Digital urbanisms:
Exploring the spectacular, ordinary and contested facets of the media city

Jani Vuolteenaho*, Koen Leurs** & Johanna Sumiala***

*Adjunct professor, Department of Geography and Geology, University of Turku, Finland (jani.vuolteenaho@utu.fi)
**Assistant professor, Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University, The Netherlands (K.H.A.Leurs@uu.nl)
***Senior Research Fellow at University of Tampere / Adjunct Professor at University of Helsinki (johanna.sumiala@helsinki.fi)

Abstract

This introductory review article develops an analytic-conceptual distinction between spectacular, ordinary and contested facets of the present-day digitized urban condition. We reject a scholarly techno-optimism versus techno-pessimism dichotomy and argue that this triadic conceptualization can pave the way for a better understanding of the multiple, often contradictory and unpredictable implications of the fast-proceeding digitalization on cities and people who inhabit them. First, we discuss the intensified spectacularization from the perspective of labeling of cities as technologically advanced "smart" spaces and endeavors to enhance the attractiveness and ICT-glamour of urban public spaces. Next, we highlight two acute "ordinary sides" of living in digitally-mediated cities: the contributions of code-based software and digital media infrastructures to the routinized practices of urban life, and the escalation of the perceived standards of what constitutes "the ordinary" in the face of rapid technological change. Thirdly, we shed light on attempts at re-igniting street-level political agency, and the creation of outside-the-mainstream public spheres, via the aid of digital technology. In the end of the article, we consider how variable spectacular, ordinary and contested facets of the media city are co-present in the following articles of this Special Issue.

Keywords: media city, digital urbanisms, spectacular media city, ordinary media city, contested media city.

Introduction

[W]e now live, we are told, in the Computer Age. What is the outlook for Luddite sensibility? Will mainframes attract the same hostile attention as knitting frames once did? I really doubt it. Writers of all descriptions are stampeding to buy word processors. Machines have already become so user-friendly that even the most unreconstructed of Luddites can be charmed into laying down the old sledgehammer and stroking a few keys instead. Beyond this seems to be a growing consensus that knowledge really is power, that there is a pretty straightforward conversion between money and information, and that somehow, if the logistics can be worked out, miracles may yet be possible. Thomas Pynchon, Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite? (1984).

In his provocative titled essay *Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?*, the American novelist Thomas Pynchon's (1984) once contended that a traditional intellectual disdain for technology can hardly benefit anyone in the age of computers (cf. a classic essay on techno-optimism vs. techno-pessimism: Snow, 1959). By hindsight,

Pynchon's three decades old prognosis about a widespread dissolution of anti-technological academic-culturalist stances seems a prescient vision, in growing numbers also among critical scholars (cf. earlier criticisms of the Machinery and Information Ages: Marcuse, 1968; Murphy et al., 1986; Webster & Robins, 1986). Notwithstanding the myriad black-boxed concerns over digital data, privacy and surveillance, scholars across the social sciences and the humanities have embarked on studying the nascent forms of e-democracy, online participation and crowd sourcing, digitally facilitated human creativity and knowledge-sharing cultures, not to speak of the deluge of digital humanities and computational social science projects. An unmistakably non-cynical, often practice-oriented thrust of putting the "miracles" of the Digital Age and its latest incarnation of 'Big Data' to do their work for people's and societies' good also prospers in many thematic research fronts. This broader academic turn towards investigating the generative possibilities opened up by information and communication technology (ICT) is also mirrored in urban research, a trans-disciplinary research field at the pivot of this Special Issue of *OBS* (Observatorio)*.[1]

Of course, not all research in the social sciences and humanities has mutated into one-dimensional celebration of the effects of digital technology. In the aggregate, attitudes towards pervasive digitalization may have taken an increasingly optimistic mood among urban scholars, but far from all of them have edged power inequities and social conflicts in the diverse contexts of digitalized urbanism out of their analytic sight. Equally crucial for our present purposes, the research field in question has illuminated multiple, often contradictory ramifications of the digitally facilitated mediatization in contemporary cities. Hence, instead of rehashing the techno-optimism versus techno-pessimism dichotomy, in this review article, we argue that three important research foci hold strong potential to offer better understanding of the present-day digitized urban condition: spectacular, ordinary and contested facets of the media city.

In the following section, we will thus focus on a dimension of contemporary urbanism that stems from the interplay between corporate capital and digital technology, namely the intensified spectacularization of cities and urban spaces in the wake of their digitalization. As examples, we discuss the en vogue labeling of cities as technologically advanced 'smart' spaces and endeavors to enhance the attractiveness and ICT-glamour of urban public spaces. Secondly, we consider implications of the ordinary, digitalized sides of urban everyday life, ranging from people's digitally automated spatial routines to the drastically altered expected necessities of urban life. Thirdly, we offer new insights on social contestation in the context of the digitalized media city. We bring to fore instances of bottom-up challenging of high tech- and new media -driven urban redevelopments and the unprecedentedly efficient spreading of the voices of discontent through digital gadgets. Synthesizing these three dimensions, we finally reflect upon challenges that the diverse and uneven consequences of digitalization in contemporary cities pose to critical media cities scholarship.

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[1] The articles of this interdisciplinary special issue include papers reworked from the Helsinki conference "Spectacular/Ordinary/Contested Media City", held in the University of Helsinki in May 2013, as well as invited contributions from colleagues working on the intersections between media, city and digital urbanisms.

Spectacularizing the media city

ICTs have been one of the main driving economic forces in cities over the last few decades, attracting investments and causing fundamental shifts in their symbolic economy (Harvey, 1989; Zukin, 1995; Graham & Marvin, 2001). Contemporary urban entrepreneurialism can be characterized by the two-fold opening of local economies to competition and the globalization of governmental management methods and enterprise cultures. In this connection, high-tech-related city promotion has grown close to a de rigueur component of urban policy-making, often in association with visions built around creative industries (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; see also Sihvonen & Knor, in this issue). Accordingly, the bestowing of cities and prestigious flagship developments with ever more efficient digital infrastructures has not only had numerous intra-urban material and social effects, but arguably also made the digital media city an example par excellence of what Guy Debord (1998, p. 3) once dubbed "advanced spectacularization" in the neoliberalized present. In this article, we review literature and promotional forums such as city websites to concentrate on two distinct features in the attention-seeking staging of cities as ICT-infused spaces (on a generalized theory of spectacularization as attention-seeking, see Crary, 2000). Fashionable global phenomena such as the labeling, indexing and ranking of cities by variable yardsticks of technological advancement and the digital enhancement of urban public life's attractiveness exemplify the relationship between top-down spectacularization strategies and digital forms of urban transformation.

With slightly differing denotations and varying levels of popularity, a range of high tech –associated, more or less futuristic labels – from cyberville to digital media city, flexicity, global city, hackable city, ideopolis, informational city, intelligent city, IT city, media city, mobile city, networked city, new century city, ubiquitous city and smart city, along with specific place names and geographical designations like MediaCityUK, Tomorrow City, Cyberabad and of course Silicon Valley – have become the stock signifiers of urban boosterism, that is, the acts of boosting and promoting contemporary cities. This new, miraculous-sounding lexicon for urban techno(u)topias of state-of-the-art digital-technological advancement dominates academic-, government- and business discourses as well as policy recommendations. Akin to the culturally-leaning Creative City -paradigm,[2] a regular practice behind the deployment of such enviable labels has been to anchor them on city-rankings on a global or (macro-)regional scale. Along with cities' economic competitiveness in the global marketplace, such rankings tend to be based on indicators on the intensity of communication networks, the ratios of users of specific ICTs, employment figures of high-skilled labor in creative or ICT sectors and other associated variables (e.g. Krätke, 2003; Anttiroiko, 2014). The contemporary smart city discourse exemplifies the spectacularizing overtones in the frenzy to label and rank cities and urban areas in digital technological terms. True, locally pursued smart city agendas characteristically (at least in a rhetorical level of attempting to earn city councils' and residents' consent)

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[2] As Hollands (2008, p. 316) points out, there exists a relatively close resemblance between smart city literature and a preceding (still forcible) enthusiasm around Richard Florida's (2002) theory of the creative class (for critical accounts: e.g. Peck, 2005; Jeppesen, 2004; Bader & Scharenberg, 2010), a fountainhead for a whole branch consulting industry with a more general focus on the urban preconditions for creativity than in the digital-technology centered smart city discourse. The pivotal role ICTs as facilitators of creativity in culture, media and the arts is though frequently underscored in the smart city agendas (Hollands, 2008, p. 316; see also Sihvonen & Knossen in this issue).

cling to a set of progressive goals of facilitating governmental and educational efficiency, e-participation or sustainable development via "intelligent" innovations and infrastructural solutions (see Ylipulli's article in this issue). More problematically, however, these tendencies also echo the socio-economic hierarchization of space, in a true fashion of Debord's (1995 [1967]) sinister visions in *The Society of the Spectacle* written half a century ago. Witness a description by Papastergiadis et al. (2013, p. 6) on how Tomorrow City in Incheon, South Korea, strives for achieving a status as a world-class smart city:

> As one of Asia's major seaports, Incheon fits the paradigm that urban theorist Mike Davis describes as 'imagineered urbanism', in which 'all the arduous intermediate stages of commercial evolution have been telescoped or short-circuited to embrace the "perfected" synthesis of shopping, entertainment and architectural spectacle' (Davis, 2006, p. 54). Updating Archigram's 1960s vision of the 'instant city', Tomorrow City is intended to be the world's best-known example of a 'smart city' aiming at encouraging new inflows of capital, business, technology, language and labour into the already complex local topography. Upon its completion in 2014, it is intended to comprise state-of-the-art high-rise apartments, five-star hotels, international schools and firms, and world-famous luxury department stores all connected through ubiquitous computing.

The question arises whether cities that are not digitally re-branding themselves are automatically relegated to an unspectacular status of 'dumb cities'? Or will such cities in return champion alternative goals by willingly tapping into a 'low-tech' city image, and possibly 'slow' or 'down-shifted' lifestyles of their residents? More directly to the point of this article, it is deplorable that only a fraction of academic analyses of smart cities have incorporated wider urban perspectives, such as existing critical literature on urban place marketing and other aspect of neo-liberal urban governance (Hollands, 2008, p. 305; see also Söderström et al., 2015; Krivý, forthcoming 2015). Our point here is not to downplay the role that economic-geographical studies of cities labelled as smart, innovative or otherwise have played in facilitating the understanding of the urban causes and effects of the rise of ICT into one of the spearheading economic sectors. However, we argue that the deployment of unmistakably spectacularizing (superlative or otherwise) concept(ualization)s and market-led "language-imagineering" of digital-technological advancement need further reflection (see Beauregard, 2003; Hollands, 2008; Vuolteenaho & Kolamo, 2012; Hoyler & Watson, 2013). Ranking cities on the ground of their knowledge-intensive economic performances reminds us of an uncritical celebration of top-ranking urban areas as the role models for the rest of cities in the game of competitive capitalism (cf. Robinson, 2006). In the world of escalated unpredictability and "potentially temporary buzzwords" (Tulloch, 2008, p. 164), academic research on digital urbanism should avoid championing one-size-fits-all patent solutions and model narratives on "smart" cities and technoscapes, even though these are often one-sightedly exalted in city branding discourses in themselves (see also Kitchin, 2015).

Our second entry point into the digitally-led spectacularization of urban space concerns the initiatives of boosting public life and its various audience activities via novel technological solutions. At the level of urban design, one of the intended functions of such endeavors is to enhance a city's technological and visual image by refurbishing its key public arenas (major squares, inner-city plazas and arteries). This is often carried out through installations of dazzling screens and other new "digital street furniture" (e.g.

Allen, 2006; McQuire, 2008; McQuire et al., 2008; Ridell, 2010). However, the promotional goals of in situ digitalization often go beyond the creation of visually glittering and enticing architectural milieus. In fact, the smart city and other digitalization initiatives frequently involve a more "humanist" aspect to them (Hollands, 2008). To give one example, we may think about facilitation of civic interactivity that takes place via WiFi-based provisioning of intelligent services and information on local happenings, timetables and news for the owners of mobile and location-aware gadgets.

Even more intriguingly, the utilization of interactive digital devices and audio-visual attractions, intended to enhance people's roles as socially and emotionally "engaged" producers of urban events and public stages, has become a new urban megatrend. In their aptly named article *Mega Screens for Mega Cities*, Papastergiadis et al. (2013, p. 5) point out that recent urban facelifts have taken the relation between urban social space and digital media "to a new level of interdependence", by providing mediated platforms "for the convergence of technology, place, community and body". Let us mention here networked megascreens as a sophisticated instance of "igniting" people to participate in the spectacularization of space through their mediated interactions and self-presentations (on digitally mediated urban audiencing, e.g. McQuire, 2011; Ridell & Zeller, 2013, p. 437). These screens are nowadays utilized not only to gather large crowds in urban events but also to create translocal aesthetic experiences – between plazas in Melbourne and Incheon, or between Stockholm and The Hague, for instance. In these spectacular events, artistic performances and offline- and online reactions on them by audiences take interactively place in two or more geographically distant locations simultaneously (see Verhoeff in this issue; Papastergiadis et al., 2013). A bodily presence seems to be crucial in creating an emotionally engaged atmosphere. Whether screening a translocally shared art happening or a more conventional event from which the mobile gadget users can send greetings and snapshots to their social circles elsewhere, "credible" urban spectacles are impossible without engaged, 'affective' audiences (Hillis, Paasonen & Petit, 2015). Even in the digital age, hardly anything could be duller and more harmful for a city's image than public stages empty of people.

A flipside to all this is the intensified commodification of digitally mediated and spectacularized urban spaces and events. Undeniably, a key institutional motivation behind the encouragement of public, digitally enhanced forms of entertainment, culture and arts in those neoliberalized cities is their potential to stimulate inward investment and attract tourists, professionals and well-to-do locals, who posses economic value as producers or consumers (cf. Amin & Graham, 1997; McLeod, 2002, p. 606; Gotham, 2005, p. 226; Kolamo & Vuolteenaho, 2013). However, rather than engaging affective audiences, an overwhelming majority of recently installed digital screens in urban public spaces seem "monotonously show commercial images" (see Verhoeff's article in this special issue; see also Cronin, 2010).

To take one particular urban glamour zone under closer examination, the MediaCityUK in Salford Quays, an upscale landscape of work and leisure in Greater Manchester, is one site that has employed the "media city" label in its name recently (Ozturk et al., 2010). The planning and creation of this "second largest media and digital cluster" in the UK, has been surrounded by local anxieties about the privileging of market-oriented urban growth and mobilization of urban space for the globalized forms of elite consumption (Christophers, 2008; O'Connor & Gu, 2010). Under the protection of powerful public-private partnerships and state-led creative industry policies — the MediaCityUK has more lately continued its expansion in the immediate proximity of one of UK's most deprived neighborhoods.

Figure 1. A scene from the MediaCityUK's hub, its main plaza complete with mega screens and flamboyant glass facades of surrounding edifices.

Photo: Sami Kolamo.

This brings us back to the socially negative ramifications of urban digital facelifts, as current place branding initiatives have been often accused for producing spatial gentrification and the related exclusion of worse-off groups from the target areas (e.g. Boland, 2013). As Graham and Marvin (2001, p. 15) portrayed, in a seminal intervention into what they evocatively called "splintering urbanism", there is a stark disparity between the connected and disconnected urban spaces that is strongly embedded in high-tech discourses:

> New, highly polarised urban landscapes are emerging where 'premium' infrastructure networks – high speed telecommunications, 'smart' highways, global airline networks – selectively connect together the most favoured users and places, both within and between cities. Valued spaces are thus increasingly defined by their fast-track connections elsewhere, as any examination of the intensifying transport, telecommunications and energy links between the dominant parts of 'global' cities reveals. At the same time, however, premium and high-capability networked infrastructures often effectively by-pass less-favoured and intervening places and what Castells calls 'redundant' users. Often such bypassing and disconnection is directly embedded into the design of networks, both in terms of the geographies of the points they do and do not connect, and in terms of the control placed on who or what can flow over the networks.

While our above discussion has exposed important critical interventions into urban digitalization as spectacle-making, such studies seem to have become rarer in recent years, with the notable exception of scholars concentrating on pervasive and multi-faceted forms surveillance in the digitalized urban present

(e.g. Koskela, 2006; Lippert & Murakami Wood, 2012). This decrease may be interpreted as a testament to the fact that critical spectacle theory has simply ran out of scholarly fashion. A common negligence for analyzing the flipsides of the spectacularizing dimensions of urban digitalization may thus mirror the researchers' avoidance of an overly pessimistic and putatively superannuated tone in the analyses of mass media and culture à la the Frankfurt School, Debord and Baudrillard (cf. Sumiala, 2013). Be that as it may, local "marriages" between top-down city promotion and digitalization initiatives are today all too pervasive and powerful to be treated as a negligible topic in the media city scholarship (see e.g. Georgiou, 2013). We contend that, in the face of this situation, it is justified to avoid utterly cynical treatments of digitally-mediated urban face lifts as mere capitalist 'epiphenomena', but neither should the analysts embrace and reiterate the hype while leaving the socio-spatial inequalities that lurk in the background of smart city and associated labels unquestioned. To find a middle-ground beyond essentializing the media city either as a purely liberating or merely suppressive space requires scrutinizing the everyday realities of those who inhabit digitally mediated cities. This is a subject we shall turn next.

The ordinariness of the media city

In comparison to the scarce attention for the digitally-mediated spectacularization of space, many more analysts have considered the implications of digital technologies on the urban everyday. In this strand of research, spatial and media theorists have coined concepts such as "the technological unconscious", "automatic production of space" and "sinking of software" into people's consciousness to underscore human-technology interaction and how this steers the embodied processes of everyday routine formation (Thrift & French, 2002; Kitchin & Dodge, 2011). Meanwhile, a voluminous body of empirical studies has concentrated on the concrete social and economic ramifications of digitalization on people's everyday life and interactions. These research fronts have both revolved around the "ordinary sides" of living in digitally-mediated cities. In what follows, we highlight two acute themes to do with the urban everyday that demand further scrutiny: the routinization and taken-for-grantedness of people's digitally-mediated urban spatial practices and the escalation of the perceived standards of what constitutes "the ordinary" in the face of rapid technological change.

In their influential article, Nigel Thrift and Shaun French (2002) theorize how the software-generated "automatic production of space", and the forms of "local intelligence" based on it, are decisively reconfiguring urban life. Writing about existing and projected urban realities in the beginning of the new millennium, they noted, for instance, that:

> [M]obile telephony has already become a part of everyday life, producing new forms of social action – from the new kinds of 'hyper-coordination' promoted by text messaging (and the new kinds of 'flocking' that is made possible) to the invasion of public space by private and work lives to new kinds of affective social performance… More recently, it has become possible to create computationally active textiles [which] can not only assist in locating shops, [but] also act as more general navigation aids, as mobile payment systems, provide security access to buildings, assist engineers and mechanics in the field, record conversations, meetings and other events, act as mobile internet and phone portals, augment vision and memory and a host of other activities. And,

as in the case of mobile phones, a key requirement of future wearable systems will be the need to communicate, through the employment of wireless protocols like Bluetooth, with each other and with other systems embedded in the fabric of everyday life. (ibid., pp. 318-319).

As a general result:

wherever we go, then, in modern urbanized spaces, we are directed by software: driving in the car, stopping at the red light, crossing the road, getting into an elevator, using the washing machine or the dishwasher or the microwave, making a phone call, writing a letter, playing a CD or a computer game, the list goes on and on (ibid., p. 323).

Software and automated algorithmic sorting have, in a few decades, come to inexorably intervene in nearly all aspects of everyday life. Especially in cities as spaces where most digital infrastructure and its users are concentrated, software, as "a mass-produced series of instructions that lie in the interstices of everyday life, pocket dictators that are constantly expressing themselves", affects all kinds of human spatial and social practices, without people being necessarily consciously aware of how software "make things do work" (Thrift & French, 2002, p. 311; Kitchin & Dodge, 2011, p. 5; for reasoning in the same post-humanist and post-hegemonic lineage, see e.g.: Lash, 2007). Also in more recent research, similar notions on how code-based software and digital media infrastructures steer the routinized practices and rhythms of urban life, and how the habituated uses of ICTs in turn appear to people themselves as taken-for-granted or "automagical", have been developed further (e.g. MacKenzie, 2008; Beer, 2009; Kitchin, 2011; Ridell & Zeller, 2013; Rose et al., 2014; Ridell, 2015). One common thread in these conceptualizations has been an understanding of the automatization of urban space and life as a process whereby at least some aspects of a user's independent agency are given over to the ever more sophisticated assemblages of digital technology and context-specific and location-based local intelligence (e.g. Hillis, 1999; Kitchin & Dodge, 2011; Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011).

In concrete socio-spatial terms, if one is attuned enough to observe daytime street life in any present-day "ordinary city" (Amin & Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2006), it proves that myriad digitally-mediated urban practices have in a short time immersed themselves into the normalized walk of urban life (Tosoni et al., 2013; Krajina, 2014; Gordon & De Souza e Silva, 2011). If one stops at a busy railway station or any other mixed-use transit space, the eye catches a variety of urbanites performing distinct social action roles and interaction grammars (Goffman, 1963; Jensen, 2010). Some busy-looking people seem just to be passing by, others are calling to someone, or interacting with their hand-held touchscreen devices whilst sitting, standing or walking, possibly reporting their acquaintances about one's current location and what's up there and next. Others' conduct exposes an attitude mentally engaged with the surrounding socio-material milieu: some look as if hanging up at their favorite turf, some follow the electronic rapid-fire of ads and bulletins running on the screen furniture, few explore a digitally installed exhibition; and then there are those who chat with each other, hawk on by-passers with a purpose of fundraising, sell flowers, beg coins, snap selfies, among other interactional practices that people perform in the current stages of tactful urban sociability (cf. Suurpää et al. in this volume). Put on display for ordinary urbanites, an excess of digitally mediated attraction points of focus for social interaction, along with the continuing presence of non-digital

environmental affordances, comprise, to paraphrase Thrift and French (2002; see also Borgmann, 2000), a "semi-artificial" stage of urban life. Only occasionally, deliberate interventions such as licensed street concerts or stealthily convened flash mobs cause momentary breaks in the routinely flowing normality of urban life in public spaces.

For very many urbanites, a nearly constant use of code-based technologies is nowadays a self-evident necessity and a source of delight of urban living. The habitual "digital lifestyles" (in the terminology of Bourdieu one could also speak of a "digital habitus"; Leurs, 2015; Papacharissi & Easton, 2013), however, are not led in a socio-economically and spatially equal, classless utopia. Rather digital media use replicate, legitimate and reaffirm, as Sims (2013) puts it, hierarchical "differentiating practices". In the context of contemporary global capitalism, stepped-up innovation cycles and ultra-efficient marketing by competing corporate giants have yielded a phenomenal proliferation of ITC-based product categories and brands catered for both mass and elite, niche markets worldwide. In quotidian terms, all this has generated a tremendous aggregate expansion of things and wants counted now as 'ordinarities' of (post)modern, liquid life. In this commodified context, not only digitally mediated environmental affordances such as public screens, but also an ever increasing multiplicity of saleable digital goods and location-based services are, in principle, at everyone's disposal. Irrespective of their financial resources, people usually have to pay for their material access to digital devices (yet not invariably so, as Mickevich's article in this issue on digital libraries in Canadian cities shows). The market logic also characterizes many services from pay-tv and navigation software to a recent deluge of apps for sale for all kinds of portable gadgets, even though non-chargeable distribution remains comparatively common in the world of software.

A reverse side of the coin is that consumption-related social polarization in the digitalized societies and cities, is leveled by the relatively rapid lowering of price levels in ageing product categories (Fidler, 1997; Räisänen et al., 2006). At the same time, digital-environmental affordances from Wi-Fi networks to QR-codes (not to speak of the nearly ubiquitous surveillance technologies) are in many cases provided freely to people from all social strata. In a vast body of the so-called digital divide literature, disparities in people's actual access to digital devices and amenities along the lines of purchasing power, geographical location, race, gender, age, social class and education have been examined in different countries, although usually without an explicit urban focus (e.g. van Dijk, 2006; Näsi et al., 2012). According to most studies, a gap between those who have an internet connection, own hardware, are media literate and fit norms to participate in mainstream digital culture, and those left bereft of "the miracles of the Digital Age", has been generally narrowing in the course of recent decades, especially in over-developed societies in the Global North (Kinnunen et al., 2011; Van Deursen & van Dijk, 2013).

As van Dijk (2006, p. 227) pointed out already in the mid-2000s, "one of the most confusing myths produced by popular ideas about the so-called digital divide is that people are either in or out, included or excluded". Indeed, more recent years have witnessed an increasingly vast amount of academic and especially policy-oriented studies in which it has been assumed that the use of ICTs is tantamount, irrespective of people's socio-economic background, to everyday empowerment. From the perspective of everyday consumption, digital technology has been often implicitly eulogized as a kind of equalizer if not a "great leveller" of our times,[3] with cheapness, easy usability and communicational efficiency as its key

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[3] In techno-optimistic visions, digital technology has indeed shown up as a kind of "great leveller", a label attached in earlier phases of modern urban history to innovations such as the bicycle, making moving "four times faster" than on

features (cf. in the next section on ITCs as drivers for bringing democracy back to the public). Currently, the perceptions of ITCs as non-elitist and absolutely ordinary tools abound, especially in policy-oriented research and discourses. Nonetheless, a need to critically scrutinize not only the socio-spatial stratification of digital access, ownership and literacy, but also how the "differentiating practices" of digitalized urbanism privilege certain types of digital identities and relegate others to the periphery (Sims, 2013), is nowadays more urgent than ever. Bearing in mind this broader context of the "participatory digital divide" (Leurs, 2015, p. 19), let us take as this section's last example the selfie, a paradigmatic icon of digital urbanism and simultaneously a new platform for power struggles and social divides. Consider Scott McQuire's (2013) depiction of what an "ordinary night out" can mean for young contemporary urbanites:

> One of the lines separating the amateur and the professional photographer used to be shooting ratios; amateurs might take one or two shots while professionals would shoot roll after roll of film and select their shots later. In a recent discussion, some of my students reported routinely taking as many as 500 images during what they described as an ordinary night out. Since there is almost no upfront cost in capturing digital images, everyone just keeps shooting (McQuire, 2013, p. 225; see also Van Dijck, 2011).

What is at stake is how the standards of what constitutes normal and ordinary have in many regards drastically escalated in the course of the increased digital mediation of the urban everyday. Whilst the exploded photographing and especially the selfie culture have been often dismissed as vain and narcissistic practices, under the umbrella term of "selfie citizenship" researchers have began to take serious the selfie-genre, considering the digital circulation of individual and collective self-portraits as "acts of citizenship" (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). In this regard, the new forms of communicative self-expression such as protest selfie memes on Facebook, and Twitter and Instagram hashtag actions such as #NoMakeUpSelfie and #ICan'tBreathe, #BlackLivesMatter (cf. Kunstman, Vis & Faulkner, 2015), also bear strong links with the third promising research focus of digitalized urbanism we want to foreground this article, namely the forms of contestation in the present urban conjuncture.

Contestations of / in the media city

In their *Code/Space. Software and Everyday Life*, Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge (2011, pp. 11, 20) assert that digital technologies are making societies and cities "safer, healthier and richer". If we are to believe Kitchin and Dodge, the digitally enabled improvements in the quality of everyday life are occurring in innumerable ways: automated and code-based innovations are making daily chores easier; attract investments; create new jobs, entertainment and shopping opportunities, open up new ways of recording and sharing experiences; spur the arts and creativity, and so forth. Though noting shortly that the benefits may not be equally distributed, Kitchin and Dodge (2011) infer that people tend to trade off the potential disciplinary effects of software-driven technologies against the benefits gained. But have the gains of everyday urban digitalization actually been so overwhelmingly irresistible as Kitchin and Dodge suggest?

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foot, and the cinema, characterized as the early 20th century's "uniquely democratic art form" due to its relatively affordability for working-class audiences, too (Kern, 1983, pp. 111, 208, 216).

Or to formulate the question from another angle: Is digital urbanism in some ways rather commensurate with socio-spatial discontent and its public expressions?

To begin with, it is pertinent to distinguish between critical expert and academic voices towards the digital information society, and emerging signs of a popular discontent with the digital age and its annoying everyday aspects. In the former category, open-source movements and the proponents of hacker ethics have, as mavericks with insider expertise, addressed the problems of proprietary software, advocated software's collective production and free dissemination in its stead, and manifestoed alternative, socially inclusive futures for the digital society (e.g. Stallman, 2010; Schaefer, 2011). Also in social and spatial theory, radical (Marxist or otherwise) conceptualizations of ICT and global capitalism have formed a polemical adversary and undercurrent of the hyping of high-tech for decades (see e.g. Webster & Robins, 1986; Garnham, 2000; Massey, 2005, pp. 81–89). Concerns have been voiced over an ill fate of 'progressivist' social media in the face of their tremendously popular corporate equivalents (e.g. Fuchs, 2013; 2014), and mentally depleting obsessions with self-surveillance and hyper-motivated "friending" as detrimental effects that the contemporary digital media landscape is fostering in many people's lives (Lovink 2012). Recently, anxieties about the information overload and addictiveness of social media have indeed become commonplace. As symptomatic counter-reactions, semi-serious civic campaigns (an annual technology abstinence day, "Twenty-four hours offline", for instance) as well as groups (typically online!) labeling themselves as Facebook resisters or quitters have surfaced, along with common disquietude about the loss of privacy and the vast quantity of marketing spam in the digital milieu (see also Ylipulli's article in this volume). Illustratively, Facebook criticasters (The Facebook Liberation Army) gathered in the posh Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam on June 23, 2015 to have a 'Facebook Farewell Party' and to disseminate a 'Facebook survival Kit' allowing users to counter the exploitation of their private user-generated-data.[4]

With respect to conspicuous landscape manifestations of digital urbanism, a multitude of urban social movements, opposing redevelopments pursued under the aegis of high tech- and new media- driven urban development agendas, have seen the light of day. Let us take our vignette here from Berlin, currently a "hipster city" in which the sub-sectors of media, culture and music (and to a lesser degree software) industries have been thriving in the last two decades. Even so, in the vocabulary of Krätke (2003; 2004), Berlin's status as a "first-rank" or "alpha" media city has been tarnished by the stagnancy of many other industries, huge public debt per capita as well as by its "poor but sexy" yet by no means sleek urban image (see also Bader & Scharenberg, 2010). In 2002, all this led the Berlin Senate Department to launch a so-called MediaSpree plan for a vast area flanking the river Spree. Mirroring international regeneration policies, the aim was to re-engineer and gentrify the area's decayed and counter-cultural image with post-industrial patent solutions, including a 17,000-seater multi-functional event arena, high-rises, riverside promenades, glamorous hotels, luxury apartments as well as the integration of media and arts on the planning agenda (Ahlfeldt, 2010, pp. 6-7; Dohnke, 2013). In a city whose population is arguably "more politically invested in the vexed issues of city space and planning than elsewhere" (McRobbie, 2013, p. 995), however, the plan was met with a wave of local anger. For local residents and

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[4] In addition to such manifestations of digital pushback among the social media users themselves, it should be also borne in mind that a substantial share of (especially elderly) population in different national contexts has never converted into the users of social media or even Internet, but for differing reasons remained "laggards", "want-nots" or "net-evaders" in the midst of otherwise phenomenally rapid digitalization (see e.g. van Deursen & van Dijk, 2014).

users of the area's existing amenities, the MediaSpree plan was an anathema, and in fact a springboard for a vastly popular MediaSpree Versenken! (Sink MediaSpree!) -campaign in years to come (Dohnke, 2013). Whilst media multinationals like MTV Europe and Universal Europe chose to move to the development, the opposing side engaged in a series of offline and online protests and public debates. As an institutional culmination of the protesting, the local adversaries of the MediaSpree took an overwhelming victory in a non-binding referendum in the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg jurisdiction on the fate of the target area – with 87 percent out of 300 000 votes supporting the "sinking" of the redevelopment.[5] (Figure. 2). Very probably in part due to the multi-front local opposition, an advanced gentrification and spectacularization of urban space has not turned into a full urban reality in this area in south-eastern Berlin, at least for the time being.

Figure 2. A scene from the eastern end of East Side Gallery, Friedrichshain.
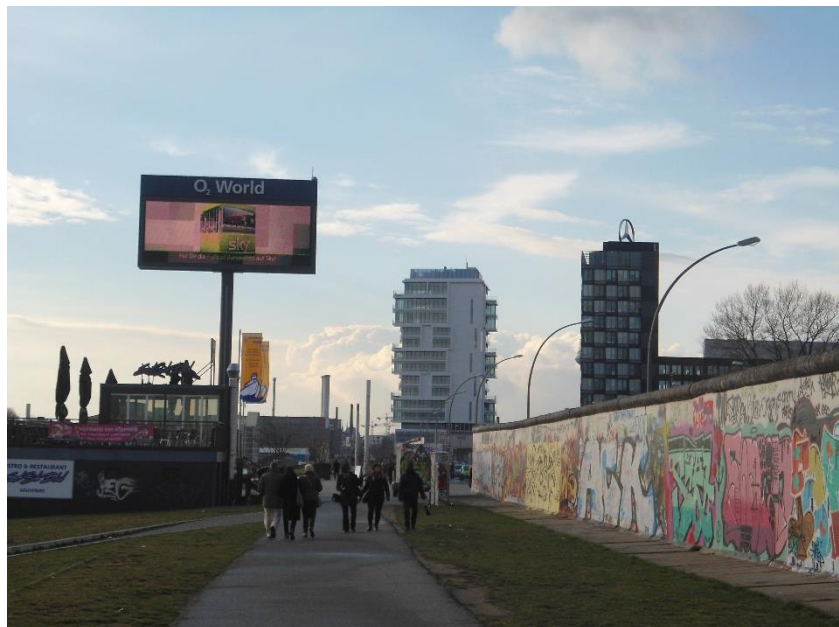
What one encounters in the MediaSpree regeneration area today is a mixed landscape. At some spots, the area is dotted by separately standing high-rises, steel-and-glass facades, well-kept parks, a O2 World event arena and other chic essentials of the globally interchangeable, heavily surveilled media city. Elsewhere, graffiti-embroidered ambiences, derelict lots and dilapidated buildings dedicated to punk-, techno- and artistic subcultures as well as a length of the Berlin Wall as the area's main tourism attraction, dominate the scarcely monitored landscape. Symptomatically enough, one curious absence in the local landscape and street signage is contemporarily the lack of explicit references to the governmentally hailed but locally disliked MediaSpree-appellation. Source: Jani Vuolteenaho.

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[5] As Jan Dohnke (2013) though notes, the metropolitan government's secretly agreed but legally binding contracts with investors have largely watered out the effectiveness of the referendum over the area's future.

As a centuries-long series of popular uprisings in Berlin and many other metropolises evince, contemporary urban public spaces do not in principle divert from their pre-digital revolution predecessors as the stages for expressing political discontent (e.g. Castells 1978; Leontidou 2006; Mayer 2009; Harvey 2012). As a further historical continuation, protests against the redevelopment of particular target areas is often still motivated by fears over destabilizing and marginalizing existing urban communities, as with the MediaSpree's case above (Ahlfeldt 2010; Pinder 2000). However, in one important sense the newer urban social movements have proved anything but backward-glancing: especially since the advent of web 2.0 and social media (most notably BBM, Facebook, Skype and Twitter), the spreading of the voices of discontent through ever-changing communicational tools has facilitated unprecedentedly flexible and spatially multidimensional modes of social organization among dissatisfied urbanites. In all kinds of contestations of prevailing political, social and cultural circumstances and power hierarchies – from the chain reactions of the Arab Spring, Hong Kong Umbrella Revolution to the #Occupy Movement and the 2011 "BlackBerryMessenger" London Riots – the use of digital networks and devices, and the associated integration of the online (virtual) and offline (physical) modes of communication and action, have rather become a norm in urban collective rebellions (Georgiou 2013).

A 'classic' example in this regard is the rise of the #Occupy Movement in the early 2010s. Taking its inspiration from "a notable modern tradition of the use of central spaces for democratic action" (Marcuse 2011) and amalgamating elements from cooperative hacker ethic into this thrust, the sudden spread of anti-corporate activist camps in central public spaces in hundreds of cities across the globe was a *tour de force*, in the words of Jeffrey Juris (2012), of a flexible mediation between *the logics of networking and aggregation* by the activists. While the former logic was particularly important in coordinating communication and formulating shared political demands both during the mobilization phase of the camps and after their evictions, the latter was crucial in the spirit-enhancing congregations of protestors from diverse backgrounds in centrally located urban places. As Juris explains:

> [W]hereas the use of listservs and websites in the movements for global justice during the late 1990s and 2000s helped to generate and diffuse distributed networking logics, in the #Occupy movements social media have contributed to powerful logics of aggregation, which have continued to exist alongside rather than entirely displacing logics of networking. Social media such as Facebook, YouTube, and especially Twitter were particularly important during #Occupy's initial mobilization phase, although networking logics have become more salient since the evictions of the largest camps around the United States from mid-November to early December 2011. This shift toward less publicly visible forms of organizing and networking outside centralized physical spaces may help to ensure the staying power of #Occupy (2012, pp. 260-261).

These examples show that the digital era has seen a series of at least partially or temporarily successful attempts at re-igniting street-level political agency. Not all digitally mediated crowd practices, however, are deliberate political actions in that they would champion thoroughgoing structural transformations in the society or the overcoming of forms of domination along the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality and (dis)ability. In some cases, an explicit goal of the intertwining of the possibilities of online and offline milieus is to mobilize demonstrations or carnivalesque counter-spectacles "to sow seeds of dissent, create breeding grounds for reflexive action and launch radical critiques of inequality (Gotham, 2005, p. 225). In

other cases, however, emancipatory motifs of a more mundane type play a key role in galvanizing street life or in creating outside-the-mainstream public spheres via the aid of digital technology (see the article by Suurpää et al. in this issue). As insinuated in the preceding section, for instance, recent years have witnessed the advent of digitally orchestrated interventions that attempt to fleetingly experiment with the perceived normality of "the mediated crowd" (cf. Baker, 2011). In causing in-situ breaks in the routinized flow of the urban everyday, it is possible to imagine the city life momentarily as one's own creation, without necessarily having any "deeper" political intentions. For an another salient tendency, a web- and free software-based "democratization of cartography" has opened up new types of engagement and counter-surveillance platforms for civic organizations and do-it-yourself-cartographers to spot and disseminate location-precise knowledge about environmental problems, local bones of contention or just fascinating sights of one's own (sub)cultural persuasions (Gartner, 2009; Arnold's article in this issue). Moreover, not only bottom-up, but also institutional forms of encouraging people's public engagement have started to emerge in many contexts. In urban planning, for instance, novel modes of engagement made possible and increasingly flexible by people's mobile gadgets and web browsers has been even seen as a new chapter in facilitating civic participation in matters that directly concern the quality of lived urban environment (e.g. Ertiö & Ruoppila, 2014).

Taken as a whole, the various digitally updated forms of street-level agency and contestation form an archetypical facet of contemporary digitally mediated urbanisms. That said, not all forms of digitally mediated crowd behavior should be idealized as progressive at face value. In certain cases, an incentive for digitally mediated collective action in cities may rather border on, for instance, watchful NIMBY-attitudes and intolerance to social and cultural differences, consumerist envy by the disenfranchised "have-nots" for the "haves", or vandalism for momentary fun and excitement. A case in point are differing interpretations on the so-called Blackberry Messenger (BBM) riots on the streets of London and other English cities in 2011. This series of events that happened after a peaceful protest following the police shooting in Tottenham of Mark Duggan, a local black youth, escalated into looting (see e.g. Bauman, 2011; Baker, 2011; Dunleavy et al., 2012; Leurs, 2014). According to many commentators, protesters criticized policy brutality, race relations and expressed frustrations over the lack of opportunities and poor living conditions of their working class area. However, only a minor part of looters involved in the riots were seriously seeking to challenge or overthrow existing political and economic power structures. Be it as it may, not only the "riots" themselves were incited and orchestrated via the aid of social media and encrypted messenger services (à la Blackberry Messenger), but also the ensuing forms of spontaneous civic resistance to the riots and a police tactics to identify and locate those in charge of the unrest largely relied on crowdsourcing and finding eye-witnesses through social media (Baker, 2011).

Arguably, as Kitchin and Dodge (2011) imply, for the majority of urbanites both the city and its digital counterpart are still mainly about mundane matters to do with enjoyment, consumption, making a living and feeling secure. However, our above discussion has testified the simultaneous presence of individuals and collective groups who strive for progressive goals by mixing the potentialities of the online- and offline forums in their actions. Indispensable for understanding the multifaceted character of contemporary digitalized urbanism, varying types of mediated urban contestations are in key focus also in many of this special issue's articles, alongside the spectacular and ordinary aspects of the media city.

Conclusions

Given that that the spectacular, ordinary and contested dimensions of digitalized urbanism hardly ever feature in a 'pure' form in actual cities, it is symptomatic that they also appear as entangled with each other in the articles included in this special issue. For instance, several case studies in the following pinpoint spectacularizing tendencies in contemporary urban transformation, without however losing a sight of more mundane aspects of digitalization. Cases in point include the readings of local experiences of the 'hypeing' of Banksy's putative street art exhibition in Stockholm (Thor's article), of the privatization and touristification of a creative workers' hub in Amsterdam (Sihvonen & Knossen), of the production of commercial and artistic varieties of trans-local street events (Verhoeff) and of the (in)commensurability of the top-down visions on smart cities and ubiquitous computing with local residents' wishes concerning the smooth, practical and unnoticeable nature of future digital technology (Ylipulli's article on the city of Oulu). Further, the indispensability of variable 'ordinary' aspects for the understanding of the digitalized media city is mirrored in many the issue's articles. This is the case, inter alia, with László Munteán's insights into how the practice of rephotography (artistic collages of old and recent photographs on a same urban site overlapped into a single image) can conjure up digital-cum-environmental affordances for the urbanites to reflect upon interconnections and ruptures between the local past and present, and with Paulina Mickiewicz's reflections on civic functions of digitalized libraries in deprived Canadian neighborhoods, providing important amenities and sparks of hope and ordinary life for their dispossessed residents. By the same token, a notion that the rapid development of digital technology has not only benefitted the already economically ruling or culturally hegemonic groups, but also the less powerful, is taken up in following discussions on social contestations with the aid of digital technologies. Gregor Arnold, for instance, excavates the uses of the Web 2.0 and digital online mapping as tools of counter-surveillance in disseminating up-to-date information about urban vacancies in the German context, whereas Suurpää et al. explore ways of doing fieldwork on how teenagers in Helsinki and London make use of ICTs in reshaping the ordinary, adult-dominated city to match better their self-defined uses and persuasions. To summarize and speculate on future scholarly debate on digital urbanisms, this special issue concludes with an epilogue. This final article consists of a reflexive dialogue the editors initiated between Myria Georgiou and Scott McQuire, two pioneers in the field of media city research. The duo interview brings together and reflects on the various themes, issues and questions addressed in this OBS* special issue.

We began this review article by Thomas Pynchon's prescient prediction from the mid 1980's, namely that of the then foreseeable of withering away of a common academic disdain for new computer-based technologies. Indeed, this review article has testified that a principled 'Luddite' dislike for (digital) machines is hardly a viable stance for the urban scholarship of today, not the least as cities and urban have been thoroughly transformed by the ICTs in the course of the last few decades. Simultaneously, however, a one-sighted celebration of the urban miracles of the digital age also bears its obvious problems and ethical biases, especially insofar as the critical thrust of urban and social research is concerned. To one-sidedly praise digitalization as the savior and healer of all urban ills, borders on, we contend, to a turning of a blind eye to the continuing if not escalated existence of power inequities, hierarchies and social conflicts within and between contemporary cities. Hence, instead of making a choice between techno-optimism and techno-pessimism, we have proposed in this article that a triadic conceptualization of

digitalized urbanism, acknowledging its co-present spectacular, ordinary and contested aspects, can pave the way for a better understanding of the multiple, often contradictory and unpredictable implications of the fast-proceeding digitalization on cities and people who inhabit them. Emphatically, we are not suggesting we offer an exhaustive, flawless theoretical 'model' of the digitalized city. On the contrary, when analyzing empirically particular urban interstices between the offline and online worlds – say, those related to digitalized surveillance, commodification, festive crowds and audience activities, everyday interactions or anti-consumerist and counter-spectacular campaigns (all topical phenomena that this article has addressed only tangentially) — more sharply focused conceptual frameworks are as pertinent and necessary as ever. Even so, keeping the spectacular, mundane and contested aspects of the digitalized media city on the horizon holds promise for keeping pace with a range of ever-changing, interrelated actualities of urban transformation in academic media cities research.

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