methods to achieve a power to act. A permanent appropriation and control over communication structures is thus not the objective of jammers’ actions. What culture jammers began to develop were rather methods that “introduce noise to the signal as it passes from transmitter to receiver, encouraging idiosyncratic, unintended interpretations”75. This strategy applies to the abovementioned methods of subvertising, billboard banditry, media hoaxing and audio agitprop76, and to Lasn’s (1999) ‘political jiu-jitsu’. Investing artefacts like ads, newscasts, and polished media images with subversive meanings, the noise strategy seeks to decrypt, and render their seductions impotent77. Still, the noise strategy can also be applied on ‘canvases’ other than those of the mass-media, such as city spaces and social relations, an example being the more subtle ‘black spot’, that simply consists in placing black spots in spaces of one-way, top-down communication78. Street art, installations and performances could also be conceptualised as ‘noise’ as they disturb the norms and values inscribed in, and ordering the spaces they temporally appropriate.

---

75 [http://www.markdery.com/archives/2004/10/culture_jamming_1.html#more](http://www.markdery.com/archives/2004/10/culture_jamming_1.html#more) (17.10.04)
Meme Warfare

In the essay *TRUTH IS A VIRUS: Meme Warfare and the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore)*, Andrew Boyd\(^7\) emphasises how culture jamming also could be utilised in getting a point across, manifesting the signals sent by activists against hegemonic discourse. Boyd explains this using the metaphor of ‘culture viruses’ spreading through the data sphere like biological ones spread through the body or a community. Once attached, the virus injects its hidden agenda in the form of an ideological code, imagined as the conceptual equivalent of the gene – a meme. Like genetic material memes permeate the ways we act and perceive reality. Using this (metaphorical) insight, Boyd contends, is essential to political activists, as they also must initiate the travel of political ideas and ‘action viruses’. As one of the main designers of the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore) campaign, devised to educate the public about campaign finance corruption and economic inequality, Boyd explains how the idea of ‘viral combat’ was integrated:

“It took ingenious “viral design” to get our message through the corporate media's editorial filters and out into the data sphere at large. We built our

\(^7\) http://www.culturejamming101.com/truthisavirus.html (16.11.05)
virus by embedding a threatening idea inside a non-threatening form. The “protein shell” of our virus: “Billionaires for Bush (or Gore).” Our meme, or hidden ideological code: Big Money owns both candidates/parties; both candidates/parties are roughly the same. Elegantly encapsulating the core ideas of the campaign into a funny five-word concept made for a sleek and potent virus… Each component was modular, compact, and self-contained. It could survive in a hostile, unpredictable media environment and like a fractal, still represent the campaign as a whole.”

Using irony’s double edge to “neatly flip between the virus’ outer shell and its inner code”, as Boyd puts it, the campaign managed get passed mass-media filters and reach its two disparate audiences: The corporate media and grass-root activists.

**Guerrilla Communication**

These communication models are different in terms of ends sought, and how they describe culture jamming: However, they also share some features, as they signify modes of communication through which the contents of hegemonic representations are altered. The distortion created could be that the message in itself has been altered (by noise), or that the relation between the place from which it is sent and the contents of the message in some sense has been dislocated (by insertion of the meme). Irrespectively, if successful, the jam will, have added an element to already existent communication streams that requires interpretation, activating the receiver at the same time as the jammer has reclaimed a space of transmission. This disrupts the authority of the sender without subordinating it to the receiver: It rather complicates it through creating an ‘outside’ formulated on the inside of dominant paradigms. A way of conceptualising the above communication strategies is ‘guerrilla communications’, here explained by the German autonome a.f.r.i.k.a groupe:

“Communication guerrilla is about attacking the power-relations that are inscribed into the social organisation of space and time, into rules and manners, into the order of public conduct and discourse. Everywhere in the ‘cultural grammar’ of a society, legitimations and naturalisations of economic, political and cultural power and inequality are inscribed. Everybody has a knowledge of Cultural Grammar - which can be used to cause irritations by distorting the rules of normality. Such irritations have a potential to question seemingly natural aspects of social life. Hidden power relations can be made visible and subverted or deconstructed”.

Rather than focusing on producing rational arguments and facts communicated through traditional political materials, like leaflets, brochures, slogans or banners, guerrilla

---

80 http://www.culturejamming101.com/truthisavirus.html (16.11.05)
81 http://www.contrast.org/KG/nett20.htm (16.11.05)
communication inhabits its own ‘militant’ political position. Conducted in the spaces of social communication, its militancy is different from the typical ‘stone meets shop window’ type of direct action. Guerrilla communicators aim not to destroy the symbolisms of power and control, nor at occupying, or destroying, dominant channels of communication. Their focus is rather on distorting and disfiguring the meanings produced by those in power, and on a continuous exploration of communication processes’ intertwined and obscured paths of senders, codes, and recipients.

Figure 12: A fictitious movie poster parody of the Bush government’s War on Terror (Adbusters Norway Archives, source: unknown)

**Spectacles of Dissent**

The ‘spectacle of dissent’ is somewhat different from the above communication models in that it does aim to create its own spaces of communication. These spaces take the form of spectacle, but are guided by other ideals than the spectacles of commerce, or hegemonic political powers (Duncombe 2007). Seeking to facilitate participation rather

---

82 http://www.contrast.org/KG/nett20.htm (16.11.05)
than persuasion, these spectacles might very well draw upon guerrilla communication, but utilise it foremost as a means to constitute a subversive spectacle rather than causing rifts to hegemonic representations. In *The Manufacture of Dissent: What the Left Can Learn from Las Vegas* Boyd and Duncombe argue how one can understand spectacle as ‘ethical’, open, participatory, and progressive.

“take Rosa Parks. The popular story of Rosa Parks is of a woman who acts from her own heart, spontaneously, and changes the world. She is the Everywoman who hits that very American “I’m not going to take it anymore” breaking point. It’s a moment of magical transformation, the Camusian moment of rebellion, the refusal, the “No!” that also becomes a “Yes!”, affirming her dignity and humanity—and ours. It is also, as any serious student of the civil rights movement knows, a lie, a fiction, a deliberately perpetuated mythology. Rosa Parks was not acting spontaneously. She was a professional organizer trained at the Highlander Institute, a secretary of the local chapter of the NAACP who was deliberately selected to perform this opening act of the bus boycott. But what’s more important, the history lesson or the myth?”

Using the example of Rosa Parks Boyd and Duncombe argue the possibility of an ethical spectacle that honours egalitarian ideals whilst manufacturing dissent through the propaganda of ‘truth’. What is there to learn from Las Vegas? That a fake is phoney only if people believe that it is real. The ethical spectacle then is one that refers its true character, embodying symbolic power but letting the reader in on how it is produced (Duncombe 2007). The ethical spectacle will be further investigated in chapter seven.

The above strategies of creating culture jams are different in form, but share a number of key characteristics. They value the ways of play, humour, and irony over that of rational argument, and seek to divert streams of top-down, one-way communication, popularising sending as well as receiving. By these means, culture jams aim not to replace one argument with the other. The underlying assumption is rather that making the audience ‘see through the illusion’ can create a political consequence. Still, this is implicit rather than explicit in the jam itself. Playing on H.C. Anderson’s tale about the emperor’s new clothes, culture jamming can in some sense be conceived as a ‘pointing out’, in the manner of the child’s exclamation of the emperor’s nudity.

The Webmaster of sniggle.net explains this process as using “the weak points in our epistemological filters” to “cut through the invisible ideology of consensus reality

---

83 http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org (16.11.05)
84 http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org (16.11.05)
85 http://www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
86 http://www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
to demonstrate the reality behind it, without resorting to additional ideology.”

The ‘pranks’ utilised to produce this disruption, master of media hoaxing Joey Skaggs claims,

“Camouflage the sting of deeper, more critical denotations, such as their direct challenge to all verbal and behavioural routines and their undermining of the sovereign authority of words, language, visual images, and social conventions in general… Pranks are the deadly enemy of reality. And ‘reality’ — its description and limitation — has always been the supreme control trick used by a society to subdue the lust for freedom latent in its citizens.”

With the jam as a means, culture jammers enter discursive struggles in which closure to certain options is sought. The aim could be to make place in public discourse for subversive viewpoints. Or, it could simply be to demonstrate the contingency of apparently objective, or naturalised, versions of ‘reality’. The multiplicity sought in the jam as expression reflects a widely shared conception amongst jammers: It is through the uncontrolled dynamism created through dislocation that the desired political consequence should be produced (Howarth 2004). Ideally the jam shows, but tells not. This contention reflects a shared conception amongst jammers that is perhaps understated in this account. Namely, that the passivity created by the mass media’s top-down communication, or by political elite spectacles, is one of the greatest hindrances to political change (Duncombe 2002, 2007). Still, this contention does not translate into an agenda of awakening the masses. What it translates into, rather, is a program of participation and active public citizenship in which the culture jammer activist is only to play the role of the instigator:

“Power relations have a tendency to appear normal, even natural and certainly inevitable. They are inscribed into the rules of everyday life. Communication guerrillas want to create those short and shimmering moments of confusion and distortion, moments that tell us that everything could be completely different: a fragmented utopia as a seed of change. Against a symbolic order of western capitalist societies which is built around discourses of rationality and rational conduct, guerrilla communication relies on the powerful possibility of expressing a fundamental critique through the non-verbal, paradoxical, mythical.”

87 http://www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
88 http://www.joeyskaggs.com/html/manif/index.html (16.11.05)
89 http://www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
90 http://www.contrast.org (16.11.05, my emphasis)
Conclusion

Culture jamming is a mode of resistance that arose in response to how spaces of public discourse formation are structured\(^91\). Experiencing these as ordered in ways that devalue the citizen in favour of the consumer\(^92\), culture jammers began to see how the extended place of mass-media imagery had come to occupy the spaces of, and also actively exclude, unpleasant political dispute\(^93\). The resistance strategies that grew out from this analysis were primarily seeking to remake spaces of mass-communication into spaces of public dialogue, negotiation, and conflict. Gradually, this has evolved into numerous resistance formations, representing what could perhaps be described as a ‘movement of micro movements’\(^94\), containing a multiplicity of strategies, goals and expressions.

As argued in chapter three, this formation of a resistance strategy cannot be ascribed to a specific set of political cases, fields, actors, or classes. Yet, it can be delineated from other resistance formations in terms of its communication strategies and what these aim to achieve. Culture jamming is a mode of resistance that aspires to open settled political and cultural meanings to contestation\(^95\). It rejects rational argument as strategy, and insists on the power that resides in the symbolic orders created and upheld by force (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999). Making ‘reality consensuses’ their primary target of resistance\(^96\), the culture jammer practice is one of critical interpretation, creative performance, and intended dislocation of discursive structures (Howarth 2004).

In terms of outcome, it can achieve the temporal establishment of alternative frames of interpretation and understanding (Duncombe 2002). And through this, it aims to open for the thinking and formulation of alternatives to our shared conception of the how things are, and should be. What the jam does not provide, given that it adheres to the principle of participation over spectatorship, is an alternative to be thought. The jam, if successful, does not absolve the hegemony it contests in order to insert another order in its place. What it aims at is, rather, to confront hegemonic formations with the understandings and possibilities they exclude (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Ideally, culture jamming is not a strategy of resistance employed in order to replace power. Instead, it

---

\(^{91}\) http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/CultureJamming.htm (12.01.06)
\(^{92}\) http://www.sniggle.net/theory.php (16.11.05)
\(^{93}\) http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org (16.11.05)
http://www.markdery.com/archives/2004/10/culture_jamming_1.html#more (17.10.04)
\(^{94}\) http://www.culturejamming101.com/truthisavirus.html (16.11.05)
\(^{95}\) http://www.contrast.org (16.11.05)
http://www.joeyskaggs.com/html/manif/index.html (16.11.05)
http://sniggle.net/Manifesti/notes.php (16.11.05)
http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org (16.11.05)
http://www.culturejamming101.com/truthisavirus.html (16.11.05)
\(^{96}\) http://sniggle.net/Manifesti/notes.php (16.11.05)
aims to create the grounds upon which cultural and political formations can be fostered without reproducing a place of power (Newman 2001). There is thus an open-ended nature to culture jamming. This is not to say that culture jammers merely practice a resistance against, without engaging in struggles for social change. What it implies though is a way of achieving change that demands popular participation – if the public does not respond to the jam it will become nothing more than what Klein (2000) describes as ‘a drop in the ocean’. A feeling that somehow is implied in the beneath culture jam,

Equation 1: A widely circulated culture jam (Adbusters Norway archives, source unknown)
Chapter 4 – Writing Worlds

There are three questions that should be settled before approaching the thesis’ two questions of research: How should culture jammers’ resistance be understood in terms of relations to hegemonic forces? What is the relation between the cultural resistance of jammers and the political struggles of which they are part? And, how should we understand public space as a ground and object of resistance? These are widely debated questions, and their answers are crucial to how abstractions are made and thought throughout the analysis (Duncombe 2002, Mitchell 2003, Critchley & Marchart 2004).

Navigating between the positions available entails both closing and opening analysis to a number of dimensions that are determinate with respect to how the thesis’ questions of research are posed, and sought answered (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999). The constitution of social phenomena as ‘objects’ of research (Katz 1992), the manners through which they are researched (Kvale 2001), and eventually how these are analysed and presented in writing (Barnes & Duncan 1991), entail acts of representation that are far removed from being mere reflections of the world (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Barker 2003): Rather than put into writing reflections of a ‘pure’, or ‘true’, social world, social scientists ‘write’ their worlds (Barnes & Duncan 1991). Approaches to the dilemmas this confronts science with range from inquiries into the ontological and epistemological status of knowledge, to discussions of reflexivity, and investigations into the (rhetorical) language-bodies of fields. I do by no means aspire to answer questions of this sort here, nor to account for the extensive literature produced through the attempts of others. The objective of the present chapter is rather to present the abstractions through which I think and write the ‘world’ of the present text. The outline takes issue with the three questions posed above, and explains the thesis’ understandings of the dynamics of contestation and dominance, of cultural resistance, and of public space as a grounds and object of resistance.

Dominance and Contestation

The thesis’ principal theoretical framework is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s extensive theory on discourse and hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Critchley & Marchart 2004). Using Laclau and Mouffe’s theory as a foundation to my analysis I take a standpoint that lies in the ontology of their theory, placing the thesis well inside the confines and potentials of post-structuralist (and post-Marxist) thought. The primary
line of thought in Laclau and Mouffe’s theory is that the meanings of social phenomena never are finished or total. The content given to signifiers of any kind – democracy, nationality, human rights – is thus contingent: Possible, but not necessary. The task of the analyst then is to unmask how actors seek to establish given meanings of given concepts – ‘liberal’ democracy, nationality ‘by birth’, the ‘UN’ human rights – as objective, naturalised, and self-evident (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999). As my analysis is orientated towards contestation the outline presented here emphasises how Laclau and Mouffe (1985) understand the dynamics through which specific discourses achieve hegemony, and the grounds upon which these can be contested.

Articulation

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) sustain their concept of hegemony on the practice of articulation, a concept derived from a deconstructive reading of what they conceive as the original Althusserian formulation of overdetermination. Stating that the logic of overdetermination is to be found “through the critique of every type of fixity, through an affirmation of the incomplete, open and politically negotiable character of every identity” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:104), they define articulation as

“any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call moments. By contrast, we will call any element any difference that is not articulated. “(Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 105)

Thus, in an articulated discursive totality, every element has been reduced to a moment of that totality. In this reduction all but one of the element’s meanings have been excluded, and the moment’s relation to other moments in the discourse has been determined. Privileged discourse points in this partial fixation are ‘nodal points’, while the status of the elements, “incapable of being wholly articulated to a discursive chain” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 113), is that of ‘floating signifiers’. Given that the practice of articulation entails the exclusion of meaning, Laclau and Mouffe argue, discourse can never be final, and every discursive totality has an incomplete character: The discourse itself exists only as “a partial limitation of a ‘surplus of meaning’ which subverts it” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 111).

A central contention to this thesis is that there lies a slowness in ‘objectified’ structures, which stops us, despite all structures being contingent, to think independently of them (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999). We always depend upon specific
structures to be able to conceive of the world as meaningful. Seeing power as upholding the naturalised notions that make the social world understandable for us, Laclau and Mouffe adopt Michel Foucault’s notion that, as well as repressive, power is productive: It is power that creates knowledge, identity and relations between individuals and groups (Barker 2003). Culture jammers’ ‘consensus reality’ disruptions could, explained in these terms, be seen as a form of resistance that relies upon destabilising ‘moments’ so that they assume the open, contestable status of a ‘floating signifier’, disrupting not only the meaning of signifiers but also their relations to the overall discursive structure of which they are part.

**Universality**

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) explain how a consensus on ‘reality’ is manifested, and provides us with notions of what is natural and self-evident, through a reformulation of the concept of universality. Their starting point is a deconstructive reading of Marxism, rejecting its positioning of the working class as the one, universal social agent. Insisting on the ‘radically open character’ of the social, they state that the idea of the universal as existing a priori of the particular must be abandoned. Still, they also recognise that for the social and political to be constituted, a notion of universality is indispensable: Meanings common to different social subjects could simply not be established without universal reference.

“For, even though impossible, this remains a horizon which, given the absence of articulation between social relations, is necessary in order to prevent an implosion of the social and an absence of any common point of reference” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 188).

The comprehension that there can be no politics, no society, nor democracy, without universal reference, has led Laclau to the task of reformulating the concept (Gasché 2004). Reordering the relation between the universal and particular (Laclau 2004), Laclau’s reformulation of universality entails “a radical mutation that, while maintaining the double reference to the universal and particular, entirely transforms the logic of their articulation” (Laclau cited in Gasché 2004: 22). This disbands the universal as the underlying and explaining principle of the particular, and establishes it as a pragmatic construction, or a contingent historical product (Gasché 2004). The universal in Laclau’s approach is thus not a philosophical concept, nor is it opposed to the particular (Laclau 2004). The universal and particular are rather possibilities internal to a discursive structure. Articulating the universal in ways that binds it to the particular
(or vice versa) thus represents a real move constitutive of social and political life (Gasché 2004). Universality, Laclau concludes, “is not a conceptual order under which events should be subsumed” (Laclau 2004: 283); it is rather an event in which a series of particular differences are universalised through equivalent inscription.

These differences will nevertheless always seek to negate the contingency of their own universality, and ground themselves as objective, natural conceptualisations of the world (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999). This principal exclusion of alternative possibilities is in Laclau and Mouffe’s framework conceptualised as manifestations of ‘power’, distinct from ‘force’ in that the latter refers to the suppression of virtual present possibilities.

**Hegemony**

Insisting on the incompleteness inherent to any structure, Laclau and Mouffe explain how decisions are taken on such an undecidable terrain through the theory of hegemony (Critchley & Marchart 2004). Hegemonic construction takes place through the complex dialectic between particularity and universality, binding different elements to each other by articulating their equality (Laclau 2004). What is established are ‘chains of equivalence’ (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999). A hegemonic project can thus be understood as the construction and stabilisation of systems of meaning (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), in which particular elements bound to privileged discourse points (nodal points or empty signifiers) assume the task of universal representation (Miller 2004). Empty signifiers and nodal points have the same referents, the distinction is that the ‘nodal point’ “makes allusions to the articulating function, while its empty character points in the direction of its universal signification” (Laclau 2004). Hegemony then, due to the function of universalism embedded in the empty signifier, can be understood as “the effort to discursively construct out of a terrain of differences the ‘historical block’ of a specific hegemonic formation” (Critchley & Marchart 2004: 4). Hegemony resembles discourse, in that both concepts speak of a framing, or locking of elements in moments. But in opposition to discourse, *hegemonic interventions lock across discourses that are in an antagonistic relationship to each other* (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999). The result, if the hegemonic intervention is successful, is an established hegemonic discourse, a new locking of meaning.

To grasp the full implications of this argument, however, Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) distinctive definition of antagonism must be taken into account. Against notions
that portray antagonism as a conflict between social agents with fully constituted identities and interests (Howarth 2004), Laclau and Mouffe state that:

“in the case of antagonism … the presence of the ‘Other’ prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution… antagonism constitutes the limits of every objectivity, which is revealed as partial and precarious objectification” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 125).

Antagonism, as defined by Laclau and Mouffe, and applied in the thesis, thus describes a situation in which ‘realities’ compete; they cannot be articulated within one coherent worldview.

**Cultural resistance**

Clowns can relate forbidden tales⁹⁷, a pretty masque allows the play of identities (Notes from Nowhere 2003), and the times of carnival are times of spontaneity (Bakhtin 2002). But are these moments of resistance? And can resistance, as James C. Scott (2002, Duncombe 2002) proposes, be found in the subdued, yet subversive, relation between Malay peasants and landowners; expressed as grumbling, gossip, laughter, laziness, sabotage and deliberate stupidity? Yes, Scott concludes, this represents an everyday resistance against the psychic and material superiority of landowners; a deduction that has lead to extended debate (Scott 2002, Scott 2005). The resistance Scott describes has been written off as a valve for motivations that build up to the ‘real’ resistance of open confrontations, and as simply an everyday issue far removed from the spaces in which power can be surmounted. A similar argument to Scott’s is presented in Robin D.G. Kelley’s (2002) account of working amongst black and Chicano youth in a McDonalds restaurant in Los Angeles. Kelley argued that to recognise their foolery and play as resistance, one must look beyond trade union pronouncements, political institutions and organised social movements.

“what we fought for is a crucial part of the overall story; the terrain was often cultural, centred on identity, dignity and fun. We tried to turn work into pleasure, to turn our bodies into instruments of pleasure. Generational and cultural specificity had a good deal to do with our unique forms of resistance, but a lot of our actions were linked directly to the labour process, gender convictions, and our class status (Kelley 2002: 98)”.

⁹⁷ http://clownarmy.org/rebelclowning/rebel.html (14.07.06)
The above debates relate to the manifold questions raised with reference to the political dimensions of cultural resistance. Should one seek to identify the political exclusively in the spaces of governments, related organizations, and ballot boxes? Or, can it, as Bakhtin (2002) argues, reside in laughter? In peasant laziness and gossip (Scott 2002)? Should the teen-age rebel workers of McDonald’s be recognised as political agents (Kelley 2002)? In other words, are cultural struggles political struggles?

This question refers to an expansive, and by no means settled, dispute over ‘culture’ as concept, and over how it is related to power (Williams 2002, Mitchell 2000, Duncombe 2002). In Keywords Raymond Williams (2002) explains the concept’s complexity through its long and complicated history. Born out of the Latin word ‘cultura’, and having travelled through the writings of various German, British and French intellectuals, all infusing it with their politics throughout the 17th and 18th century, ‘culture’ gained multiple meanings. By the 18th century the word was being put into use in discussions over civilization. According to Williams, it is along this line of reference that dominant interpretations of ‘culture’ in modern sciences have to be traced. A trajectory that is further complicated by the centrality of ‘culture’ to concepts in several distinct disciplines promoting numerous discrete and incompatible systems of thought.

In contemporary times the word inhibits at least three distinct, if not discrete, meanings. First, it is a process of cultivation and growth, second, a thing, a product, an artwork. Third, it is understood as a framework describing patterns of living and ways of understanding. While it is the latter that will be given meaning in this paper, can it not be fully separated from the other two; the meanings overlap.

How are cultural frameworks constituted? Or, how does culture become? Again multiple positions are available, ranging from the Marxist view that culture is nothing but an instrument of ruling classes to claims to the actor’s total autonomy (Storey 1999, Benjamin 2002, Gramsci 2002, Marx & Engels 2002, Barker 2003). Though these writings represent a number of different positions, in some manner or other, they all question the nature of dominance and the relation between hegemonic political-economical formations and culture. The Marxist cultural geographer Don Mitchell (2000) argues a position that allows an eclectic approach, in which both relations of power and agency is emphasised. The basis of Mitchell’s theory is a claim stating that culture as an ontological thing neither exists, nor represents an identifiable process. What does exist, he says, is a very powerful idea about culture, that developed “under specific historical conditions and was later broadened as a means of explaining material
differences, social order, and relations of power” (Mitchell 2000: 75). Culture in Mitchell’s (2000, 2003) framework cannot be representative of a whole society, because to define the culture of a place, or of a people, is impossible without excluding sides of it. Yet, he says, this does not mean that a culture cannot be represented as representative. The point is that someone must make claims to its definition. How a particular notion of culture can achieve objectification, and be conceived of as natural, can thus be explicated as the exclusion of conflicting notions (Mitchell 2000). Definitions of culture are hence closely bound to relations of power (Laclau & Mouffe 1985); as it is the sphere in which the signs, symbols and images that mark and give meaning to power are produced (Knox 1993, Bourdieu 1995, Zukin 1995), culture can be decisive in terms of determining access to resources, belonging, and rights (Mitchell 2003), Moving along these lines of argument I hold with Duncombe (2002) that:

“Both the culture we enjoy and the culture in which we live provide us with ideas of how things are and how they should be, frameworks through which to interpret reality and possibility. They help us account for the past, make sense of the present and dream of the future. Culture can be, and is, used as a means of social control. More effective than any army is a shared conception that the way things are is the way things should be. The powers-that-be don’t remain in power by convincing us that they are the answer, but rather that there is no other solution. But culture can be, and is, used as a means of resistance, a place to formulate other solutions. In order to strive for change, you must first imagine it, and culture is the repository of imagination” (Duncombe 2002: 35).

Drawing on these positions I maintain that acts of cultural obstructiveness are political: By thinking and acting through culture, either reinforcing its dominance, or challenging and undermining it, our cultural practices are political.

Still, I do not take the position that cultural resistance should be seen as equal to, or as an alternative to, political resistance. In that it is cultural, it is a resistance that resides within other dynamics, and draws upon other resources than ‘purely’ political advocacy (Duncombe 2002). The manipulation of symbols, exploitation of memories, and the invocation of myths and fantasies are the resources of cultural resistance, and this fabric is crucial to how it should be seen as related to the fields of politics. Being cultural it is a resistance that engages with patterns of living, and with ways of understanding and giving meaning to our lives and surroundings (Williams 2002). Cultural resistance is therefore always, directly or indirectly, a resistance constituted in the realm between politics of life and of power constellations (Bourdieu 1991).
Expressions and acts of cultural resistance can thus be telling both of positions taken against the latter and desires and passions of the former.

**Democratic Contestation**

A delineation of by what parameters the ‘democratic condition’ of a given place or community should be evaluated is far from an easy task, nor could it be performed in a politically neutral manner. Definitions of democracy range from formalistic understandings that emphasise representational government, and elective procedures by the Western liberal democratic model, to more direct, participatory forms of democracy, stressing social justice issues (Grugel 2002). Though many of these factors are emphasised in the subsequent analysis, the concepts by which I have chosen to evaluate the democratic function of cities are of a different character.

In both the writings of Laclau (Dyrberg 2004) and Mouffe (2005), the question of politics is approached through a primer distinction between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’. This differentiation draws on Heidegger’s philosophical distinction between the concepts, respectively referring to the levels of the ontic and the ontological. ‘The political’ Mouffe claims, must be seen as “a space of power, conflict and antagonism” (Mouffe 2005: 9), and as the dimension of antagonism that is constitutive of human societies. ‘Politics’ on the other hand, refers to the manifold practices and institutions ordering the conflicts of human coexistence. Laclau words this distinction in a somewhat different way, stating that while ‘the political’ refers to the terrain in which articulations take place, ‘politics’ represent the structuring of articulations (Dyrberg 2004).

Following the above definitions, ‘the political’ connotes the formulation of political demarcations, whilst ‘politics’ refer to how they are embedded (Mouffe 2005). Outcomes of the interrelated struggles to define ‘the political’ and structure ‘politics’, thus have consequences in terms of which issues are framed as politically contestable, and for the consequentiality of contestation. Their definition does in other words speak to the *reach* of political engagement; of what it concerns, whom it concerns, and their power to execute their decisions. Additionally, does defining the ‘the political’ also concern the *depth* of political struggles, in terms of what levels of politics are available to contestation. An open, democratic discourse on ‘the political’ would thus not only allow for contestations over the outcomes of politics. It would also permit conflicts over which issues that should be open to political dispute, and how these struggles and negotiations should take place. Returning briefly to the case of culture jammers, their
delineation from dominant modes structuring politics and culture can now be seen as articulations regarding the ontological level of ‘the political’. The expressions of these articulations, in culture jammers’ alternative forms of organising and aims to produce autonomous spaces, concern the ontic level of ‘politics’.

The uncertain boundaries of ‘the political’ and ‘politics’ reflect what Claude Lefort describes as the disappearance of social certainty with democracy (Deutsche 1996). In Lefort’s view did the French revolution’s ‘Declaration of the Rights of Men’, through which power was shifted from the king to the people, inaugurate a radical transformation of society, dissolving any certainty about the foundations of social life. Because, as Deutsche explains in her account of Lefort’s theory, “under the monarchy, power was embodied in the person of the king who, in turn, incarnated the power of the state. But the power possessed by king and state ultimately derived from a transcendent source – God, Supreme Justice, or Reason” (Deutsche 1996: 273). This transcendent source also made out the absolute basis of society, a foundation upon which certain meaning and unity could be assigned to ‘the people’.

This external force to which state power was referred was dissolved through the democratic revolution, also depriving ‘the people’ of their substantial unity. Where power derives its legitimacy from thus becomes what Lefort calls “the image of an empty place” (Lefort cited in Deutsche 1996: 273). Democracy, when it abolishes the external referent of power, and instead refers it to society, does as such have a difficulty at its core: The power that stems from the people belongs to no one. Struggles over ‘the political’ and ‘politics’ do as such represent struggles over the reach and depth available to ‘the people’ in negotiating, and filling the ‘empty place’ of democracy. The ‘empty place’ from which power draws its democratic legitimacy can thus be seen as the grounds that makes contestation possible, as it is this instability that must be drawn upon by ‘the people’ to negotiate the right to ‘fill’ and structure this ‘empty’ place (Deutsche 1996). As explained in chapter 3, culture jamming involves a specific form of cultural resistance defined by ways of contestation that translate elements like play, carnival, and spectacle into the contemporary political context and the cultural frames that holds it. At the core of this strategy is the recognition that disrupting symbolic representations can have political consequences.

These acts, staying within the framework of discourse theory, can be defined as aimed at creating ‘dislocations’. Dislocation describes “those events or crises that cannot be represented within an existing discursive order, as they function to disrupt and destabilize symbolic orders” (Laclau in Howarth 2004: 261). ‘Jamming’ culture can
thus be worded as an act directed at creating those ‘events’ through which ‘the symbolic orders’ of politics and culture are disrupted, and at using this instability to mock ‘consensus reality’. Which in the case of easyCity brings us to what Lefort describes as ‘the invention of the democratic invention’: The public space (Deutsche 1996).

Public space is in Lefort’s perspective “the social space where, in the absence of a foundation, the meaning and unity of the social is negotiated – at once constituted and put to risk” (Deutsche 1996: 274). What foremost characterises democratic public space is that it recognises the legitimacy of debate about what is legitimate and illegitimate; it recognises the right to negotiate the terms of ‘the political’ and ‘politics’ (Mouffe 2004). As the negotiating grounds of democracy, public space represents an institutionalisation of conflict in where rights to participation are given through the recognition of citizenship (Deutsche 1996). Accepting Lefort’s arguments, one must also recognise that public spaces are crucial to democracy, and that the balances of power and control that they manifest reflect the democratic condition of their societies. Which brings us to the final issue to be resolved in this chapter – how should one understand public space as a site and object of resistance?

**Space**

With the purpose of analysing contestation in the context of the neoliberalisation of cities, I begin to answer this question through a delineation, or specification, regarding the condition of contemporary public spaces. An assessment of public space as a ground and object of resistance should be seen in relation to how the hegemonic position of neoliberal urbanism directs the means of producing urban space, and the ends they are meant to serve. I return to the issue of neoliberalism in both part II and III of the thesis, and will for now emphasise how the use of public space within neoliberal urbanism conflicts with ideals of democratic public space. In this respect, the neoliberal direction is expressed in mainly two interrelated processes: Commodification of space through the dominance of consumption discourse and through privatisation (Mitchell 2000, 2003). In the remains of the chapter I discuss how these answer to a different ideal space than that of Lefort (Deutsche 1996), and resting upon Lefebvre’s (1991) theory of space, explain how the production of space will be read in the thesis.

**Public Space**

The production of urban space to meet the ends of commerce is described by Mitchell (2003) as the repression of the ideal of public space by an ideal of ‘pseudo public
space’. The former ideal, which corresponds to that of Lefort, is characterised by aspirations to inclusiveness, and to unmediated public interaction under in absence of powerful institutions. The publicness of this space is understood as a good in itself (Mitchell 2000). The spaces Mitchell describes as pseudo public, on the contrary, are spaces “commodified through and through” (Mitchell 2000: 136). Privately controlled and planned to accommodate the conduct of consumption, they are “premised on a perceived need for order, surveillance and control over the behaviour of the public” (Mitchell 2003: 138). Public space is in this ideal seen as a place of recreation and entertainment, reserved for an ‘appropriate’ public, whom by its ‘appropriate’ consumer identities meet the condition for inclusion: Specific consumer styles come to determine access to participation in the spaces of the city.

While ideals of democratic public spaces are open to the danger of disorder and political struggle, the advocates of pseudo public spaces seek planned, safe, and organised urban spaces, consumed according to a fixed set of rules and norms (Mitchell 2003). Interlocked with the construction of public culture, public spaces are bound by negotiations and struggles over whose culture has the right to representation within given spaces (Zukin 1995). The production of public spaces is thus co-implicated with issues (like gender, class, and race) where social categories are constructed and mobilised to delimit the position of individuals within their culture (Deutsche 1996). The exclusion mechanisms embedded in processes of commodification and privatisation thus have great impact upon both how and for whom public space serves as a grounds of representation. “These spaces of controlled spectacle”, Mitchell contends, “narrow the list of people eligible to form “the public”. Public spaces of spectacle, theatre, and consumption create images that define the public, and these images – backed by law – exclude as “undesirable” the homeless and the political activist. Thus excluded from these public and pseudo public spaces, their legitimacy as members of the public is put in doubt. And thus unrepresented in our images of “the public”, they are banished to a realm outside of politics because they are banished from the gathering places of the city” (Mitchell 2003: 141).

Pseudo public ideals of non-antagonistic space delimit space as political, and render crucial struggles over representation to its outside. The thesis’ understanding of processes by which space can be made to function as a tool of thought and action rest upon Lefebvre’s (1991, 1996) theory of the production of space.
The production of Space

Approaching the easyCity action and the culture jammer mode of resistance through the dynamics of ‘spaces of resistance’ within ‘spaces of commerce and state control’, Lefebvre’s (1991) conceptions of the production of space are instructive. His perspectives provide multiple entries to thinking spatial organisation as a terrain of political struggle, and how hegemonic and counter-hegemonic claims to space are expressed materially and symbolically.

Before examining the concepts of Lefebvre (1991), some comments should be made on how his theory is applied in the text, as his analysis is thoroughly grounded in Marxist thought, and also bears some affinity to modernist thinking. The basis upon which Lefebvre’s theory can be translated into the frameworks of the thesis is primarily his rejection of economism (Lefebvre 1991, 1996). Rather than seeing production as the determining base of social life, and therefore the fundamental objective of social struggle, Lefebvre emphasises social reproduction, and sees meaning as continuously invented by what de Certeau calls ‘the practice of everyday life’ (Deutsche 1996). This notion, which in Lefebvre’s work is translated into the use and undoing of dominated space by those it excludes, opens for the possibility of advancing Lefebvre’s analysis of spatial politics into frameworks that have rejected the essentialism of Marxism.

In his introductory chapter in The Production of Space Lefebvre states the thesis that “(Social) space is a (social) product” (Lefebvre 1991: 26). Lefebvre’s contention that space is produced, that it ‘becomes’ and not simply ‘is’, provides the entry to an analysis that sees space as a social relation. As a social relation, space is constitutive of, as well as constituted by, the social, but not in the rigid sense of determining, reproductive structures. The qualities of space are not essential, but volatile; its ephemeral nature must continually be counteracted by those who aim to retain its stability. From this, neoliberal urbanism should be seen as “a spatially grounded process, in which a wide range of different actors with quite different objectives and agendas interact through a particular configuration of interlocking spatial practices” (Harvey 1989a: 5).

Having established space as produced, Lefebvre breaks up the concept to a dialectic triad conceptualised as spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces. Spatial practice, “embraces production and reproduction and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each formation” (Lefebvre 1991: 33). It refers to the direct experience of observable and objective phenomena: Physical and material flows, transfers, and interactions that find place in and across
spaces (Harvey 1990). Under conditions of advanced capitalism, Lefebvre (1991) contends, spatial practices embody the close association between daily routine, and an urban reality composed of routes and networks that link up the places of work, leisure, and privacy. The second concept, representations of space, stands for the understanding of space that traditionally has been put up against spatial practice, as it emphasises subjectively experienced space, and the exploration of the cognitive, conceptual and symbolical. It is the space of all whom “identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived” (Lefebvre 1991: 38), and includes the signs, signifiers, codes, and knowledge that make possible giving meaning to, understanding, and talking about material spatial practices (Harvey 1990). It is also the space Lefebvre (1991) sees as dominant of any society, precisely because it directs how we think about, analyse, explain, experience, and act in space.

The triangular concept of space appears in Lefebvre’s writings as both theory and as a criticism. The criticism involves a long-standing dichotomy in geography between the objective, empirically observable space that spatial practice refers to, and the subjective, experienced space of representations. The third concept, representational space, is formulated on the grounds of these two, but is not deduced from them. Claiming that the reductionist ‘either-or’ of these two understandings of space could never fully grasp the complexity of actual lived space, Lefebvre sought not to subtract another concept from these two understandings of space (Soja 1999). What he aimed at was rather to disturb the binary relation between them by the introduction of a third space. This third concept breaks down the “categorically closed logics of ‘either – or’, in favour of a different, more flexible and expansive logic of the ‘both – and – also’” (Soja 1999: 268). Representational space is space directly lived through the complex symbolisations linked to the clandestine side of social life. It is the dominated space “imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (Lefebvre 1991: 39), and consists of mental constructions like utopian plans, imagined landscapes, paintings, and other symbolical structures that imagine new meanings or possibilities for spatial practice (Harvey 1990).

**Concluding Remarks**

My reading of Lefebvre is of a conceptual nature, as I do not believe that his meta-accounts can be transferred to explain the specific context in where the easyCity action took place, or the spatial forms produced by entrepreneurial governance regimes. References to Lefebvre’s (1991, 1996) assessments of how power is embedded in space
should thus not be read as explanatory. With some caution to the presence of meta-
theory, however, it provides a fertile starting point from which the easyCity group’s
resistance to the prevailing spatiality of the neoliberal urbanism and spectacle can be
thought. Though I state this caution especially with respect to Lefebvre’s theory, the
reservation made should also reflect how any theoretical abstraction is read and applied
in the thesis. Because, as this chapter began to say, how one represents the world is far
from analogous to it (Barnes & Duncan 1991). Thus, before exploring the questions of
the thesis, some reservations should also be made with respect to how the thesis
analysis purports to investigate neoliberal urbanism and commercial spectacles.

‘Neoliberalism’ is representative of both an ideology, and of a set of institutional
practices (Sites 2007). As an ideology, neoliberalism could be defined as a discursive
structure of politically inflicted articulations that reconfigure the liberal conceptions of
freedom, markets, and individualisation into representations of contemporary
capitalism. Yet, turning to the institutional practices supported by neoliberal ideology,
incoherencies to this rather sweeping definition appear. The picture is first complicated
by distinctions between processes of neoliberalisation, and actually existing
neoliberalism. Respectively, these refer to a range of ascendant or dominant politico-
economic tendencies such as financial deregulation, privatisation, and cultural
commodification. Along with an array of enabling state policies, these political-
economic tendencies are seen as constituting a historically evolving process. Hence,
even thought there is a mutually constitutive relationship between neoliberalism as
ideology and its settlement, one must make distinctions between neoliberalism
abstracted as ideology and the particulars it assumes in a given spatiotemporal context
(Leitner et al. 2007a). Emphasising its ideological construction, the thesis draws on
theory developed from site-specific research on the urbanisation of neoliberalism. The
analysis presented should thus not be read as a theory of neoliberalism, or as an
informed study of neoliberalisation in Amsterdam. What it presents, rather, is an
analysis of the discursive formation of neoliberal urbanism, read in the light of the
easyCity contestation.

This also applies to how one should seek to understand the form and function of
consumption spectacles within the neoliberal production of space. Transformations of
urban landscapes into spaces of consumption have their origin in distinct politico-
institutional contexts (Leitner et al. 2007a), and are performed to meet different ends
(Leitner & Sheppard 1998). Whilst for example some urban areas are transformed
through resident oriented gentrification (Sæther 2005), others are constructed as
content-specific sites of entertainment, or to facilitate the agglomeration of specific industries (Leitner & Sheppard 1998). The symbolic economy of these places, and the public cultures created within them, will thus vary accordingly (Zukin 1995). And, not the least, the outfalls of spectacle also depend upon how they are received, interpreted and consumed. Just as there is no direct relation between the intended consumption of commodities and how they are consumed (Storey 1999), there is no direct relation between the instrumentality of urban spectacle and the way people use the city (Mitchell 2000, 2003). The present analysis of hegemonic modes of producing public space should thus not be seen as affirmative of the instrumentality of these spaces.
Conclusion Part I - A Framework

As stated in chapter 2, the project of this thesis is *not* to write an affirmative account on behalf of culture jammers, evaluating whether their strategies of dislocation are efficient means of resistance. It is rather the nature of the antagonisms that arise from their contestations that are emphasised. Looking to the different ‘realities’ implied by the easyCity action, the thesis analysis asks how it described the neoliberal production of public space. And in turn, how this depiction points to limits to the political, democratic function of contemporary public spaces.

The culture jammer practice embodies a double critique: The articulations made through the culture jam, and the form of the jam itself, a distinction that, respectively, speaks to Mouffe’s (2005) conceptualisation of ‘politics’ and ‘the political’. In the thesis, ‘politics’ refers to limits set to representation, contestation, and antagonism in a public sphere dominated by neoliberal urbanism and spectacle, whilst ‘the political’ points to the how specific articulations are privileged, or prevented by these limitations.

By their dislocation of cultural expressions and structures of symbolic power, culture jammers draw on the insides of hegemonic notions to articulate their contestations of ‘consensus reality’ (Newman 2001). In this sense culture jammers could be said to operate on the ‘edge of hegemonic discourse’, simultaneously drawing upon hegemonic notions as a point of reference, and reordering their legitimacy as the natural, objective signifiers of how things ‘are’ (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Asking how culture jammers’ contestations depict neoliberal urbanism and spectacle thus opens for an analysis that can move between the ‘real’ of the hegemony, and the ‘imagined’ of its contestations.

The jams performed by the easyCity group were staged drawing upon the cultural-symbolic fabric of the city (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). Following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the action contested how neoliberal urbanism and spectacle fills universal notions of ‘public space’ and ‘public culture’ with the particulars of neoliberalism (Laclau 2004, Gasché 2004). Analysing the action as representative of a subversive spectacle (Duncombe 2007), Part II begins to explain the antagonisms produced through its counter-hegemonic articulations, and how they describe the hegemony of neoliberal urbanism and spectacle (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). In chapter five the articulatory practices of easyCity are related to structures within the

Drawing upon conclusions from these two chapters, chapter seven, which makes out the analysis of Part III, moves to discuss the thesis’ second question of research. This is investigated drawing upon the understandings of resistance and contestation outlined in the chapter four (Duncombe 2002, Howarth 2004, Mouffe 2005). Interpreting the easyCity space in relation to the hegemonic space it described, chapter seven emphasises how current notions of ‘the political’ come into play in these antagonistic spatialities (Mouffe 2005), and outlines an understanding of the production of a neoliberal public space (Lefebvre 1991, Mitchell 2003, 2000, Leitner et al. 2007a). Continuing these discussions, the ‘politics’ of spectacle are investigated, emphasising the role of spectacle as a force of articulation (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Zukin 1995). Analysing how this structures the political function of cities, the neoliberal production of space is argued to constitute a neoliberal subjectivity (Leitner et al. 2007a). Concluding these discussions the subversive easyCity spectacle is analysed in terms of how it embedded alternative visions of democratic practice (Furet 1998).
Part II

easyCity
Introduction Part II – easyCity

How were neoliberal urbanism and spectacle depicted and contested by the easyCity group?

The easyCity action was organised by a number of quite different actors: the Vrije Ruimte activists, photographers, video artists, performers, dancers, architects, speakers, and web designers. The meanings invested in the action were therefore bound to be multiple, and divergent, especially as these actors made up a rather unusual social group (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). The political activists were not used to working with artists, and the artists were not familiar with working in a political, and indeed precarious, situation exhibiting their works in an illegally appropriated locale. The action was also composed by a number of different elements: ‘easyCity’ refers to the direct action through which the shop was appropriated and opened to the public, to the narration of an urban future and its imagined spaces, and to the fictitious enterprise that fabricated them. Together these made out the basis to visitors’ meeting with the shop locale.

The intricacy of the consequent complex of expressions was further added to by the open-ended nature of the culture jams that gave meaning to the different elements of ‘easyCity’. The aim of jams is to disrupt top-down, one-way communication, and to encourage dialogue rather than to produce audiences. Hence, they seldom communicate a straightforward message. The action group, though clearly critical of the dynamics of spectacle and neoliberalism, did not advocate any specific political program, manifest or demands (Poldervaart 2006). The easyCity action did not set out to expose some ‘true’ nature to symbolic power, inducing revelatory experiences of cognition of which the individual can learn to know the genuine, unfeigned ‘other’ side to its previously false consciousness (Bourdieu 1994, Marx & Engels 2002). Opening urban symbolisms to contestation without resettling their meaning, the performance of the easyCity jams was a multifaceted process that produced multiple outcomes (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). Explaining easyCity by identifying and defining what it ‘really’ conveys

98 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/program_en.html (05.01.06)
99 http://sniggle.net/Manifesti/notes.php (16.11.05), http://www.markdery.com/archives/2004/10/culture_jamming_1.html#more (17.10.04)
http://www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
would therefore implicitly circumscribe the jam as a form of communication (Mattes Interview 23.01.06), and ignore the fact that participants gave divergent meaning to the action (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). An interpretation of easyCity as a critical engagement with contemporary urbanism should thus be directed towards how it aimed to make visible, and challenge, the structures and powers that determine how meaning is settled and naturalised in the urban landscape.

How these meanings are depicted to inaugurate a specific urban order is approached through the political economy of neoliberal urbanism and the symbolic economy of spectacle. Contesting discourses that portray urban space as an asset to be exchanged on markets (Peck & Tickell 2002, Leitner et al. 2007a), the easyCity action performed a number of jams of how the city is organised as an exchangeable, consumable commodity. Identifying the counter-hegemonic articulations of the jams within this action, the chapters five and six discuss the action’s engagement with neoliberal urbanism and consumption spectacle. The action group’s representation of these was interrelated, however, there are some distinctions to how they are presented\(^\text{100}\). By the articulations made through the action the neoliberal production of space was given a certain primacy: It was depicted as the force driving developments, producing an urban realm in which spectacle becomes the only cultural formation present. Consumption spectacle, on the other hand, was depicted as the formation through which this reality is lived, articulated and upheld. In the image of the easyCity action, neoliberalism and spectacle thus became interchangeable preconditions of each other, producing cohesively ordered and firmly controlled urban environments.

Chapter five, *Jamming the Evidence of Materiality*, interprets the easyCity action as an engagement with the political-economic organisation of the entrepreneurial city (Leitner et al. 2007a). This is conducted analysing the two ‘worlds’, or spaces of easyCity: The imagined easyCity city and the squatted easyCity shop. Presenting these, I outline how the action articulated neoliberal urbanism as hegemonic and relate their construction to the political-economic context in which they are produced. Emphasising representations of materiality within these constructs (Blomley 2004), the chapter asks how they engage with the ideological production of spatial form (Lefebvre 1991, Deutsche 1996).

Chapter 6, *Jamming the Economy of Experience*, moves on from discussing how the action asserted the politics of spatial practices to analyse easyCity as an engagement\(^\text{100}\)

\(^{100}\) http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
with spaces of representation (Lefebvre 1991). Seeing spectacle as a force driving how the neoliberal city is settled as a direct experience (de Jong Interview 27.01.06), the action engaged with the symbolic structures of commercial spectacles, and how it produces specific representations of space. The chapter investigates how these exposures were managed by jamming the cultural formations through which the urban is represented and experienced. Three cultural-symbolic structures are emphasised in relation to the jams performed: Objects that give meaning to the order and control of pseudo public spaces, cultures of branding, and the use of art as a means of spatial politics. The conclusion of Part III concerns how the culture jams performed by the action dislocated discursive representations of neoliberal urbanism and spectacle, and how one could interpret the outcome of these dislocations (Howarth 2004).
Chapter 5 –

Jamming the Evidence of Materiality

“The city is a fundamentally different place from what it used to be; a place where people live and work. It is now a commercial product. It communicates the hardness of the commercial world.” (de Jong Interview 08.12.06)

The easyCity shop was at once a representation of the imagined easyCity city, and an actual space in the city, related to its landscapes, economic flows, and socio-cultural condition (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). When entering the shop the customer would be presented with a range of goods for purchase, amongst these a trip to one of the luxurious, pleasurable, and accommodative, easyCity spaces. Upon further inspection, however, the appearances of the counterfeit sales office gave way to the space of the action, introducing the prospective customer to a wide range of issues concerning the commodification of urban cultures and space (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). The easyCity locale did as such function as a stage upon where its visitors would change roles while ‘playing’ on it. They entered as consumers and would leave as partakers of a (temporal) public space. The shop did thus function as a direct engagement with two quite different conditions under which space can be produced to meet specific ends; the public was addressed as consumers and users simultaneously.

Elaborate in form, and staged by the means of culture jamming, this subversive spectacle inhabited both of the easyCity ‘worlds’ – the image of a purely neoliberal city, and the politico-cultural space of the action (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). Both relate to how the traditional economic factors of land, labour and capital are organised and utilised. Yet, they were quite differently articulated. The former, the imagined easyCity space, espoused the total hegemony of neoliberal urbanism, and was a simulation of dominant space. The space of the action was, on the other hand, presented as a space of contestation, achieving a temporal presence by the means of occupation. In this chapter, the two spatialities invoked by the action are explored as a jam of neoliberal urbanism (Leitner et al. 2007a), and as a jam of separations between the public and the private (Sennett 1992, Blomley 2004). The chapter begins to investigate

---

101 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
102 www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org (16.11.05)
the ‘dominant’ fictitious easyCity space in relation to prevailing political-economic forces, and how these are reflected in the image of the future easyCity. Turning to the counter hegemonic space of the action, antagonistic with respect to its material basis and function, yet conventional in form, the analysis examines how this space of contestation stands in relation to pseudo public space (Mitchell 2000, 2003).

Narrations of the Neoliberal Production of Space

The narration of the future easyCity city was achieved by a variety of means (de Jong Interview 27.01.06): The layout and performance of the shop, the artworks exhibited in it, the jammed easyCity logo that embellished the action space, and the ‘Welcome to easyCity’ greeting. Together, these elements constructed an altogether alternate ‘consensus reality’: The smooth, resistance-free, easyCity city produced by the multinational easyCity enterprise.

Pictured as a global network of urban space, easyCity composes a geographically fragmented, yet conceptually coherent city. When complete, easyCity spaces are tagged, branded, and put into circulation on the market of urban space, readily available to the affluent consumer. Determining what can take place where, with careful attendance to your needs and aspirations, the easyCity enterprise has moulded the urban landscape to meet the most inner desires and ‘impulsive’ cravings of the consumer. All lusts are provided for, any path of experience carefully organised. Your demand is simply what easyCity supplies, around the clock.

In easyCity the ideology of consumption and the rules of the market are impregnable. The fiction reality of easyCity is the manifestation of space solely organised by principles of neoliberalism. The right to this city is exclusively analogue to the right to consume. Even so, ‘seekers of happiness’ that have come to the city are given a chance. “They give the city its famous colourful character and contribute to your pleasure as underpaid handyman, dishwasher, babysitter or sex worker”, the conjuring easyCity enterprise explains. Still, the enterprise reassures the consumer that its hospitality and tolerance indeed have limits. Deviant behaviour and unwanted cultural expressions will be responded to with an iron fist, “Because for us your safety comes first”. EasyCity, as narrated by the action, was the perfectly controlled space commodity.

103 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
104 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
105 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
The group that initiated the easyCity action, Vrije Ruimte, was established in reaction to the eviction of a large, central Amsterdam squat in 2000 (de Jong Interview 27.01.06, 01.01.07). The building that was evicted, Kalenderpanden, was situated in the centre of Amsterdam. It had functioned as a cultural centre with alternative theatre, concerts, films and political debates. There was extensive support for the occupation of the building in the city, and it was a significant free space to a large and relatively young user group that had few alternatives in the city (Utrecht Festival). It was also important, Vrije Ruimte representative de Jong (Interview 27.01.06) explains, because it represented a limit to the neoliberalisation of Amsterdam. “It was a symbol that some things could stay ‘anarchist’, it was a free space amidst the cleaning up of the city” (De Jong Interview 27.01.06).

Pushing for what they understand as free spaces – squatted or formerly squatted buildings, managed by a collective, and maintained by activist Do-it-Yourself principles – the Vrije Ruimte put forward the demand that a certain amount of buildings should be taken off the market, and protected as a social function (de Jong Interview 01.01.07). The eviction of Kalenderpanden, and the following restoration of the building into luxury apartments, made evident an aspect that is often ignored by the Amsterdam squatter movement (Amsterdam squatter 2 Interview 01.02.06): The intimate relation between the built fabric of the city and the wider political economic context it is produced within. Maintaining that the struggle over physical buildings is essential to preserving free spaces, the Vrije Ruimte group also insisted that a broader approach was crucial for free spaces to flourish.

“We wanted to change the development, and emphasise other forms of free spaces in which non-commercial activity could take place. The easyCity action was part of this move towards taking issue with urban development and lifestyle issues, and towards issues about how the city is changing into a commercial activity where branding is more important than contact” (de Jong Interview 27.01.06).

The experience of how consumption has come to dominate the city, preventing other alternative forms of creating and using urban space, were the main provocations to trigger the initiation of the easyCity action (de Jong Interview 27.01.06, 08.12.06). Bringing together a range of the factors that produce and maintain the city as a commercial space, the easyCity activists addressed the wider political economic context of their action, and the dominant position held by neoliberal urbanism.
The Political Economy of Neoliberal Urbanism

As explained in the thesis introduction, the trends addressed by the easyCity action are outcomes of an extensive shift in urban policy making. The neoliberal urban order began to dominate the urban centres of North America in the 1970s (Hall 1998), and throughout the 1980s it reached a similar stronghold in Western European cities. Explanations to these transformations are often associated with the early 1970s economic crisis, how capitalism adapted to the internal crisis of the ‘Fordist’ production regime, and to failures of the Keynesian welfare state (Harvey 1990). The emergence of neoliberalism in the wake of this system crisis, Leitner et al. (2007a) argue, was not inevitable. The present neoliberal hegemony, they suggest, should rather be seen as a result of internal and external forces shaping the outcome of a number of ‘moments of crisis’.

“The 1972 CIA-backed coup in Chile offered an opportunity to experiment with Hayek’s ideas via authoritarian market reform, and for some time neoliberalism circulated primarily in Latin America. Other spatiotemporal moments of crisis offered opportunities to push market reforms: New York City’s 1976 fiscal crisis; debt-induced structural adjustment beginning in 1982; and shock therapy after the dissolution of Soviet and eastern European state socialism in 1989 (Brenner & Theodore, 2002a; Peck, 2004). Within the United States and the United Kingdom, conservative governments backed by promarket think tanks normalized ideas and practices of market rationality (Leitner et al. 2007a: 3)”.

Neoliberal market reforms have primarily affected cities by making them economically dependent upon highly mobile flows of production-, finance-, and consumption capital (Harvey 1989a). Faced by highly uncertain geoeconomic environments, cities had to develop strategies that could respond to speculative movements of financial capital, transnational companies’ global location strategies, rapidly intensifying interurban competition, industrial restructuring and a reduction of state subsidies and intervention.

These changes in urban economies have in turn changed how cities are managed politically, causing what is frequently characterised as a transition from ‘government’ to ‘governance’. Whilst government is seen as ‘state power on its own’, ‘governance’ refers to a broader configuration of the state, in which state authority is separated from its responsibilities, and used to further private interests (Harvey 2005, Sennett 2006). With the development of capital-settlement strategies, post-war governments’ emphasis on welfare and social justice have been replaced by a growth-orientation that sees the welfare state as a hindrance to the prosperity of the city (Leitner & Sheppard 1998). Public institutions’ consequent adaptation of corporate development strategies has been
manifested in what is often characterised as entrepreneurial governance regimes driven by public-private partnerships (Harvey 1989a).

As cities become increasingly dependent upon the continual spatial fix of capital flows they also become increasingly liable to the principles that order the markets of these flows (Peck & Tickell 2002). To meet the demands of the market, and stay in position, cities are expected to attentively scan the market for opportunities of investment and promotion, provide capital subsidies, undertake supply-side interventions, conduct place promotion, or take responsibility of central-city makeovers. ‘Good governance’ has thus come to signify urban policy measures that anticipate, complement, and in some cases mimic the operation of competitive markets. Internalising the abovementioned growth strategies urban governance regimes are argued to facilitate the urbanisation of neoliberalism (Brenner & Theodore 2002, Peck & Tickell 2002, Leitner et al. 2007a, Sites 2007). Because, Sites (2007) explains, though the settlement of neoliberalism can take the form of disparate local innovations internal to specific institutions and polities,

"these solution sets are solidified and reproduced by the structural rule-regimes that govern established modes of interurban competition. In other words, neoliberalisation takes part of a larger systematic process in which cities become accomplices in their own subordination” (Sites 2007: 121).

The argumentation of Sites is much the same as that of Peck and Tickell (2002). As the name of the ‘market game’ is neoliberalism, they state, the attractiveness of cities as spatial fixes of capital is defined through their affinity to playing by the rules of interurban-competition: Deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation. Hence, to take part of the contest, cities ultimately serve to further accelerate the capital mobility that made them vulnerable, simultaneously putting closure to alternative paths to development (Peck 2001, Peck & Tickell 2002).

How the venturesome, innovative, profit-oriented, and competitive activities of interurban competition take form varies from city to city, but there are principal resemblances (Leitner & Sheppard 1998). Cities compete against each other using methods similar to those of companies. Alliances between public institutions and private actors are manifested in partnerships, and public resources and power are used to enhance growth in the private sector. One of the main criticisms against these processes is that since they are driven by the operations of public-private partnerships (Harvey 1989a), they represent a reduction in legit responses to the economic situation of cities (Peck and Tickell 2002), and produce democratic deficits (Leitner & Sheppard...
1998). Through the constitution of urban governance regimes (Harvey 1989a), political decision-making is moved from the open forums of elected bodies to the closed spaces of public-private negotiations. Political spaces that are vital to the formation of public discourse are as such closed to the electorate in a highly undemocratic manner, making the considerable economic instability and volatility that characterises world markets the counter-power to the political will of the citizenry (Harvey 1989a).

As the balance of power between citizens and private interests increasingly favours the latter what makes a ‘good’ city is redefined (Leitner et al. 2007a) – whilst post-war ideals emphasised development for the larger citizen body (Sadler 1998), are contemporary visions of ideal development are characterised by consumer preferences (Peck 2005). The ‘maximal-growth’ users of the city, whether they are identified as upscale residents and tourists, or as a specific industry, become the chosen social groups for whom urban spaces are produced to attract, and increasingly, for whom they are controlled (Knox 1993, Mitchell 2003, Mayer 2007). It is hence increasingly the consumer, and not the citizen that has a right to the city (Zukin 1995, Mitchell 2003).

The Present of the Future easyCity

In the tale of easyCity, by a chain of events that are not known to the spectator, this reordering is total106. Through the illusion created by the jam, the extreme, end-point reality of total private control over urban space is presented in the form of a utopia come true. In this vision, urban space has become thoroughly, and exclusively, commodity. The ideology of consumption penetrates all aspect of life; its presence is total. Neither the state, nor the political is present in the tale. Ideals of social justice and cultural diversity are not only subordinated to the principles of growth, all social measures and freedoms of expression have been carefully and exhaustively obliterated. The grounds upon which claims to social justice can be formulated have been effectively erased. “We’ve banished affordable housing and small businesses from the centre of town, we’ve driven the neighbourhood grocery stores and speciality shops right out of existence”107, the enterprise boasts. Also the instrumental use of culture to market and sell places has reached its final consequence. The merge of public culture with consumer ideology is self-evident, and consumer identities alone allocate social rank. “EasyCity”, the enterprise pronounces conceitedly,

106 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
107 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
“is an international phenomenon which we developed at the end of last century, and has since conquered the globe at a phenomenal pace. Driven forward by creativity and speed, profit and the desire to consume we have surpassed every boundary, every border and every obstacle, defeated all opposition and broken virtually every bit of resistance… We don’t have any space or desire for places of freedom and other publicly accessible social, cultural and political institutions. As far as we are concerned, the battle over public space is over”.

In this world the rule of the easyCity enterprise is the rule of the urban, and the reduction of political power in the city has been completed to the point of obliteration, its void filled by free market ideology. It is pure neoliberal space in which alternative paths are foreclosed, bringing to thought the famous maxim one of neoliberalism’s strongest proponents, Margaret Thatcher, that ‘there is no alternative’ (Sparke forthcoming).

It is remarkable, Harvey contends, how the consensus on the entrepreneurial approach “seems to hold across national boundaries and even across political parties and ideologies” (Harvey 1989a: 4). He concludes that its stronghold is founded upon necessity. Intensifying socio-economic problems caused by the geo-economic shifts of flexible accumulation, and the resultant inter-urban competition have, in Harvey’s analysis, simply forced cities into becoming growth machines. Machines that must attract capital to their spaces in order to avoid the fate of post-industrial ghost towns, plagued by unemployment, poverty, and decay. Urban developers and politicians often employ this now conventional explanation, saying that there is a need to adapt to globalisation, and to face ‘economic realities’ (Deutsche 1996). The reduction of the state’s responsibilities with respect to social welfare and justice are as such legitimized as necessary ills of survival, or argued to be private responsibilities (Mitchell 2003). Often coined ‘the economic argument’ this explanation presents urban politics as economically determined, and its strategies as self-evident reactions to the realities of a new regime of capital accumulation (Deutsche 1996). The material spatial practices that condition the politics of cities as such become the evidence of the necessity of these politics – a substantiation drawn upon by both its advocates and its opponents.

The ‘no alternative’ reality of the easyCity fiction, in which current developments are amplified to the extent where trends become the rule and characteristics totality, points to a general weakness in the essentialism of the economic argument. Because, what the easyCity narration of neoliberalisation emphasises is the agency of the enterprise in creating a representation of a best-choice world: Like governance regimes

http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
claim that a principled non-involvement in the games of neoliberalism is impossible (Peck & Tickell 2002), easyCity tells us that a principled non-involvement in the consumption of the city is impossible.\footnote{http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)}

When read in relation to the social welfare regimes it ensues, the hegemonic intervention of neoliberal governance could be understood as a locking of meaning between the antagonism of a collective social justice and private economic interests (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Mouffe 2005). By defining state regulation and redistribution as preclusive of maximal benefit, neoliberal discourse reorders the antagonism between social welfare and capitalist markets to the point where the mechanisms of the market exclusively ensure welfare (Leitner et al. 2007a, Mayer 2007). Arguments that support this position resemble what Deutsche (1996) identifies as ‘the economic argument’, and shares with it a claim that has achieved a hegemonic position over the last three decades (Leitner et al. 2007b). Namely, that there is an equivalence between neoliberalism and social welfare. This equivalence is constructed by filling the universal (empty) signifier of ‘responsible economic policy’ with the particulars of neoliberalism. In other words, that the welfare of cities can only be achieved given its close engagement with the driving forces of world markets (Leitner & Sheppard 1998, Peck 2001).

Extending the power balance shift between the political and the economic to the point where the power of the corporation is absolute, the easyCity jam purports to represent a reality in which ‘there is no alternative’ to the free market.\footnote{http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)} Taking a closer look at what this pure, neoliberal space looks like, certain aspects to the ‘universalisms’ of neoliberalism are depicted to have taken another form that that promised by its ideology. First, easyCity is far from a city of sweeping wealth. On the contrary, it is a city ordered through difference, and through a carefully controlled exclusion of those who do not belong in the image of its desired consumers: The homeless, beggars, legal and illegal immigrants, political activists.\footnote{http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)} The excluded groups of easyCity correspond to those of contemporary cities, and to how the right to the city is allocated through consumption (Zukin 1995, Deutsche 1996, Mitchell 2000, 2003). Pointing to how the neoliberal growth-first strategy is not a program of growth-for-all, the easyCity narrative of an extended neoliberalism pointed to how the commodification of space also produces those who cannot consume it.

\footnote{http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)}
The ‘promise’ of neoliberalism, however, is yet not broken by this articulation. With respect to welfare distribution, the reality of easyCity is not too unlike the reality promised by proponents of neoliberalism (Peck 2005, Leitner et al. 2007a). In neoliberal ideology the well being of individuals is seen as a private achievement, their failure as equally effected by the qualities of the person. In the eyes of the neoliberal advocate it is not the system that fails the individual, but the individual that fails its society. At this point, however, the easyCity representation of neoliberal space makes an articulation at odds with the ideological grounds of neoliberalism: The company rather gladly admits the necessity of cheap, poor, and precarious labour for the maintenance of the city as commodity\textsuperscript{112}.

The point made was not especially elaborated by the action, but it does point in the direction of a second discrepancy to neoliberalism. Namely, the non-contested, non-ideological nature it purports, preserving the self-evident relation between contemporary political economic challenges and the market-as-solution (Deutsche 1996). The easyCity corporation’s hold on the city, taken to the extreme of totalitarian dominance, seems like a reality far removed from that of the contemporary city. Yet, as the outcomes of this exaggerated reality are articulated as the intensification of contemporary developments, the easyCity jams pointed to a number of questions: How is neoliberal ideology embedded and enforced through its production of urban space? How do the (material) principles of neoliberalism become the conditions of urban life? How does neoliberalism’s settlement become plain evidence of its continued hold over solutions to the challenges of cities? By whom is neoliberalism chosen? Whom does it serve? How do privatisation and deregulation shift power?

The action proposed no answers to these questions, which were implied, rather than articulated, through the action’s culture jams. Still, when reflected in the image of the future easyCity, the ideological representations of neoliberalism are disturbed: The increased autonomy of the actor, liberated from her social bonds, and free to pursue whatever rewards she desires, is not the reality of easyCity. In this futuristic image of a consumption haven it is not so that the power of the state has been dissolved into a condition where the power to consume is the power to rule the world. In easyCity the incentive of the corporation is everything, it determines what an unfavourable cultural expression is, what an unwanted guest can do, even what your desire shall be – “your

\textsuperscript{112} http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
pleasure is our product” 113. ‘Free space’, this image suggests, is something radically different from the spaces one is ‘free’ to consume.

The Unsettling Materiality of the easyCity Action Space

As explained above, the action did not offer any direct answers to the questions its disciplinary image of a purely neoliberal urban future provokes. What it rather did was to establish a space in where these questions could be raised and debated114. This space sprung out of the same grounds as the spectacular space of the imagined easyCity, but was radically different. The easyCity shop was a space broken into, occupied, and then put into use by means and ends different from those of a shop. Following Blomley’s (2004) understanding of property, this should not be seen as simply violating property rights; by the manners the shop locale was used, the action also articulated a counter-hegemonic notion of property ownership.

Dominant notions of property are often described as ‘the ownership model’, and attribute exclusive rights over a bounded space to the solitary owner. These rights are supported by state law, and make out the basis of private uses of the city. In his deconstructive reading of this discourse, Blomley (2004) proposes that this model silences numerous aspects to property. Power achieved through property, he argues, purports to have qualities independent of social and cultural relations, presenting property as fixed, natural, and objective. The contingency of social history is hence transformed into a set of structural arrangements and ideological commitments that appear as pre-political, obvious and unproblematic. Seeing property as a socio-cultural practice, Blomley explains, opens for the interpretation of property as derived from specific ontologies. Differences in conceptions of property can hence reflect “very different ways of ‘relating to the world at large’” (Blomley 2004: 10),

“If we recognize that space is socially produced, and socially productive, we need also to recognize that it can be remade for different social ends. The spaces of property in that sense can be powerfully disciplinary, but also transgressive” (Blomley 2004: 7).

Following Blomley, the easyCity appropriation of private space, and their temporal claim to its active ownership can be seen as unsettling the material basis of the shop and as a claim to alternative allocations of ownership. Taking a building ‘off the market’ and having the action in a squatted locale, de Jong (Interview 01.01.07) explained, was

113 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
114 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/program_en.html (05.01.06)
an important factor to the action. By first glance, however, the difference seems less significant. The insides of the squatted action locale imitated the interior design of a shop – surveillance cameras were put in place, a desk was placed by the door, and an alarm system was activated. In fact, the resemblance was so close that some of its visitors left without realizing they were in an illegally appropriated space (de Jong Interview 27.01.06).

Figure 13: easyCity shop opening (photo courtesy Bas van de Geyn)

Still, though the shop inhabited the hybrid public/private nature typical of urban space, were the ends sought through its constitution fundamentally different from private spaces of commerce. Pseudo public spaces, Mitchell (2000, 2003) argues, can never meet the ideals of a public space. On the contrary, they repress them. To Mitchell, the ideal public space is a space of inclusiveness, unmediated interaction and uncontrolled social and political conflict. Pseudo public spaces, geared towards consumption, Mitchell (2003) contends, can never (and do not aspire to) meet these ideals. Planned to the last detail, and premised on “a perceived need for order, surveillance and control over the behaviour of the public” (Mitchell 2003: 138) these spaces are constructed to prevent, rather than foster, the political: They hinder the negotiations and struggles that, in ideals of a citizen controlled city, determine the shape and function of urban space (Lefebvre 1996). Interpreted in the light of these contentions the easyCity space
assumed distinctive material qualities that are decisive in terms of the spatial practice implied by the action.

The easyCity action can be seen as an attempt to create a public space that dismisses the material conditions of (neoliberal) private interest. Obviously, it was far from a space of consumption. What is perhaps more remarkable is that the activists did not proclaim any specific alternative to how public space should be differently produced (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). Nor was it created as a ‘space of interest’ in terms of advocating the cause of precarious groups that are excluded from the commodified spaces of cities, like political activists or the homeless (Mitchell 2003). The action clearly stated that there is a politics to space, but did not seek to utilise their appropriation of space in any specific, programmatic manner (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). The use of the easyCity space was rather directed by its aspirations to full public exposure, and hence bore close affinity to ideals of public inclusiveness and openness (Mitchell 2000, 2003).

The foundation to the public nature of the easyCity space can be located in mainly two features if its production. To begin with, those who established the frames of the shop were not a coherent group, the main divergence being between the political artists and the activists. “It was a challenge to work together with the artists who bring in a different way of seeing things, where politics are not directly recognisable as a subject”, de Jong (Interview 01.01.07) explained. Yet, as the form of the project was shaped through the dialogue between coordinators and the artists, the artworks also became the main door opener to a dialogue with the public. Another feature that enforced the public quality of the shop was how the action subverted the nature of its own resistance (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). Rather than challenging the dominance of forces producing urban space, the action formulated its resistance from the inside of the hegemony it contested. Making itself part of the ‘game’ it contested, without seeking its conventional ‘revenues’, the action sought a position of counter-hegemony that does not make out a specific position to be refused or adapted by the public. By dismissal of how material conditions determine who can communicate how and where, with whom and for what purpose (Foucault in Barker 2003), without other incentives than that of inducing a ‘free’ space of communication, the easyCity group circumvented the rationale of utility that serves as the foundation of the private sphere (Blomley 2004). “People who entered the shop got very confused by what they saw and got offered”, de Jong (Interview 01.01.07) explained, “They expected a shining world, they expected to shop things, to book tickets”. Playing with the boundaries of public and private space...
the shop became a pseudo *private* space, its form imitating spaces consumption, but its function being public.

Arguments that claim there is an inevitable ‘economic reality’ (Deutsche 1996), and discourses that privatise the grievances individuals (Leitner et al. 2007a, Mitchell 2003), strongly influence how we think in terms of ‘real’ contestations of the ‘real’ effects produced by the economic organisation of societies. Depicting neoliberal urbanism as a force of commodification, the easyCity action pointed to how privatisation structures the use and experience of urban space. Describing neoliberal space as a profitable physical entity while emphasising the exclusions this produces (Deutsche 1996), the easyCity action challenged how the material organisation of space is made into self-evident, utilitarian, and politically neutral representations. What the action also did was to expose of the externalities produced by privileged spaces. On the basis of its contestation of neoliberalism-as-solution, the action acted to temporally make virtual the possibility of counter-hegemonic alternative. Drawing upon the possibilities made ‘impossible’ through the neoliberal production of space, the activists and artists of easyCity sought to construct a space similar to that which Lefebvre coins ‘experimental utopia’ (Sadler 1998) – a spatial construction that is constituted amidst an ‘objective’ analysis of the contemporary urban and the imaginary. Or in the easyCity case, amidst the neoliberal image of the easyCity city and the subversive, squatted shop locale. In this instance, the evidence of materiality becomes the evidence of its creation rather than determination.
Chapter 6 –

Jamming the Urban Economy of Experience

“Contestation frequently entails resignifying place: the strategic manipulation, subversion, and transgression of everyday spaces and the social relations they stand for, within a city and beyond” (Leitner et al. 2007a: 20).

Playing with the ideological grounds of neoliberal and (pseudo) private spatiality, the easyCity activists opened firmly embedded notions of economic policy and private property to contestation. The counter hegemonic articulations of the action were managed through a critical reading of the symbolic language of urban spectacle (de Jong Interview 27.01.06) – of the meanings embedded in signs, signifiers, codes and knowledge that make out the spectacle’s spaces of representation (Lefebvre 1991). Re-articulated through the means of culture jamming, these were re-presented to the visitors of the shop, people who in turn would attribute new meaning to them. The unsettlement, or dislocation, of hegemonic discourses to a field of contestation was as such achieved through the jamming of the symbolic construction of space (Howarth 2004).

In Evictions Rosalyn Deutsche (1996) demonstrates how the rhetoric of ‘the economic argument’, presenting entrepreneurialism as the single, natural reply to economic realities, is transformed into commonsensical representations. By portraying the spatial organisation of the city as determined by presupposed and practical needs, Deutsche argues that urban elite policy appears as purely instrumental, response oriented, and collectively beneficial. Asserting the social character of spatial form, she sees this essentialist view as systematically obstructing social and political antagonisms over the organisation and meaning of space. Severed from its production and fetishized as a physical entity, space appears to exercise control over the very people who produce and define it. The functionalisation of the city, which presents its form as merely utilitarian and politically neutral, Deutsche concludes, is thus filled with politics: “For the notion that the city speaks for itself conceals the identity of those who speak through the city” (Deutsche 1996: 52).

The easyCity jams engaged with a number of structures of symbols in the neoliberal spectacle, of which three are discussed in this chapter: Objects that give
meaning to the order and control of pseudo public space, cultures of branding, and the
use of art as a means of spatial politics. These are all part of the symbolic economy of
cities (Zukin 1995), and are, although they do not represent a singular force or coherent
incentive, they are outcomes of entrepreneurial governance.

The Symbolic Economy

Cultural strategies of growth-enhancement are increasingly prevalent strategies within
entrepreneurial governance regimes, as they

“extend and recodify entrenched tendencies in neoliberal urban politics,
seductively repackaging them in the soft-focus terms of cultural policy. This
has the effect of elevating creativity to the status of the new urban
imperative – defining new sites, validating new strategies, placing new
subjects, and establishing new stakes in the realm of competitive interurban
relations” (Peck 2005: 740)

How the city is ‘spoken through’ is explained by Zukin (1995) as how the signs,
images, and codes that constitute the city’s symbolic economy are manipulated to
signify exclusion and belonging in its spaces. The understanding that the look and feel
of cities reflect belonging, concepts of order and uses of aesthetic power, is not novel
(Zukin 1995, Sadler 1998). Nor is the engagement of city advocates and business elites
in the construction of symbols of growth and prosperity a phenomenon new to
entrepreneurialism (Peck 2005, Zukin 1995). The novelty of contemporary urban
landscapes’ symbolic production, Zukin asserts, is rather “its symbiosis of product and
image, the scope and scale of selling city images on both national and global levels, and
the symbolic economy’s role in speaking for, or representing the city” (Zukin 1995: 8).

In the 1970s and 1980s the symbolic economy rose against industrial decline
(Zukin 1995). The rise of the symbolic economy coincided with the early 1970s
economical crisis that provoked the shift in urban policy, and led to the overall
restructuring of the ‘Fordist’ regime of capital accumulation (Harvey 1990). With these
transformations ‘post-Fordist’ capitalist production has shifted its orientation from the
production of object commodities to the fabrication of the images, and sign systems of
brands and fashions (Harvey 1990, Zukin 1995).

Signalled by the 1988 Phillip Morris takeover of Kraft at six times its paper-
value, the market soon came to see the brand as a hard cash commodity (Klein 2000).
Integrating the mantra of marketers into the company structure, the corporations we
tend to think of as manufacturers, have seized to craft much but an image (Harvey
Enterprises’ primary condition of prevailing in the games of contemporary capitalism has thus become mastering the production of volatility, either as fashion leaders, or by shaping unstable markets to meet certain ends. Interurban competition, Zukin (1995) asserts, has made cities mutually dependent on mastering unpredictable and unstable markets as they progressively become spaces to consume. The spectacles composed within the symbolic economy can hence be seen as the aggregate outcome of strategies to produce attractive cities, marketing and ‘selling’ them, and the sphere within which dominant perceptions of the cultures of cities are produced.

“The symbolic economy features two parallel production systems that are crucial to a city’s material life: the production of space, with its synergy of capital investment and cultural meanings, and the production of symbols, which constructs both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity.” (Zukin 1995: 23/24)

The symbolic economy has both a spatial and a cultural dimension (Zukin 1995), manifested in urban landscapes that are produced and manipulated to meet the desires of wealthy consumers (Mitchell 2000). Several processes distinguish these places, perhaps the most pertinent being the privatisations of public space (Mitchell 2003), regeneration through aesthetisation (Deutsche 1996), and the staging of carefully manipulated urban spectacles (Harvey 1989b, Peck 2005). The outcomes of these strategies are spaces in where belonging and exclusion is allocated through consumer culture and identity (Mitchell 2003, Zukin 1995). As Knox (1993) explains,

"Although urban space is produced and sold in discrete parcels, it is marketed in large parcels: when an evening’s entertainment, or a house, is bought, the neighbourhood and perhaps the whole central-city area is consumed (Mair, 1986, p. 363). The poor and the homeless represent potent negative externalities, not only endangering the exchange value of homes but also threatening the ability to upscale settings to deliver style, distinction and exclusivity, to insulate the middle classes from the anxiety induced by contact with the poor and to legitimize and reproduce the ideology of consumerism” (Knox 1993: 28).

**Jamming Objects of the Urban Order**

As explained in chapter five, the future easyCity was articulated as an intensification of contemporary developments. In this image space has become pure commodity, and its cultures are controlled and manipulated as ‘raw material’ in the production of

---

115 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
spectacular space and spectacular commodities. Within this state of entertainment there is a certain social order. Some serve, others are served and capital is accumulated and collected by the enterprise. In some senses, this picture serves as a black and white image of the colour photo of contemporary urban environments: The totalitarian, neoliberal, corporate dominance exercised over easyCity is a styled reality far removed from that which we are experiencing today. Yet, there are strong elements of the present in the easyCity vision of urban futures\(^{116}\), expressed as how the construction of cities as consumption spaces has social and cultural consequences (Zukin 1995, Deutsche 1996, Mitchell 2003). These reflections were made both through the fictitious easyCity image, and through the interior design of the actual easyCity locale. By placing objects that signify (social) orders of consumption in the shop and narrating their affinity to the neoliberal project of easyCity, the activist contested the presupposed, practical function of these objects and asserted the disciplinary powers of spectacle (Duncombe 2007).

To understand how these articulations were achieved, we must first turn to how mechanisms of exclusion function in contemporary consumption landscapes. The exclusions Knox (1993) refers to in his description of ‘upscale settings’ have much in common to those enforced in the easyCity “world of urban havens”\(^{117}\). In easyCity, as in contemporary pseudo public spaces, space is dictated by incentives to resistance free, leisurely, and smooth consumption. Still, there is a distinct dissimilarity. In the easyCity universe the corporation is omnipotent, ensuring that the presence of any individual is carefully designed, properly communicated, and closely monitored. “A great number of security agents”, the corporation promises, “ensure that nothing, nothing at all, will happen to you. Total control is our trademark”\(^{118}\). It is space militarised, unadulterated, and simplified. The spaces of contemporary cities are on the contrary increasingly chaotic, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and inhabit a style and sign complexity (Sadler 1998) that one hardly imagines within the borders of the branded spaces of easyCity. Nor are they policed to an extent of total control. There is thus a divergence in how exclusions, though defined from equal criteria, can be achieved in contemporary pseudo public spaces and in easyCity. The surveillance camera, both present in the easyCity locale and fiction image, exemplifies this.

\(^{116}\) http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
\(^{117}\) http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
\(^{118}\) http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
In easyCity exclusions are achieved through the enterprise’s will to enforce its laws, surveillance cameras (and guards) are simply tools. In contemporary urban landscapes, citizen rights, and correspondent constraints on private security control serve as a counterweight to corporate interests (Mitchell in Vreng # 1, 2004). In some cases, mostly in US cities, these constraints have been overcome through the actual privatisation of public spaces. In most cases, however, the exclusions ‘necessary’ to create attractive urban environments are achieved through mechanisms of social identity and public culture (Knox 1993, Zukin 1995). The primer power of the security camera is hence what it signifies – that the space in where it is situated is a zone in where behaviour and conduct is monitored to ensure that deviance does not occur. It has a dual nature. For those who ‘belong’ it is a camera of security – for those Knox (1993) describes as ‘negative externalities’ it is a camera of surveillance. The security/surveillance camera, amongst other objects and cultural formations that signify ‘attractive’ pseudo public spaces, becomes representative of an urban order communicated through the symbolic language of cities (Zukin 1995). Unproblematic for those who belong, and highly disciplinary of those who do not, this order not only marginalises the excluded, it also silences them (Mitchell 2003).

By relocating these in the futuristic (neoliberal) image of easyCity spaces, the easyCity action constituted these material objects and the cultural formations with which they are associated, as social relations representative of privatised spaces and fabricated spectacle. Connecting their material form to the social functions they serve in the fictitious easyCity, the ‘customers’ of the shop were presented to the reverse side of spectacle. The action hence proposed reinterpretations of both how symbolic power is manifested in the fabric of the city, and a critical reading of the instrumentality of urban symbolism.

‘Branded New World’

The second symbolic structure that the easyCity action jammed was the culture of branding in and of urban space, targeting both marketing as a cultural phenomenon, and the nature of marketed images. The easyCity logo ornamented both the interior and exterior of the shop (figure 2), postcards handed out (figure 14), and the action webpage. Brands are not unlike objects such as the surveillance camera, as both signify modes of exclusion. The brand is yet different since it is directly bound to a commodity or service of some sort, portraying its image as appropriable through direct consumption. How the easyCity group’s jamming of branding functioned as a
commentary to neoliberal spectacle is interpreted with respect to mainly two phenomena – to use of marketing to ‘sell’ the city (Kim & Short 1999), and the brand as part of urban cultures (Klein 2000).

Figure 14: The easyCity postcard (source: Vrije Ruimte)

As mentioned in chapter five, the use of marketing to enhance the competitive strength of places is one of the main strategies employed by entrepreneurial governance regimes to attract human capital, enterprises, and consumers (Peck 2005, Leitner et al. 2007a). Place marketing bears close resemblance to traditional advertising, and is also strongly influenced by competitive market principles and incentives to maximise profits. Still, it is evident that the advertisement aims at creating a consciousness about the city and its services, rather than selling a specific commodity (Gold & Ward 1994). Building ‘brand’ images of cities is closely connected to the carefully considered manipulation of culture, carried out with the preferences of specific target groups in mind (Kearns & Philo 1993). Who the city aims to attract, and by what qualities it seeks to accommodate their preferences, thus depends upon its growth strategies and the assumed preferences of target groups. City marketing is therefore usually directed at groups with buying power: Relatively wealthy and educated employees, wealthy tourists, and organisers of activities perceived to create positive economic bi-effects. By creating an image that is attractive to these groups, rather than emphasise the ‘authentic’ qualities of the place, some of its qualities are magnified, others silenced.
The counterfeit easyCity enterprise clearly embraced this philosophy, and similar to how neoliberal urbanism was narrated, the presence and dominance of the brand was also amplified (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). Unlike ‘real’ city advertisements though, the easyCity image also took into account the negative externalities that are silenced in most city images (Knox 1993), and articulated how desirable urban environments can be achieved in spite of unwanted individuals’ presence\(^{119}\); giving easyCity its “famous colourful character, and contribute to your pleasure as underpaid handyman, dishwasher, babysitter or sex worker”\(^{120}\). And, for entertainment there is always the “creative spirits”\(^{121}\) of psycho-geographers, urban explorers, builders of free spaces, activists, video makers, filmmakers, photographers, and dancers. In this sense is it not only the phenomenon of marketing and branding cities that is amplified. Through the jam it is also co-articulated with a mentality of the ‘city-as-growth-machine’; a mentality in which any particular to the urban fabric can be articulated as a component to the city as commodity, including the ‘free spaces’ the Vrije Ruimte fights for (Peck 2005). Reflected in the easyCity image these trends also assume a specific character, as their existence is justified in terms of their attractiveness to the consumer and not in terms of the value of ‘free spaces’, or ‘creative spirits’. By engaging the public in a critical interpretation of place imagery and its relation to commodification processes, the easyCity group pointed to the instrumental nature of place promotion, depriving it of representational power.

Embellishing the space in which they represented themselves with the easyCity logo, the activists imitated the brand intensity descriptive of most urban centres today, expressed through the billion-dollar business of outdoor-advertising and the increased presence of branded cultures in the city (Klein 2000). Following Klein’s genealogy on branding, advertisements have stepped out of the television and glossy fashion magazine pages, onto huge billboards in public space and up on the walls of cultural events. They have also become prime signifiers of personal identities, and travel the city with the bodies that carry them. Present as messages communicated to us, and also given recognition by our adaptation (consumption) of them, brands and the cultural forms they signify have become an important constituent of the city’s spaces of representation (Lefebvre 1991).

\(^{119}\) http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)

\(^{120}\) http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)

\(^{121}\) http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
Re-contextualised in the space of the easyCity shop the nature of the brand takes upon it a new meaning. Recalling the ‘unsettling’ material basis of the (pseudo) private easyCity space, the brand becomes part of the representation of this space’s material spatial practices. Binding the brand to the practices of the action space and making it a representation of a political-cultural space of contestation disrupts the relation between the brand as a signified and what it signifies. Because, while a brand is an image invested with particular associations, is it also descriptive of a relation between itself and the individuals it communicates to. This is a relation of promised consumer appropriation, by which the individual can assume the identity of the brand through the purchase of what it signifies. The easyCity brand breaks this promise. It attracts the visitors of the shop in terms of customer relations, promising them something to buy, but upon the moment of purchase it reveals another nature to its representation. The unproblematic relation of appropriation between the brand and the consumer thus became complicated, introducing the shop’s visitors to a range of political-cultural expressions far removed from the depoliticised image of commodities.

Art and Spatial Politics

The third symbolic intervention performed by the easyCity action – its engagement with art as a means of spatial politics – is somewhat different from the jams investigated above. These engaged with the signifiers of pseudo public spaces in a culture jam sense, using meanings excluded by their representation to subvert their functional, unproblematic, and self-evident object status. By exploiting the language of the urban landscape the easyCity action managed to bring out the instrumental, contradictory nature of pseudo public space, and drawing upon these contradictions to initiate debate (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). The artworks presented were on the other hand less explicitly political, and related to a wider range of issues than the activist aesthetic, questioning both the particulars of the contemporary neoliberal city and universals of urban existence (de Jong Interview 27.01.06, 08.12.06, Borcila Interview 02.11.06). Still, they were also very much part of the counter hegemonic articulations of the action.

The instrumentality of aesthetics has been crucial to the urban settlement of neoliberalism (Deutsche 1996), and the use of art and design to establish, and conceal how spatial form accommodates capital interest has received sharp criticisms (Harvey 1990). To Deutsche (1996) this relation of aesthetics and utility represents a use of public space dictated “by the necessities of control and profit, but legitimated by

122 http://www.anthrobase.com/Txt/N/Nome_D_01.htm (25.01.06)
concepts of efficiency and beauty” (Deutsche: 1996: 53); it draws upon the social function of public art to conceal and naturalise capitalist conditions for constructing the city, and simultaneously reduces art as a ‘free’ expression. Yet, Deutsche argues, there is also an emancipative potential to the use of art in an increasingly privately controlled public sphere:

“As a practice within the built environment, public art participates in the production of meanings, uses, and forms for the city. In this capacity, it can help secure consent to redevelopment and to the restructuring that constitutes the historical form of advanced capitalist urbanization. But like other institutions that mediate perception of the city’s economic and political operations – architecture, urban planning, urban design – it can also question and resist those operations, revealing the suppressed contradictions within urban processes. Since these contradictions stamp the image of the city with a basic instability, public art can be, in an Althusserian sense, a “site” as well as a “stake” of urban struggle” (Deutsche 1996: 56).

The rather extensive range of artworks exhibited and drawn upon by the easyCity action used various forms of expression; photography, performance, film, sound, dance, video. The different projects sprung out of four themes predefined by the initiators – the city as economic company, the city as control, the city as multicultural and city senses – but were interpreted quite differently (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). An example is how ‘the city as control’ was interpreted in terms of resistance-free landscapes in a video of bungee jumping, alluding to the fabrication of risk free adventure in the city. I do not account for all artworks here, but with reference to one of the artworks presented, the video piece called ‘Schiphol trans’ created by Rozalinda Borcila, illustrate how the easyCity group used art to articulate the exclusions of hegemonic space (An overview of other installations is presented in Appendix 2).

“My role in easyCity was limited by the specific conditions of my participation”, Borcila (Interview 02.11.06) explains, “and these conditions were in turn the primary parameters of the video project I made specifically for easyCity”. A Romanian citizen, travelling from the US to Germany via the Netherlands, Borcila was detained and subsequently deported from the Amsterdam, Schiphol airport. She was travelling with a Schengen visa with entrance in Germany, and when transferring at Schiphol she was stopped at a passport checkpoint. Border control staff claimed that there were irregularities with her visa, and also with her carry-on luggage: Her bag contained a series of sculptural chocolates she had made commemorating illegal border crossing performances. These were to be presented at a conference at her German destination. “The border guards”, Borcila (Interview 02.11.06) comments, “had little
sense of humour about these art objects, which were promptly confiscated along with just about all my other possessions”. She was detained for 3 days and then deported to the US. For the next few years she was unable to obtain a visa to the Schengen area.

Her contribution to the easyCity project was a video made from footage shot surreptitiously in the airport as she was denied entrance, looking down through the glass walls of the immigration detention centre at the See-Buy-Fly shopping area. After short her camera was confiscated. “The images are strategically abstracted”, Borcila (Interview 02.11.06) explains, “as I negotiate with the border agents the permission to shoot”. Ironically, her terms of negotiation were the same discourses on depoliticised aesthetics that Deutsche (1996) criticises. The argument “it’s just art became the excuse”, Borcila (Interview 02.11.06) remarks. Unable to obtain a Schengen visa she could not attend the easyCity action herself, but instead sent the video generated through the very conditions that ensured her exclusion.

“My interest in easyCity was precisely of a direct intervention in the absolute fabric of the city – its material coordinates, the absolute values of space/time that locate us in a particular place at a particular moment. But I saw it also as an interpretation in terms of relative space – flows and fluxes of bodies, information, compressions of time space – and in terms of the city as experimental (lived) or representational space. I have always found Lefebvre’s tripartite notion of space useful, and I saw easyCity as an opportunity to produce, through a performative intervention, an activation of these complex forms of spatiality” (Borcila Interview 02.11.06).

In terms of how her artwork intended to make visible what Deutsche (1996) describes as “the social organisation and ideological operations of space”, Borcila explains her contribution as a comment to imaginations of how the “mock ‘perfect’ space” (Borcila Interview 02.11.06) of the easyCity enterprise is composed as a fluid space:

“An apparently undifferentiated space, in which capital is fluid, it can flow everywhere, even in our thoughts and dreams, the realm of experience we had thought free from commercialization. But on the other hand, of course, global capitalism is characterized by a simultaneous increase in the concentration of social power – the opposite of a fluid space, the space of capitalism is one characterized by rigid boundaries, technologies of exclusion. It is difficult to visualize this apparently contradictory dichotomy, it is tempting to say that “there is no outside” of capitalism because of course it is everywhere. I saw this overall concept as an attempt to pierce through the illusion of the fluid space – and my own contribution, inserted as it was within the context created by this discourse of the ideal neoliberal global city, was intended as a marker of some sort – like going into undifferentiated space and placing a marker that can re-orient it” (Borcila Interview 02.11.06).
Amongst the other works and jams presented in the shop, Borcila’s video stands out as it relates not only to the construction of internal urban features but also to the externality of privileged spaces. In Borcila’s case this externality was manifested through the terms of her nationality. Her video asserts the precariousness of those rendered outside the privileged spaces of advanced capitalism, and perhaps more, those denied smooth passage through the flows that connect these. As a depiction of the neoliberal city the easyCity action thus also brought attention to the global order of which western urban centres are part, and indeed, function as privileged nodal points in.

What the easyCity action described, through their jams of branding and of the security camera, and through artworks like Borcila’s, relates to what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben called *spaces of exception* (Gregory 2004). The exception, Agamben explained, arises from how political communities are constituted. Because, he insisted, the formation of political communities is not based upon inclusion, but by defining what they exclude. The uses of space, and the people, that are excluded from the places of a given community are thus as much part of the identity of that community. However, they are exempted from its privileges; “the exception is that which cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member in that which it is already included” (Agamben cited in Gregory 2004: 62). In the case of the neoliberal city, a space of exception can be the space of she who does not inhabit an appropriate consumer identity (Zukin 1995, Peck 2005), he who has no (private) home (Mitchell 2003), or in Borcila’s case, a privileged nationality. Defined as those who do not belong within the privileged spaces of the city, and placed beyond its margins, the exempted are as much a part of its identity as for instance the Creative Class.
Conclusion Part II – Jamming the Urban Landscape

The easyCity jams played the urban as if it were a stage. Set before the city-as-audience the action constructed a drama between itself and the city, and drawing upon the urban symbolic fabric, began to sketch a world in incoherence with itself. Acting out a drama of a city constituted as pure commodity, the action held its crystal ball up to the audience, and declared the coming of today’s extended reality: The fulfilment of all dreams of smooth space. Easy, resistance-free space, void of conflict, danger and other urban nuisances was now, thanks to the easyCity enterprise, a good in abundance.

Yet, there were discrepancies to this ‘urban haven’ vision. Persuading the audience that there is a present to the future easyCity, the easyCity group pointed to the groups and cultures unrepresented in both the image of contemporary cities (Mitchell 2003), and in their vision of easyCity. Stating that the spaces of easyCity are already being made, its ‘perfectly smooth’ spaces, simulating the ‘upscale settings’ of contemporary cities, were articulated as spaces defined by what they exclude (Knox 1993). Thus, articulating a relation between the shining spaces of consumption and the bleak realities of exclusion, the action drew a picture of the city as a commodity at odds with itself.

How the easyCity action described the commodified neoliberal urban space could be understood following Karl Polanyi’s (2005) concept of fictitious commodities. Fictitious commodities, Polanyi argued, are factors applied to the accumulation of capital that do not accord to the empirical definition of commodities, meaning that they are not objects produced for sale on markets. He explains this argument through the examples of land, labour and money:

“Labour is only another name for a human activity that goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized; land is only another name for nature, which is not produced by man; actual money, finally, is merely a token of purchasing power which, as a rule, is not produced at all, but comes into being through the mechanism of banking and state finance. None of them are produced for sale. The commodity description of labour, land and money is entirely fictitious” (Polanyi 2005: 51).

123 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
What is central to Polanyi’s fictitious commodity concept, and which makes it relevant to the commodification of urban space, is the tension between what the commodity originally represented – life, nature, an organising mechanism – and what it is constituted as when put on the market – labour, land, money. The non-commodity features of such objects of exchange are constructed as externalities, contradicting their efficient use, and making their suppression an indication of their value.

The easyCity action dealt with mainly three manners through which the urban generates commodity features. First, it addressed transformations of space through its neoliberal production. Second, it confronted how private property functions as an organising principle of space. And third, it questioned the symbolic language of consumption spectacle, stressing the instrumentality of its representations. The sum outcome of the action’s critical involvement with these processes, did by far mount into coherent demands, or into some pointed, specific critique of the city as commodity. Yet, there is an affinity to the issues pursued, and how they were raised. Their common denominator, I suggest, lies within the multiplicity of expressions and meanings invoked though the different jams of the action. And in turn, how these were articulated to stand in an antagonistic relation to the homogenising effects of commodification.

As I have argued in chapters five and six, the action instigated its contestation of urban commodification through an extension of the power shifts embedded in entrepreneurial governance. Taken to an extreme end-point of corporate totalitarianism, this alleged extension of the present depicted an urban future of closures. No cultural autonomy, no freedom of speech, no free space, no public space, no non-commercial relations, no anything that does not take place in accordance to the will of the enterprise. The reality of the neoliberal city, as depicted by the easyCity action, is the reality of fictitious commodities lived through spectacles of consumption. The ‘city as lived space’ does as such become the ‘city as consumed space’, pushing the spaces of social reproduction to its margins (Lefebvre 1991).

Constituting itself as a space of resistance within this stylised image of dominant space, the easyCity action space drew upon different culture jams to bring out how the symbolic structures of spectacle both create and suppress meaning; the ‘security/surveillance camera’ came to signify exclusion through a neoliberal order, the brand a practice reducing the diversity of urban landscapes, and the instrumental nature of both depoliticising and political public art was made visible.

124 http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
The action’s appropriation and use of its material basis, albeit fundamentally different to the intricacy of its symbolic jams, also involved making present what is suppressed through the commodity structures of the neoliberal city. As de Jong (Interview 27.01.06, 01.01.07) explained, the Vrije Ruimte group, as well as its initiation of easyCity, sprung out of an experience of the city being closed to alternative modes of creating and using space. The aim of the action was – as much as contesting current developments, or jamming the symbolic structures of the city – to simply take a building off the market, and insert itself as a deviant component to the streetscape (de Jong Interview 08.12.06). The occupation can thus, again in the light of Polanyi’s (2005) theory, be seen as constituting the action space as the market’s ‘other’ – the spatial element that does not belong within its sphere of commercial exchange.

When seen as an aggregate then, the easyCity jams implied that there is a multitude of suppressed meaning within urban landscapes produced as spaces of and to consume. The action performed this articulation through a slow exposure of ruptures to its own image, using the pseudo private space of the shop to introduce the not so smooth, and not so easy issues of urban development, social justice, and public space. Playing with how the experience and use of the city is limited, the easyCity action engaged with observable, perceptible elements of the urban, as well as with the cognitive and conceptual construction of these (Lefebvre 1991).
Part III

The Promise of Democracy
Introduction Part III – The Promise of Democracy

*How do neoliberal urbanism and spectacle produce limitations on antagonist urban activism?*

The easyCity action performed its contestations drawing upon the contradictory nature of signifiers that order and give meaning to the urban landscape (Zukin 1995, Mitchell 2003). Seeing these representations as crucial components to the city’s production, the action worked to open space to practices other than those privileged by neoliberal policies and consumption spectacles (Duncombe 2007). Having investigated how the easyCity group jammed these modes of producing space, the analysis has so far accentuated the counter-hegemonic articulations of the action. Turning to the thesis’ second question of research, Part III emphasises how these articulations translate into an antagonist politico-cultural position.

There is a gap, Furet (1998) argues, between the expectations of liberty and autonomy aroused by democracy and its fulfilment: When realised the ideals of democracy are thwarted, making democracy an idea always imposed upon itself, always a source of restlessness. Because, as democratic regimes can never reach the point where “the most complete liberty and the most complete equality meet…bringing together the ideal conditions of autonomy” (Furet 1998: 66), they will always be subject to the accusation of disloyalty to their own founding values. As an extension of the always pent-up realisation of democracy, Furet maintains, the modern world becomes particularly sensitive to claims of utopia; nourished by frustrations engendered by what it promises, there is always a utopian horizon to democracy. Continually recreating the incentive to fill what Lefort coined ‘the image of an empty space’ (Deutsche 1996), democracy becomes a process of envisioning that horizon.

When related to the production of public space, the neoliberal city produces a range of limits to these democratic visions. Following the analysis of part II, a neoliberal production of space seeks to negate uses of it that do not adhere to a commodity structure and it divides space according to consumer hierarchies (Zukin 1995, Mitchell 2000, 2003). Turning to how these structures translate into limitations on urban activism, two aspects are emphasised. These are deducted from Mouffe’s (2005) conceptualisation of ‘the political’ and ‘politics’, and describe democracy in different ways. ‘The political’ refers to how the power invested in ‘the people’ is given meaning. Definitions of ‘the political’ settle the *reach* and *depth* of democratic rule and...
contestation. ‘Politics’ describe how definitions of ‘the political’ are put into practice, institutionalised and ordered; they describe how articulations of ‘the political’ are structured (Dyrberg 2004).

Respectively, these distinctions correspond to how the easyCity action depicted neoliberal urbanism and spectacle: Whilst neoliberal urbanism was made to represent ‘the political’ definition of cities, commercial spectacles were made to signify the ‘politics’ of representing, ordering, and living the neoliberal city. In accordance with this articulation, the analysis in this part begins to explore how ‘the neoliberal political’ embeds limitations on urban activism (Mouffe 2005, Mayer 2007), and continues by investigating how the ‘politics’ of commercial spectacles are part of producing these limitations (Peck 2005). Following Laclau and Mouffe’s definition of antagonism, an antagonist relation “arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 125). In other words, antagonism is descriptive of a situation in where the claims of adversaries cannot be met simultaneously; if one claim is granted, the other is made impossible. Thus, as much as asking how neoliberal urbanism and spectacles produce limitations on urban activism, one must also ask what they prevent: What are the ‘impossible’ elements of a culture jammer activist claim to a political public space?

Figure 15: In the easyCity shop, at the counter (photo courtesy Bas van de Geyn)
Chapter 7 –

The Neoliberal Political and Spectacle

With the ascendancy of neoliberalism over the last three decades ‘advanced’ liberal democracies have witnessed a tremendous transfer of power from the principally democratic sphere of politics to the driving forces of world markets (Leitner & Sheppard 1998, Harvey 2005, Leitner et al. 2007b). As it is broadly accepted amongst mainstream political parties and other elite formations, the shift of power relates to all scales of politics (Harvey 1989a, Leitner et al. 2007a) and is often argued as the inevitable outcome of a new, globalised world economy (Peck 2001). These accounts find their explanatory power in the fiscal crisis of states in the 1970s, the failure of the welfarist political-economic project, aggressive forces of globalisation, and the allure of solutions provided by the free-market. However, emphasising how neoliberalism and interurban competition determine the policy measures available to cities, an equally important aspect to ‘the neoliberal political’ is overlooked (Peck 2001, Peck & Tickell 2002): If public institutions and political bodies are structured by neoliberalism, they will also function as a structuring force. Urban governments have been active, innovative, and at times, aggressive agents within neoliberal processes of restructuring cities. Hence, with respect to how neoliberal urbanism delimits ‘the political’, the appropriate question to ask is not how urban governance regimes have become less powerful, but how they become differently powerful (Peck 2001).

The antagonist relation between easyCity and neoliberal urbanism arises from two interrelated articulations regarding the action space. The first is given by the values that were set as parameters for its production: Participation, openness, and public dialogue (de Jong Interview 01.01.07). The articulation of these principle values, however, does not necessarily create a relation of antagonism (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). The antagonism generated from the easyCity action relates to the second articulation, promoting a certain (anti) vision for what a participatory, open, and dialogic space is. In what Vrije Ruimte coins ‘free space’, notions of ‘freedom to’ are primarily articulated as a ‘freedom from’: Freedom from state domination, and freedom from market forces (de Jong Interview 01.01.07). The demand for ‘free space’ is hence a demand for autonomous civic space; it is a demand for pirate radio station space; for independent, anarchist bookshop space; for non-monitored social centres; and for public spaces of
assembly that are neither controlled by the state, nor protected by private interests. In the presence of entrepreneurial governance regimes, the advocates of ‘free space’ could as such not claim the full identity of the ‘free space’, as their ‘freedom from’ is denied by law, and rendered useless by the market.

‘The Neoliberal Political’

The governance regimes of neoliberal cities represent what sociologist Anthony Giddens coined the Third Way (Warf 2004): A political middle ground where public-private partnerships follow the golden mean between the state-directed model of the left, and the free-market orthodoxy of the right. By the influence of Giddens upon the British New Labour Party, Third Way politics have come to signify the specific rollout neoliberalism of Tony Blair (Peck & Tickell 2007). However, as most contemporary forms of governance adhere to the principles of state-market collaboration, Third Way policies have come to signify a range of governmental functions (Mouffe 2005). In cities, the settlement of Third Way thinking is mainly expressed in public-private partnerships (Harvey 1989a), and how they have come to share tasks that previously were purely public, or purely private: Private security guards now police shopping streets (Mitchell 2003), whilst public institutions are at the forefront of entrepreneurial projects (Peck 2001).

The Negation of Conflict

The Third Way has its roots in announcements made by a variety of theorists in the 60s, proclaiming the coming of ‘post-industrial society’ and ‘the end of ideology’ (Mouffe 2005). These notions, Mouffe contends, have later been revived in new guise by sociologists such as Giddens. Stating that Western societies have entered a ‘second modernity’, characterised by the rise of risk society and the growth of individualism, Giddens argues that ‘old’ lines of conflict and partisan controversies now are irrelevant. Hence, his conclusion is that conflicts fundamental to the ‘old’ adversarial model of politics could and should be eradicated from the political landscape.

As a dialogic model of politics, the Third Way separates antagonism from ‘the political’, and the practice of ‘politics’ becomes a practice of consensus building where conflicts are not given a legitimate presence. This consensus, Mouffe (2005) states, is highly problematic and fraught by political dangers. Because, she argues, it is based upon a disqualification of political arguments that are not in coherence with the already established ‘rational’ discourse. The ‘politics’ of consensus presume that ‘the political’
is closed to contestation. To Mouffe this represents a *post-political* vision, in where the place of the adversary is erased, constituting the antagonist proponent as a destructive agent:

“If we accept to envisage the domain of politics according to their framework, we end up with the following picture: on one side, a multiplicity of ‘sub-cultural’ struggles about a variety of ‘life issues’ which can be dealt with through dialogue; on the other side, either old fashioned ‘traditionalists’ or, more worryingly, the ‘fundamentalists’ fighting a backward struggle against the forces of progress” (Mouffe 2005: 50).

Following the above arguments, ‘the neoliberal political’ embeds a general limitation on contestation: It restricts ‘politics’ to a set frame of consensus building, and it confines antagonist adversaries to the outsides of politics.

Activists are in this respect especially susceptible to post-political mechanisms of hegemonic intervention (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Mouffe 2005). Seeking autonomy from conventional spaces of power, they delineate themselves from political parties, trade unions, and from NGOs seeking influence with political elites, global powers and multinational companies (Poldervaart 2006). In other words, they stand in a principal opposition to Third Way spaces of consensus building and dialogue. Within a ‘politics’ defined by ‘the neoliberal political’, activists’ alternative political organisation constitutes their practice of ‘politics’ as a practice outside the political sphere. Pointing not only to the grievances of those excluded from the neoliberal city, but also criticising the system through which inequalities are generated, adversaries, like the easyCity group, easily end up on what Mouffe (2005) calls ‘the other side’; ‘fighting backward struggles’ against the forces of urban regeneration. As a consequence of their delineation from the conventional spaces of politics, activist groups are heavily dependent upon public space to represent their politics (Mitchell 2003). Seen as illegitimate adversaries their struggles in public space are often transformed into struggles over public space, and their political outside translated into an exclusion from space.

**Co-optation and Instrumentalisation**

‘The neoliberal political’ also draws upon another mechanism of hegemonic intervention that is decisive to urban activists’ contestations (Mayer 2007): Co-optation

---

125 www.contrast.org/KG/nett20.htm (16.11.05)
www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
www.sniggle.net/interview.php (16.11.05)
and instrumentalisation. This mode of suppressing antagonism is based upon the
distinctive, non-antagonistic, relation between the political and economic sphere that
makes the Third Way consensus possible (Mouffe 2005). This relation privileges
market mechanisms as a way of progress, and diverges from the classical assertion that
the sphere of politics should be independent,

“The ancient Athenians separated the place where they did politics, the
Pnyx, from the central economic space of the city, the Agora. The separation
embodies a classic proposition in social thought, that economic activity
enervates people’s capacity for politics. The logic is simple: to Plato it
appeared that economics operates in need and greed, while politics should
operate on justice and right” (Sennett 2006: 136/137).

Seen in this perspective, the antagonist relation between economics and politics not only
appears to be dissolved in ‘the neoliberal political’: It is reordered to the extent where it
is politics that appear to defile the self-regulating market’s optimal allocation of
investments and resources (Brenner, Peck & Theodore 2005). Over the last three
decades this conviction has guided extensive operations of privatisation and
deregulation, and legitimised the decentralisation, devolution and attrition of political
governance (Leitner et al. 2007a). Yet, when this ‘market-as-solution’ policy is merged
with fields of problem solving that used to belong to the state, the role and functions of
the market are also altered (Mayer 2007). As neoliberal urbanism has been faced with
its own immanent contradictions and crisis tendencies, there has also been an
evolutionary reconstitution of the neoliberal project (Brenner & Theodore 2002).

“On the one hand, the basic neoliberal imperative for mobilising space – in
this case, city space – as a purified arena for capitalist growth, commodification and market discipline remained the dominant political
project for municipal governments throughout the world economy…On the
other hand, the conditions for promoting and maintaining economic
competitiveness were reconceptualised by many urban political and
economic elites to include diverse administrative, social and ecological
criteria” (Brenner & Theodore 2002: 370).

Mobilising neoliberal strategies to confront regulatory problems, governance regimes
have co-opted many of the issues addressed by urban activists contesting neoliberalism
(Mayer 2007). Yet, as Brenner and Theodore state, this does not entail a “linear
transition from a generic model of the ‘welfare city’ towards a new model of the
‘neoliberal city’” (Brenner & Theodore 2002: 371). Rather, they argue, the ‘roll-back’
mechanisms of neoliberalism destabilise the grounds upon which claims to rights like social justice, job security, and rights to housing can be made.

When co-opted by projects of neoliberalisation, Mayer (2007) explains, the issues raised by urban activists are made to represent the achievements of market mechanisms – their contestations are instrumentalised as assets for sustaining and legitimising neoliberal policies. This mode of hegemonic intervention thus works quite differently from that described by Mouffe (2005), as it acknowledges the problem addressed, but co-opts and instrumentalises its solution. Seen in relation to the easyCity group, this hegemonic intervention would meet the demand that ‘free spaces’ are necessary components to an attractive urban environment. Yet, as its solution would be co-articulated with neoliberal policies, the group’s contestation of gentrification, commodification and image building would end up reproducing the cultural formations that they were meant to resist. And indeed, this is the main criticism directed at the Vrije Ruimte group from the above squatter movement in Amsterdam (Amsterdam squatter 1 Interview 01.02.06, Amsterdam squatter 2 Interview 01.02.06). Because, though squatters were overly positive to the easyCity action, many of them maintain that the cultural ‘free spaces’ that Vrije Ruimte push for are too easily integrated in the council’s gentrification schemes.

Following this brief examination, it can be argued that ‘the neoliberal political’ is articulated to separate the universal meaning of democracy from the antagonist dimension of politics (Mouffe 2005), creating a void that is filled by the particulars of neoliberal ideology (Brenner & Theodore 2002). When constituted on the basis of ‘the neoliberal political’, urban governance regimes internalise two distinct, yet interrelated, rationalities of hegemonic intervention: Exclusion by illegitimating adversarial claims to political participation (Mouffe 2005), or the co-optation and instrumentalisation of the issues raised (Mayer 2007). Contestations of neoliberal urbanism, such as the easyCity action, are hence confronted with a dual precarity. As creative ‘free spaces’ often are attractive, their advocates might see their efforts instrumentalised by hegemonic modes of producing space. Or, its presence could be framed as a disturbance of the public peace and order, legitimising its obstruction by force (Mouffe 2005). The hegemony of neoliberalism thus poses both rhetorical and practical challenges to its contestation, challenges that are enforced by law, and put into effect by the state.

Yet, as argued in chapter six, to understand how limits set to the democratic functions of cities become tangible, we must turn to the symbolic frameworks that constitute how reality and possibility is interpreted within (potential) spaces of
contestation (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Duncombe 2002). Following the contention of Duncombe that we “account for the past, make sense of the present and dream of the future” (Duncombe 2002: 35) through culture and that the cultures of our grounds of negotiation are permeated by spectacle (Duncombe 2007); how are limits created to thinking, or envisioning, a democratisation of the neoliberal city? Or, how does spectacle, when seen as the cultural counterpart of neoliberal urbanism, delimit visions to the utopian horizons of democracy?

The ‘Politics’ of Spectacle

Spectacle is a way of making an argument that rests not upon rationality, reality or truth; it convinces and persuades through the mythical, the imagined, the feared, the desired, and through fantasy (Duncombe 2007). As the cultural counterpart of neoliberal urbanism, spectacle assumes the role of narrating what neoliberal proponents promise (Blomley 2004): Clean streets and well-preserved parks; secure environments; disciplined out-door advertising; attractive shopping streets; and the provision of efficient services to the prosperous population (Mitchell 2003, Brandvold 2004, Leitner et al. 2007a). All provided for by self-regulating markets, generating the optimal allocation of investments and resources (Brenner et al. 2005). Elements of the contemporary urban spectacle could thus be found in tidily arranged outdoor-markets, a festive Sunday afternoon in the park, or it could simply be the flashy brand of a storefront. Always a part of what makes the allure of cities, the symbolic structures of spectacle are nonetheless conflicted by what the spectacle narrative empowers (Peck 2005, Zukin 1995).

Writing in the 1960s Guy Debord, leader of the subversive Situationist International (Sadler 1998), tied the commercial spectacle to the growth dependency of capitalist societies (Debord 1994). Debord’s thesis captured, in spite of its abstruse, and somewhat nebulous contentions, the core relations of contemporary commercial spectacles. What Debord saw in the relatively affluent post-war Europe was the building of a world too safe, too sanitised, too stultifying (Mitchell 2000). In this world the commodity had become an identity bearing image that defined not only the situations through which people live their lives, but also their relations: “The Spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord 1994: 12). With this relation as grounds, Debord contended, consumer capitalism was empowered to alter its role from one satisfying primary human needs to the far more productive manufacturing of pseudo needs. Hence, he argued, the necessity
of boundless economic development could be established as an objective truth in public opinion: “ideology is no longer a historical choice, but simply an assertion of the obvious” (Debord 1994: 150), he concluded.

Figure 16: From Hackney London (photo courtesy Martin Aaserud)

Figure 17: Also from Hackney in London (authors photo)
In *The Consciousness of the Eye* Richard Sennett (1992) traces demarcations of urban public space along the historical lines of culture. Sennett relates Christian Protestant constructions of the home as a sanctuary to separations of the public from the private, and by extension, to the modern fear of exposure. Exploring the renaissance invention of the clock, he draws lines from how the human body is subjected to disciplinary time to the capitalist grid-organisation of cities. Throughout these accounts Sennett describes the history of urban design as a neutralisation of the environment. Denying the urban environment a value of its own, levelling hilltops and cutting across social borders, the history of urban design is to Sennett one that denies complexity and difference.

Writing amidst the upsurge that eventually led to the Paris uprisings of 1968, Lefebvre (1996) asserted that the city by necessity is a place where an interaction of difference finds place between people. If not suppressed, Lefebvre contended, this difference should make out the basis of a transformative city, continually reshaped by the diverse projects of its users. The right to participate in the production of the city, and to collectively create it as a work, as *œuvre*, is to Lefebvre a right which “manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualisation in socialisation, to habit and inhabit” (Lefebvre 1996: 173). Lefebvre’s notion of ‘the right to the city’ as a right to *creating* the city connects to his later work on the production of space (Lefebvre 1991). In the above ideal the citizen works to produce the city. She stands in a possibly antagonist relation to her peers; she performs an active ownership of the public. In late-capitalist space, however, the agent is seen as subjugated to a range of constraining structures, marginalising her participation. What is central to both Sennett’s (1992) understanding of the suppression of urban diversity, and Lefebvre’s (1991, 1996) contention that conflictual difference is productive, is how they relate the production of space to culture. In both approaches cultural exclusions are seen to produce exclusions from public space, limiting citizens’ right to social interaction and political participation. The creative powers of the citizenry are as such seen as closely related to its political powers.

As explained in chapter six, the easyCity action worked to expose how narrations of the neoliberal city are embedded in spectacles of consumption. Through the jams performed, attention was directed from the commodity function of urban spectacles to their social and cultural implications. Pointing to the ‘reverse side’ of spectacle, these culture jams exposed how commercial representations structure exclusion and disciplines the city. Turning to how limitations on urban activism are produced through the cultures of spectacle, and how they produce the political spaces of
the city, the following analysis investigates the themes implied by the easyCity articulations. These are explored both in light of spectacles that embed ‘the neoliberal political’ (Peck 2005), and the subversive easyCity spectacle (Duncombe 2007).

‘Creative’ Cities for the ‘Creative’ Class

The cultural entrepreneurialism of cities is multifaceted, and unfolds, like any process of neoliberal localisation, in place-specific forms (Brenner & Theodore 2002, Peck 2005). Yet, cities cultural strategies, like their political economy, converge. Competing with other cities over investments and innovations, entrepreneurial governance regimes have, to a considerable extent, come to see economic success as dependent upon the ‘Creative Classes’ (Leitner et al. 2007a). An ascendant priority in interurban competition, ‘creative’ strategies are of recent origin. The ‘creative focus was triggered by Richard Florida’s widely influential book The Rise of the Creative Class. Since its publication in 2002 it has become an international bestseller, and remarkably, already a public-policy phenomenon (Peck 2005).

According to Florida’s pervasive script, urban developers must acknowledge that contemporary capitalism is based on human creativity, and create an accommodative urban environment that embraces the ‘Creative Class’: A class made out of atomised subjects that “seek out tolerant, diverse and open communities, rich in the kind of amenities that allow them precariously to maintain a work-life balance, together with experiential intensity” (Peck 2005: 745). The ‘creatives’ are imagined to live in converted lofts, to prefer streetscapes distinguished by a density of subcultures and coffee shops, and are seen to make out the hustle and bustle of concerts and art venues. Shaping the city as they use it, the members of the Creative Class are seen to generate the spectacles that give cities the necessary edge to become winners of interurban competition. Celebrated as the victory of the urban multitude over shopping centres and suburbanisation, the Creative Class has come to signify a soft, cultural turn to the hard policies of neoliberal urbanism. What distinguishes ‘creative’ strategies from previous attempts to reposition cities within the spatial division of consumption is the relation established between the users and the producers of urban spectacles. In the ‘creative’ city’s “teeming blend of cafes, sidewalk musicians, and small galleries and bistros”, Florida states, “it is hard to draw the line between participant and observer, or between creativity and its creators” (Florida cited in Peck 2005: 762). The image of the creative city is presented as an image created by its users, rather than by entrepreneurs
seeking to attract consumers, and following its proponents, it fits like hand in glove with aspirations to an open, diverse city (Peck 2005).

Yet, as the settlement of ‘creative’ strategies has unfolded, dividing lines have appeared. Observing how cities have come to embrace Florida’s doctrine, Peck argues that the ‘Creative Class’ strategy makes out a fundamental shift in the entrepreneurial governance of cities: “This is not simply a matter of learning to live with gentrifying cities, not even merely to accommodate the process; this it to go several steps further, in asserting the ostensibly productive nature of creative gentrification” (Peck 2005: 762). Thus, by the influence of ideas about the Creative Class, the elite focused policies of neoliberal urbanism are given a new content: Notions of ‘growth-first’ are rearticulated and reoriented towards a reliance on a ‘creative’ trickle-down effect. From this emphasis on ‘creative’ strategies, Peck argues, the profitable Creative Class is made the marker of both cultural and economic prosperity, leaving only “supporting roles for the two-thirds of the population languishing in the working and service classes, who get nothing apart from occasional tickets to the circus” (Peck 2005: 767).

Seen in the perspective of strategies to attract and profit from the Creative Class, the ‘politics’ of ‘creative’ spectacle assume a distinct shape. As it is given precedence by cities’ authorities, the Creative Class is empowered as the defining force of urban public cultures (Peck 2005). Following Zukin’s (1995) understanding of inclusion in public culture as decisive to the right to represent oneself in public space, the Creative Class becomes the key referent in the distribution of rights to expression within the city’s public. At another level, Creative Class identities and cultures are drawn upon in the construction of competitive city images, making their productivity a marker of what the city is (Peck 2005). Privileging the Creative Class in order to profit from its synergies, cities take upon themselves a facilitative role, producing space in accordance to the consumer preferences of the Creative Class. Politically neutralised, and relieved from ‘negative externalities’ such as the poor and the homeless (Knox 1993), the spaces of ‘creative’ spectacles internalise the same structures of exclusion as spaces of consumption (Mitchell 2000, 2003). To paraphrase Knox (1993), ‘creative’ urban spaces, produced and sold in discrete parcels, are not that different from what Mitchell (2000, 2003) calls pseudo public space; they just come in different wrapping.

As they are tied to entrepreneurial spatial politics, ‘creative’ spectacles embed the same non-confictual relation to the economic sphere as ‘the neoliberal political’. The political limitations embedded in ‘creative’ spectacles, however, are not directly related to post-political exclusions, nor is culture co-opted in the same manner as
contestations. When translated into spectacles, Deutsche (1996) explains, the politics of spatial order and control are muddled, adding elements of seductive narration to their manifestation. The ‘politics’ of spectacle are politics depoliticised, articulated as an extravagant happening of directly lived, experienced space (Lefebvre 1991, Mouffe 2005). In these spaces post-political structures of exclusion and discipline are translated into feelings of not belonging, and into specific behavioural frames (Zukin 1995). And, the co-optation of culture by neoliberal growth strategies becomes a structuring force, neutralising the containment of culture within the sphere of productivity (Deutsche 1996). Explaining space as non-related to the social contexts it is produced within, the commercialised spectacles of the Creative Class become part of making urban space the practicable, sensible, uncontested solution of itself (Deutsche 1996, Blomley 2004).

The ‘politics’ of ‘creative’ spectacles, understood as a practice of ‘the neoliberal political’, can thus be seen as integral to how neoliberal urbanism is embedded as a lived experience, institutionalised through culture, and made into a social practice. The creative achievements of citizens are as such instrumentalised, and sought determined by the ends of profitability: In visions of the ‘creative city’, the transformative urbanism in Lefebvre’s (1996) ideal gives way to an ideal of the accumulative city, subjugating the creative powers of the citizenry to the necessity of boundless economic growth (Debord 1994).

Within the ‘creative’ urban order a specific subjectivity is produced (Leitner et al. 2007a). The neoliberal city expects that its citizens behave entrepreneurially and prudently, and take responsibility for their own successes, failures and social welfare. Reconceptualised along economic lines, the freedom of the ‘neoliberal individual’ is defined as the freedom to act as the self-centred entrepreneur of its own life. By empowerment through individualisation the citizen is given autonomy in interest, and is freed from its collective obligations; simultaneously assuming the burden of social welfare that its community previously bore for it. ‘The political’ becomes a question of success versus failure, morals versus immorality, and responsibility versus irrationality (Mouffe 2005). The circumstances of those outside the favored class, Peck (2005) explains, are rationalised according to a deficit model of creativity. Given the subject position of this neoliberal rationality, ‘horizons of change’ are individualised, and tied to a set of personal management criteria. Yet, as the geographically extensive, and strategically diverse contestations against neoliberal urbanism demonstrate, the boundaries of this subjectivity are continually broken, confronting the disciplinary
organisation of neoliberal cities with alternative sociospatial imaginaries (Leitner et al. 2007a).

The Subversive Spectacle and the Limitations of Resistance

Writings on spectacle often mark understandings of spectacle with notions of strong instrumentality, giving spectacle the power to uphold social, cultural, and political domination (Debord 1994, Duncombe 2007). From this, critical accounts often conclude in an unassuming position, referring spectacle to consumerism, to the political right, and to the futility of cultural resistance. Criticising these understandings, Duncombe states that fascism and commercialism “appear to have cornered the market on the political use of fantasy and the mobilisation of desire” (Duncombe 2007: 124). It is necessary, he argues, to come to terms with how inherently antidemocratic spectacles, created by elites to be followed by the masses, can serve participatory, egalitarian politics. Duncombe explains his position stating that we live in an age where spectacle has become the lingua franca of politics, and that political progress, in the name of modern democracy, demands the manufacture of consent. From this contention he concludes that progressives must formulate a political language that manages to look “beyond reason, rationality and self-evident truth” (Duncombe 2007: 124), and makes use of the powers of spectacle to further its respective agenda. Drawing upon his long-time experience with creative activism, Duncombe gives an outline to the ‘politics’ of a spectacle that rests on activist ideals of ‘the political’: A “radically democratized, participatory spectacle” (Duncombe 2007: 134), characterised by incentives to participation, openness, and transparency.

The users of this ‘ethical spectacle’, Duncombe explains, should be involved in the spectacle’s construction as well as in its performance; they should produce as well as consume the spectacle. This does not entail that the participatory spectacle is spontaneous, but that its organisers must create a situation where popular participation “not only can happen but must happen in order for the spectacle to come to fruition” (Duncombe 2007: 129). Like the (ideal) ‘right to the city’, the (ideal) ethical spectacle is only realised though the inclusive, active, participation of the individuals afflicted by its performance. In order to express, and not control and channel popular desire, the spectacle’s structure must also be open to the plural, contingent and indeterminate processes catalysed by its use.

“Nazi spectacles, the historian George Mosse argues, always culminated in order. The masses might march here and line up there, but they always
arrived at the same answer: the Nazi Party. Ethical spectacle, as an opera aperta, never arrives at one answer. Open to the noisy diversity of participants, observers, and settings to create the completed work, it ends (or rather, rests) in a field of possibilities" (Duncombe 2007: 142).

Yet, non-dependent upon its open, participatory nature, Duncombe contends, the ethical spectacle must invite the viewer to see through it. Instead of making out a portrait of social realities, the spectacle must disclose that “the fantasy being presented is a fantasy: a performance, not reality; a symbol, not simulation” (Duncombe 2007:151). In other words, for the ethical spectacle to serve democratic ends, those that participate in its making must be enabled, and encouraged to see the spectacle as the fictitious expression it is. Unlike the ‘creative’ spectacle it cannot be made to represent the socio-cultural reality of urban space (Peck 2005).

The ‘politics’ of the subversive culture jammer spectacle and what Duncombe describes as an ethical spectacle share a range of common denominators: Both emphasise participation over spectatorship. In the same manner as Duncombe emphasises the contingent and indeterminate processes of the ethical spectacle, culture jammers see their politics as generative rather than determinative. In terms of what
Duncombe describes as the transparency of spectacle, culture jammers seek to give meaning to the contingent processes of settling social reality, rather that portraying that which is ‘real’. This is not to say that the ethical spectacle envisioned by Duncombe (2007), or the disruptive acts of culture jammers, ever fully meet the ideals of participation, openness, and transparency. What these notions point to, however, is a reformulation of ‘the political’ through envisioning the ‘politics’ of spectacle as a democratic practice.

Using the cultural markers of commercial spectacle to articulate their critique of neoliberal urbanism, the easyCity group constituted their spectacle through a play with the fictitious image of the easyCity sales office\textsuperscript{126}, its visitors’ experience of an activist space, and the space as an art exhibition. The easyCity group’s synthesis of spectacle as a mode of narration with their actual contestations was primarily constructed as a spectacle of ‘free space’, performed through the public’s use of it. The shop locale thus came to represent both an alternative political vision for space, and the performance of this idea. From this, the easyCity spectacle was made to signify what the group sanctioned: ‘Free’ public art, performance and engagement; spaces that are not controlled authoritatively, but collectively; actors who’s agency springs out of principles of equal participation rather than unevenly distributed consumer power; and not the least, a city that accommodates uncontrolled, spontaneous, and chaotic manifestations of an autonomous public (de Jong Interview 27.01.06, Borcila Interview 02.11.06). In the easyCity shop, as in other ‘free spaces’ like squatted social centres, alternative political visions were developed, struggled for, and lived. Envisioning a shift in power that regains the authority of politics over markets and disperses state power to a radically open political landscape, activists’ resistance to contemporary cities look to a democratic horizon of their own.

In \textit{T.A.Z The Temporary Autonomous Zone} Hakim Bey (1985) describes events like the easyCity spectacle as areas wherein transitory ‘pirate utopias’ are assembled, liberating space from their hegemonic function. To Bey, the T.A.Z is an enrapturing space of liberation, where the rebel momentarily lives an insurgence that is confined to a politics on the margins. Yet, as an extension of Bey’s conceptualisation of the T.A.Z, there are severe constraints to the freedoms of the ‘free space’. Autonomous in form and constitution, this is a space for which one must continually struggle. Defined as illegal by the state, it is not a space that delivers freedom – it is rather (in the eyes of some) a

\textsuperscript{126} http://www.vrijeruimte.nl/easycity/about_en.html (05.01.06)
space to be liberated. The easyCity spectacle, though it is one that embraces culture’s imaginary repository, and a politics of indeterminacy, did as such also internalise limits to its creativity and difference. But, in opposition to the ‘creative’ spectacle, in where creativity is limited by participation (Peck 2005), the limits to activist contestations are defined by their chosen outside position. And moreover, they are defined by how this position of not conceding to formations of neoliberal urbanism and spectacle are constructed.

The activist, is an ‘agent of action’, for whom being someone who is what one does, rather than what one happens to be, is an essential part of its self-image. In the article *Give up Activism*¹²⁷, the author (unknown) points to how the activist is constituted as an expert in social change and, arguing the fallacy of this identity quite abrasively, states that:

“To think of yourself as being an activist means to think of yourself as being somehow privileged or more advanced than others in your appreciation of the need for social change, in the knowledge of how to achieve it and as leading or being in the forefront of the practical struggle to create this change”¹²⁸.

Though there is a range of structures to activism that work against the elitism described above – like their non-hierarchical organisation, consensus building through direct democracy principles, and the dismissal of mass-representation – the author of *Give up Activism* still hits a nerve. Because, through activists’ delineation from conventional spaces of power, and from the spaces of popular culture, they achieve not only autonomy from hierarchical structures: They also delineate themselves from the overall democratic body.

In terms of how Lefort described ‘the people’ as a source of democratic power – ‘the image of an empty place’ to be filled by the particulars of negotiation, struggle, and, at times, consensus (Deutsche 1996) – the activist comes to signify an edge to this space: As a political agent outside political parties, outside NGOs, a radical and a rebel, the activist can in a sense be said to describe an endpoint of the liberal democratic continuum of political actors, contesting the ‘end-state’ of neoliberal projections (Peck & Tickell 2002). In this sense, activists become signifiers of the *breath* of ‘the political’ (Mouffe 2005); they signify the political tolerance of democratic regimes, and ultimately, the sovereign power of the people. However, as the law does not protect

¹²⁷ http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no9/activism.htm (05.01.06)
¹²⁸ http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no9/activism.htm (05.01.06)
activist practises, like the occupation of private property or their temporal appropriation of public spaces, their political actions can also, legitimately, be suppressed by force. The suppression of activism can as such also be drawn upon to confirm the authority of democratic regimes, and their protection of rights such as private property and the public peace and order.

The political position of the activist is as such a zone of indistinction, a juridico-political space in where “the decision and the exception it concerns are never decisively placed within or without the legal system as they are precisely the moving border between the two” (Norris cited in Gregory 2004: 62). A space of exception, the political space of activists cannot be included in the democratic regime it is a part of, and yet, it is already a part of its whole (Gregory 2004). Caught between the philosophy of their autonomy, and the unmarked powers of democratic politics, activists must perhaps, in order to release the imaginary repository of their articulations, ‘give up activism’. Or, as the editorial collective behind We are Everywhere states, imagine otherwise:

“What is needed is not for more people to become activists, but for the everyday fabric of society to become engaged. That involves risking our own identity as a movement, and our own senses of a place in the world. It’s only through letting go of our precious identities, letting go of our egos and our subcultures, that we can remove the limits we place upon our own achievements and move into the kind of pluralist politics that we need now more than ever. As Jeremy Gilbert, a British academic and activist, wrote to us during the production of this book: ‘We are everywhere? We’re not, you know – but we could be. And if we are going to be, then we have to acknowledge what a scary thought that really is: for once ‘we’ are everywhere then there will be nothing to define ourselves against, and so ‘we’ will be nowhere” (We are Everywhere: 510).
Conclusion Part III – The Neoliberalisation of Democracy

The analysis of the thesis’ Part III explored the second thesis question: How do neoliberal urbanism and spectacle produce limitations on an antagonist urban activism? In answering this, the analysis began to explore how ‘the neoliberal political’ is constituted. Rather than giving a general overview of the political ideology of neoliberalism, the analysis was centred upon two features to how neoliberalism influences urban governance: The post-political discourse of the Third Way (Mouffe 2005), and the evolution of neoliberal projects through the co-optation of tasks that used to belong to the state (Mayer 2007). These two features were approached in a theoretical manner, and discussed in relation to the above second question. Seeing how these provide the basis of politically legitimate hegemonic interventions, the discussions of this analysis can be summarised in the following manner.

The post-political Third Way discourse relates to how processes of neoliberalisation shift power from open political spaces to the closed negotiations of public-private partnerships. Following Mouffe’s (2005) line of argument, these public-private regimes of power are primarily characterised by a definition of ‘the political’ where antagonist conflicts are seen as external to progressive, democratic politics. This separation of antagonism from definitions of democracy provides the basis for public-private partnerships’ consensus policies, and for the creation of a political practice that emphasises dialogue over conflict. Within these ‘dialogic’ processes, political articulations that are not in harmony with the neoliberal frames of decision-making are defined as non-political, and as separated from democratic decision-making processes. Political articulations that for example point to an antagonist relation between the interests of ‘the people’ and the interests of the market are hence seen as illegitimate, or ‘backwards’. Urban activists relate to the consensus policies of the Third Way in mainly two manners. Firstly, their criticism extends from outcomes of neoliberal policies to the governmental mode of neoliberal urbanism – their critique extends to the consensus formation between public and private actors. And secondly, activists delineate themselves from the conventional spaces of power, and organise outside the ‘dialogic’ spaces of Third Way politics. Contesting their ‘democratic consensus’, and organising outside the political spaces of public-private regimes, activists’ contestations of neoliberal urbanism are hence susceptible to a politically legitimated suppression by force.
The second mode of hegemonic intervention that was investigated in the analysis works quite differently as it relates to how urban governance regimes privilege market mechanisms as a means of progress (Brenner & Theodore 2002). As the projects of neoliberal urbanism have evolved, the market has come to solve more and more of the problems that were previously seen as part of the state’s responsibilities. The legitimacy of the market’s privileged position in democratic regimes thus becomes dependent upon factors that exceed those of profitability, like social equality and cultural diversity. The advocates of neoliberal urbanism have therefore become increasingly receptive to the articulations made by those contesting its settlement (Mayer 2007). Co-opting the problems addressed by activists, and mobilising neoliberal strategies to solve them, governance regimes can recognise the issues raised, but dismiss the general criticism. Internalised as part of the neoliberal projects of public-private partnerships, activist contestations can thus be made to sustain and legitimise the policies they were meant to challenge. Though this second mode of hegemonic intervention represents a ‘softer’ approach to contestation than the first, what they achieve is quite similar: In both cases the antagonist dimension is brought into play to suppress contestation, and the hegemonic position of neoliberal urbanism is reaffirmed drawing upon discourses of democracy.

The promise of democracy is a promise of equality, liberty, and autonomy (Furet 1998). These universal signifiers of freedom provide the frames of democratic contestation and the grounds for a continued reinvention of democracy (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Laclau 2004). As a grounded practice of ‘the neoliberal political’, however, democracy is represented as the end-point of emancipation, and the impossibility of its own fulfilment is negated. Thus, when put into practice by entrepreneurial governance regimes, ideas of democracy can be mobilised both to frame contestation as a destructive practice, and to assert the progressiveness of neoliberalism: When claimed as a representation of existing regimes of urban governance, the promise of democracy can become a powerful tool of domination (Furet 1998).

Turning to how these limitations are grounded as a political practice, the analysis proceeded to investigate the ‘politics’ of the neoliberal spectacle. The centrality of spectacle to the analysis came from a number of reasons. The case investigated in the thesis, easyCity, drew upon spectacle to produce their critique of neoliberal urbanism (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). Also, spectacle is one of the main outcomes of cultural entrepreneurialism, and the cultures of commercial spectacles are increasingly becoming the cultures of public space (Zukin 1995, Mitchell 2000, 2003). And finally,
The spectacle has become one of the most important features to cities’ competitiveness (Peck 2005).

The spectacles of contemporary cities are mainly created through the Creative Class’ use of the city (Peck 2005). This is a vaguely defined social group, and is generally seen to include anyone from a lawyer with a ‘sophisticated’ taste to the ‘struggling artist’. Its ‘members’ are not defined politically, or through their social status, but rather, through how they use the city. This ‘use’ is seen as profitable by neoliberal governance regimes, as it is perceived to generate the spectacles that make out the attractiveness of cities. The spectacles of the Creative Class are therefore widely considered as valuable assets to interurban competition. Recognising this, entrepreneurial politics have been reoriented towards accommodating a development of cities that is seen to favour the Creative Class. Hence, the ‘creative’ spectacle signifies both an asset to growth, and the privileging of a certain kind of citizen.

The ‘politics’ of these spectacles, understood as how they make space into a lived experience, work quite differently from the direct hegemonic interventions of ‘the neoliberal political’. In opposition to how ‘the neoliberal political’ is drawn upon to negate or co-opt contestations, the ‘creative’ spectacle becomes a structuring force through its neutralisation of neoliberal urbanism; in the spaces of the ‘creative’ spectacle social exclusions and economic privileges are transformed into expressions of the city’s public culture (Zukin 1995, Deutsche 1996). As the dominant cultural formation of central public spaces, the cultures of these profitable spectacles are also integral to processes that depoliticise urban public space. Within these processes a specific subjectivity is produced, by which the urban citizen is imagined as an atomised subject that acts in accordance to a neoliberal rationality, operating as a self-centred entrepreneur within a market of life-possibilities. The politics of these subjects are hence seen as individualised life-politics, and not as a collective, democratic engagement. As they seek to change their life conditions through changing the overall society rather than through profiting from it, activist politics are hence in discord with the rationalism of neoliberal politics.

Asking how activists seek to circumvent these limitations on their resistance to neoliberal urbanism, the analysis turned to the subversive spectacle of the easyCity group (de Jong Interview 27.01.06). The easyCity locale made out what could be described as a situation, or moment in public life (Sadler 1998). Staged through the arts of spectacle, and built upon aspirations of space ‘free’ from commercial and state dominance, this spectacle made public space its site and object of contestation. Pointing
to the social inequalities and the cultural homogenisation generated through neoliberal urbanism, the easyCity group depicted the commercial spectacle as a way of infusing public space with structures of exclusion and discipline.

The easyCity action represents a politico-cultural contestation, as it drew upon both activist and culture jammer strategies. Analysing the one-week spectacle staged by the group through Duncombe’s (2007) notion of ethical spectacle, the analysis concluded that this subversive spectacle embedded a vision of democratic practice that diverges from the ‘creative’ spectacles of neoliberal urbanism. This vision was expressed by the easyCity groups’ aspiration to stage a participatory spectacle, in where the shop’s visitors were decisive in making it a political public space. The main point where the easyCity spectacle diverges from the ‘creative’ spectacle is by the nature of their instrumentality (Peck 2005). The ‘creative’ spectacle is directed towards interurban competition, and at making urban space profitable. The easyCity spectacle was staged as a political contestation, but proposed no outcome to its challenge of neoliberal urbanism. Rather, it aspired to an open structure, where the outfall of the action would depend upon public participation. Following the above conclusions, public space, when imagined as a space of political struggle, negotiation and conflict, becomes a space on the margins of political discourse (Deutsche 1996, Mitchell 2000, 2003). Seen in this perspective, the sociospatial imaginaries of the easyCity action, and their articulation through the appropriation of space, were not only a contestation of urban commodification: It was also a contestation of the neoliberalisation of democratic practices and spaces.
Chapter 8 – Thesis Conclusion

Throughout the analysis, rights to political participation have been argued as a right to public visibility, and hence, as a right to representation in the city’s public spaces (Zukin 1995, Deutsche 1996, Mitchell 2003). Claiming the centrality of public culture and space to cities’ political function, the thesis argued that neoliberal processes of privatisation and commodification entail an uneven redistribution of these rights. Investigating the easyCity culture jammer action, the analysis explored these changes in the political composition of cities through the perspective of a politico-cultural activist resistance. The mode of resistance explored was culture jamming, investigated through the easyCity case.

The foundations to this analysis were established in Part I of the thesis, Approaches to Culture Jamming. This segment began to present the methodology applied in researching the culture jammer mode of resistance and the easyCity case. Presenting this as A History of Research, chapter two described how the study unfolded – with changing questions, objectives and ideas – in the time of a travel which could be described as moving in a landscape of resistance. Drawing upon this fieldwork, and an extensive body of secondary material, chapter three, Culture Jamming, presented culture jamming as a mode and field of resistance. Culture jamming was discussed as a critique of the commercial saturation of public discourse, as different forms of communication strategies, and as a philosophy of contestation. Chapter four, Writing Worlds, gave an outline to the theoretical framework of the thesis. Explaining the relation between hegemony and contestation from a poststructuralist perspective, the chapter argued an analytical emphasis on contingency, representation, and symbolic power (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Mouffe 2005). Discussing the political aspect to cultural resistance, the chapter argued that, albeit different from a ‘pure’ political contestation, culture could be a powerful means of resistance (Duncombe 2002). Exploring ideas and ideals of democracy and public space the chapter argued the importance of indeterminacy, openness, inclusiveness, and conflictuality to democratic practices and spaces (Deutsche 1996, Mitchell 2000, 2003).

Answering the thesis’ first question, the analysis of part II, easyCity, explored how neoliberal urbanism and spectacle were depicted, and contested by the easyCity group. In chapter five, Jamming the Evidence of Materiality, the culture jam of the imagined easyCity city was examined as a commentary to the political economy of
contemporary urban centres. Pointing to the politics of cities economic organisation, this jam targeted naturalised notions of the inevitability of neoliberalisation (Harvey 1989a, Deutsche 1996). Using the occupied shop locale as a container of this critique, the action pointed to how the dominance of discourses on profitability and competiveness produce both the privileged and the excluded spatialities of the neoliberal city. Chapter 6, Jamming the Urban Economy of Experience, continued the investigation of the different easyCity jams with an emphasis upon the symbolic economy of consumption spectacles (Zukin 1995). Seeing how the signifiers of commercial space suppress the non-commodity features and functions of urban space, the chapter argued that the spaces of the neoliberal city should also be seen as described by what they exclude. Concluding the discussions of Part II, the easyCity group’s depiction of neoliberal urbanism and spectacle was argued to resemble what Karl Polanyi (2005) describes as fictitious commodities. As non-profitable qualities of fictitious commodities are envisioned to contradict a beneficial use, neoliberal urbanism and spectacle devalue and suppress uses of the city that cannot be made to fit with neoliberal projects of profitability.

Part III, The Promise of Democracy, continued to examine how neoliberal urbanism and spectacle produce limitations on an antagonist politico-cultural activism. This question was mainly approached in chapter seven, The Neoliberal Political and Spectacle. Asking how ‘the neoliberal political’ is constituted (Mouffe 2005), the chapter explored the democratic practices of neoliberal urbanism. Emphasising the ‘politics’ of spectacle as part of settling the neoliberal urban order (Peck 2005), the chapter outlined the political practice embedded within the ‘creative’ spectacle’s production of public space and culture.

Tracing a line between ‘the neoliberal political’ and the contestations of the easyCity action, two general features to the political hegemony of neoliberalism were emphasised. The first relates to how neoliberal governance regimes define democratic contestation as a dialogic process in where a consensus is reached (Mouffe 2005). This notion of democratic practice separates antagonist articulations from democratic decision-making, and enables the political exclusion of adversaries that do not concede to the frames of a neoliberal consensus. The second mode of hegemonic intervention works quite differently from the first. In this mode the antagonist element of political articulations is counteracted through its co-optation, and further, by its instrumentalisation in the manufacture of consent by neoliberal governance regimes (Mayer 2007). However, in spite of their differences, both these modes of hegemonic
intervention draw upon representations of democracy to legitimise the practices of neoliberal governance.

Seeing how these structures of exclusion and discipline are settled through the cultures of urban landscapes, the analysis argued the centrality of spectacle in the production of public space and culture. The spectacles of the neoliberal city are by large produced through how the Creative Class uses the city, and are integral to strategies of interurban competition (Peck 2005). Projected as using the city in ways that are profitable, the Creative Class is seen to create the attractiveness of urban environments. Urban grounds of political contestation are as such subjugated to a philosophy of productivity. This philosophy of value extraction extends from the production of space to the manufacturing of political subjectivities (Leitner et al. 2007a). Following Peck,

“A new generation of entrepreneurialising subjects is formed, as the disciplines of creative production extends to every aspect of the self and soul, to the spheres of consumption and play, as well as to those of work, while the circumstances of those outside the favoured class are rationalised according to a deficit model of creativity” (Peck 2005: 277).

Emphasising how spectacle is part of the political function of cities, the analysis argued that neoliberal urbanism, as well as strengthening market rule, has made the state differently powerful (Peck 2001). Urban citizens, on the other hand, are faced by a political equivalent of Thatcher’s statement that ‘there is no alternative’ to neoliberal reform (Sparke forthcoming). Because, as the political use of public space is increasingly framed as illegitimate, and the entrepreneurialism of governance regimes is protected by a ‘democratic’ consensus, a ‘no choice’ neoliberal rationality is also being firmly settled within the democratic institutions of cities.

The analysis of part III was concluded by a discussion of how the subversive easyCity spectacle embedded an alternative vision for an urban democratic practice. In opposition to the ‘creative’ spectacle, the easyCity spectacle did not aim to insert space with a certain order. Rather, it aimed at provoking a rethinking of urban space in ways that sees the hegemony of neoliberalism as contingent. Depicting neoliberal urbanism and spectacle as created through the coercive force of commercialism, the easyCity action asserted the possibility of its alternative. Aimed at provoking the political imagination of its users, without giving a specific direction to the imaginations produced, this subversive spectacle sought to recreate political empowerment by experience. However, as the political agency of activists places them on the edges of democratic space, a distance to the overall democratic body limits their contestations.
Ironically, this distance is formulated as a contestation of projections of neoliberalism as an end-point to democratisation (Peck & Tickell 2002).

In this research project, neoliberal urbanism has been mapped as a contested intervention, described by what could be perceived as the edges of the neoliberal urban project. In this exploration the urban experience has emerged as an element of correspondence between the privileged spaces and users of the neoliberal city and the people and functions excluded from the privileges of neoliberal urbanism and spectacle. As spectacle has the effect of depoliticising space the political implications of neoliberal ‘politics’ of ‘creative’ spectacle are seldom experienced as explicit. Relating the everyday experience of spectacle to its instrumentality, the easyCity action hence made graspable politics of neoliberal urbanism that seldom are discussed outside the spaces in where they are made. However, the political importance of experiences produced through this subversive spectacle, as Mehta (1999) convincingly argues, can by far be captured with the framework of current academic language.

“There is a paradox that attends reflection on experience. The concept and the term are often taken as markers of precisely what it exceeds, and remains below, the threshold of what concepts and language can capture. The feelings, the allegedly ineffable modalities to which experience refers, are in this sense always betrayed by the very gesture that is employed to translate them into conceptual or communicable form. Experience, in this view, is so densely tactile that it defines all representations. On the other hand, there is the view that, which has gained wide-ranging following after the so-called linguistic turn, in which anything that is meaningful must, on account of that, be available to linguistic mediation. The gravitational field of language is deemed to be inescapable, and therefore experience is and can be no more than what a particular discursive system makes possible. Whatever it signifies, experience cannot be prior to, nor can it exceed, the expressive capacities of that system” (Mehta 1999: 201).

With this in mind, I turn to the reflections of the easyCity participant Robin van ‘t Haar. Van ‘t Haar dismissed my request of an interview, explaining that he did not feel comfortable within the frames of science. What he did instead was to visit the Coffee Company that now resides where the easyCity shop once were. Describing the experience of this visit in words and pictures on his blog129, van ‘t Haar somehow captures ‘that which exceeds, and remains below what concepts and language can capture’ (Mehta 1999). With the permission of van ‘t Haar, this account concludes the thesis.

129 http://www.cityscripts.com/weblog.html (18.10.06)
Some years ago I joined the Easy City project, for which an empty shop in the Kinkerstraat in Amsterdam was squatted during one week. The Easy City project was initiated by the Vrije Ruimte and addressed the increasing privatisation and commodification of public space. As I understood, the Easy City group since then travelled to more places within Europe. Last week I received e-mail from Tone Huse from the University of Oslo who is writing her master thesis in political geography. She is researching the Easy City project and therefore asking questions to the participants. As I have not always been happy when science meets visual art, I decided not to answer her questions but to have a look of what has become of the former squatted site of the Easy City.

The space is now in use by the Coffee Company.
For 2.50 euro I ordered a ristretto medium – ok.

At the Coffee Company people walk in and out, some are working behind laptops. It is not very crowded. One lady is making phone calls while she rocks her baby carriage.

Obviously people know their way around much better at the Coffee Company than at the former Easy City shop – what you see is what you get: coffee, no cheap bargains on sun trips to where ever. I remember quite a bunch of people got confused by the well-known logo of the Easy group.
At the Coffee Company most people read a newspaper, so do I.

The front page of the Volkskrant shows an image of some squat riots in the city centre yesterday. To emphasize these scenery's originally belong to another decade, the subscription speaks of 'a classical image'.
Outside two men -their appearance keeps between estate agents and city officials- show some serious interest in the floors above the Coffee Company. One is carrying a briefcase;

…the other is calling with his cell phone.

After a while they conclude something.
At the right of the two men you can see a poster of the terrorism warning campaign of the Dutch government. The slogan says: "the Netherlands against terrorism" - don't let us be misunderstood.

There are some more posters at the other wall. But while I am finishing my ristretto, a man from the advertisement company parks his car and starts to take the posters from the wall.
It looks like that from now on the threat of a terrorist attack can be taken less serious

Somehow the activities of these men make me feel I am still in Easy City.
Bibliography


Poldervaart, S. 2006. The Importance of Everyday Life-politics and Personal Change for Utopian Politics. University of Amsterdam, Department of Political Science


Appendix 1

Interviews:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fieldwork Interviews</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordi Ariola</td>
<td>14.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo Mango activist</td>
<td>15.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattes Interview</td>
<td>23.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clown Army clown</td>
<td>29.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent de Jong</td>
<td>27.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam Squatter 1</td>
<td>02.02.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam Squatter 2</td>
<td>02.02.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kees Stad</td>
<td>03.02.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chainworkers activist</td>
<td>21.01.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post-fieldwork Interviews and Correspondence | Date: |

| Robin van t’ Hart     | 18.10.06 |
| Rozalinda Borcila     | 02.11.06 |
| Vincent de Jong       | 08.12.06 |
|                       | 01.01.07 |
| Space Hijackters Agent| 21.09.06 |

Utrecht Festival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshops</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local versus Global Movement:</td>
<td>28.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots movements and Visibility</td>
<td>28.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clown Army</td>
<td>28.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Struggles and Media Strategies</td>
<td>29.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence and Activism</td>
<td>29.01.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory and Practice</td>
<td>29.01.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

The easyCity shopping floor included a number of installations, these are described beneath (source: Vincent de Jong, Vrije Ruimte).

**The Paper House** – a sculpture built up from panels that were sawn out of the thick layers of posters that were illegally pasted up, year after year, on a recently demolished kiosk in the city centre.

**Smooth and Control** – an interactive computer installation about Amsterdam as ecology of fear, the design and setting up of urban spaces based on the mechanisms of fear.

**Conversations on the factory floor** – An interactive computer installation of Amsterdam about workers of non-Dutch origin (legal and illegal) who seems proud to do their bit for easyCity. EasyCity can’t exist without them. The installation is a map of Amsterdam with a choice of 15 keys, for example. Bengali/laundrette, Turkish/street maker, Iberian/newspaper deliverer.

**easyIdentity People** – A slide show on identity and meaning of public places. These meanings are not shared by everyone, which mounts into contestations over space. This struggle for space is identified by inequality; some parties have the possibility to force meanings, while others only operate in a margin. This slide presentation shows the Nationaal Monument on Dam Square in Amsterdam as an ultimate place, which is alternately a symbol of national pride and unity, place of resistance against this same national unity and hangout place for different groups.

**Madame Cosmopolite** – A video installation for all your day-to-day worries! We offer cheap, reliable employees for everything that demands too much of your time, prostitution included. All languages available, 24 hours a day. Call 06-Easy Job (06-3179-5587).

**Wibautstraat** – a film, without dialogue, that gives an impression of the life in the street and the absence of it. The rhythm of the street is reflected in the rhythm of the film. No music has been used.

**Beeldenstormers (image stormers)** – An event with video films, speakers and discussion on the crossover influence between activism and art. With 'beeldenstormers' from different eras: Provos, Kabouters, people from the squatting movement, Adbusters and communication guerrilla. How can we intervene in the commercialisation of everything and everybody? How can images be used to force the ruling economy, politics and economy into defence? How can we challenge power with creative means?

**The reverse side of the tourist industry** – Informal talk show about the reverse side of the Amsterdam tourist industry with Bureau Black Work, a researcher/advisor, a restaurant employee & anarchist and an owner of Indian restaurant. In the Amsterdam catering industry many labour migrants have found a job, many of them without a work permit. This branch of industry, itself an expression of the economical globalisation and mobility, flourishes by the grace of a reduced mobility of the people who work there.
In the present text the term ‘activism’ will be used in the same manner as by the groups in question. Generally this refers to a form of political engagement that favours *doing* something together over *being* something together (Poldervaart 2006) From this an ‘action’ means the execution of a direct action performance in where unconventional means of politics are utilised, like the blockading of a road, or the occupation of spaces associated with power. Activism is by large organised horizontally and adheres to principles of direct democracy.

“The concept of *overdetermination* is Althusser’s way of expressing the historical effect of the ensemble of contradictions on each individual contradiction: “the reflection in contradiction itself of its conditions of existence, that is, of its situation in the structure of dominance of the complex whole” (Althusser 169: 209). Overdetermination, in other words, is a variation on the Althusserian concept of structural causality and the dialectic of the social formation and its instances. The ensemble of contradictions assigns a place and a function to individual practices, but the contradictions within each individual practice will exercise in turn an effect on the ensemble and hence back eventually on each individual practice and contradiction, including its own” (Resch 1992: 62)

In relation to neoliberalisation the terms roll-out and roll-back refer to the evolution of neoliberal projects as creatively destructive: “Tendentially, and more and more evidently as neoliberalism has been extended and deepened, this program involves the *roll-out* of new state forms, new modes of regulation, new regimes of governance, with the aim of consolidating and managing both marketisation and its consequences. As a market-building project, then, neoliberalisation involves the simultaneous and iterative roll-back of institutional and social forms (especially those associated with Keynesianism) together with the roll-out of restructured institutional and state forms” (Peck & Tickell 2007: 33).