Epilogue: Methods and Perspectives of Interventions in Digital Cultures

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Engaging in Methods

This volume is an experiment in fostering thinking in ambivalences, which is potentially a way of dealing with the problematic constitution and situation of interventions, the facilitation of which is attempted through organization of the texts. Some essays in the book analyze the constitution of interventions, concerning either gender, history, or policy, and use the insights gained to propose various methods. Other texts focus on practices and methods of intervention in the conditions of digital cultures without specifically reflecting on the constitution of intervention itself. This combination of approaches brings about a reflection on interventions in accordance with the two aims of the book. The first aim is to examine the shaping of digital cultures by interventions, and vice versa, and the second concerns the reconciliation of the constitution of interventions in political, economic, or discursive conditions. To achieve a mutual reflection, the texts are collected under a list of methods and

have been carefully balanced to enable readers' self-organized reflection on interventions.

A short reconstruction of the order and interplay of the texts, focusing on critical and reflected methods that come out of the analytical approach to interventions, should provide an insight into the power of following, and thinking in, interventions' ambivalences.

Reading the Chapters

Fred Turner proposes *historicizing* as a method for exploring the aesthetics and dramaturgies of interventions in today's digital cultures. In his interview, Fred Turner talks about the multi-screen environments that were used in the 1940s/1950s and the 1960s as an aesthetic means to develop what he calls the "democratic surround." The aim of the surround was the creation and control of self-determined, democratic individuals by training them to form their own worldview by piecing together fragments. But even as the artists involved were trying to achieve an emancipative social arrangement, they became part of a Cold War policy of forced democratization and, furthermore, engaged themselves in attempts to control the effect of this process. This context is to be taken on board as a prehistory of today's digital cultures as well as interventions into them. In this framework, a historical approach clarifies the instrumentalization of interventions, or of art as intervention, in order to understand which methods, concepts, and dramaturgies we should avoid repeating. The aim is securing interventions against a repetition of this history. Instead of intervening in digital cultures by immersion in multisensory environments as affective and cognitive apparatuses and happenings of unconscious Be-In, Fred Turner votes for the establishing of distances and differences. An example is the photographic work of Wayne Lawrence (2013) at Orchard Beach, the Bronx Riviera, which presents people at respectful close-range. It is about standing still, according to Fred

Turner, about looking and reflecting, instead of—in accordance with the analysis of this problematic status of interventions—acting and performing. This is one possible method against the big techno-ecological players today, involving people immersively in socio-technological systems.

Howard Caygill also follows a historical reconstruction of interventions in digital cultures and at the same time stands for research into its ambivalent political constitution. He refers to Clausewitz's notion of resistance in the sense of the capacity to survive violent attacks (*Widerstandsfähigkeit*), using, for example, secrecy as a strategy. The prehistory of interventions in Clausewitz's concepts of secrecy and resistance shows that as a form of resistance in digital cultures, interventions can apply equally to war as to subversion, freedom, and equality. This strategic constitution also conditioned the configuration of the Internet by Paul Baran within the RAND Corporation in the late 1950s and early 1960s, creating an Internet that is able to survive attacks by being decentralized and, at the same time, creating secrecy by using cryptography. A genealogical point of view excavates the paradoxical constitution of the Internet, determining today's resistance to and interventions in it. The appropriate method for interventions is *thinking in ambivalences*. Fighting against the state's monopolizing of information technologies also means fighting against decentralization. Intervening in digital cultures has to be sensitive to the paradoxical situation, grounding itself firstly in decentralized structures in order to not leave traces. It could, secondly, use encryption, knowing that this calls the state's resistance investigating in strategical cryptography. Interventions in digital cultures ask for continuous reflecting, keeping the military and war contexts of resistance in mind and pondering the interplay of the opponents, each envisaging its own survival. Howard Caygill's contribution provides training to think about the ambivalences of interventions.

Alexander R. Galloway also opts for intervention in infra-structures. He claims the invention and realization of other infra-structures in the manner of *other*, so-called ad hoc *networking*, which could, in reference to Howard Caygill, enable invisible interventions in moments of revolution. Instead of interrupting infrastructures and software in interventions as hackers did in the 1960s, Alexander R. Galloway argues that today, we need robustly running alternatives.

Making differences and enabling discomfort are the methods Wendy Hui Kyong Chun proposes for interventions in digital cultures, especially in their infrastructures as networks and databases, working against homophily and habits that constitute them. Habits build infrastructures and survive even technological or social changes. Homophily, a concept from 1950s' sociology meaning love of the same, generates heavy segregation as a basic constitution of, for example, social networks. Against this background, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun calls for the establishment of critical digital humanities that become indispensable in digital cultures, in which Big Data analysis or user profiling are done by ideologically based, recursive algorithms. Overcoming the prej-udices concerning gender, race, and class, as well as habits that all together constitute data processing, requires the invention of other infrastructures as interventions in digital cultures, and for that, transdisciplinary cooperation is necessary.

Ulrike Bergermann also votes for the power of differences and differentiation as a basis for interventions in digital cultures. In her example, she explores the human microphone as a medium of protest, which she studies in terms of a *critical politicizing of space*. The affordance of this analog medium in interventions in digital cultures is not to speak for the other. A gendered being-with should help to overcome prejudices and pre-inscriptions in collective protest, which can exclude those who should have a voice in protesting. For interventions in digital cultures, questions of the politics of space, leading to those of gender and race, need to be clearly in focus. Both Ulrike Bergermann and Wendy Hui

Kyong Chun highlight that it is not technology itself that can bring critical points to digital cultures, but the concepts they are based on.

Steve Kurtz also stresses the importance of differences as a basis for continuous interventionist work. He gives an overview of the intervention methods and projects of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), which has been active since 1987. They carry out interventions into destructive ecological situations, biotechnology, and digital technology. In every field, the intervention methods are *interrupting* and *queering* in order to make people think differently, and *speculating* to find alternative ways. These methods overcome the problematic hype about pure performativity, also mentioned in Fred Turner's insight into the history of interventions, and transform interventions into a work of continuous queering as an institution of critically dealing with digital cultures.

Kat Jungnickel confirms the importance of continuity for effective and non-violent interventions with an example from the nineteenth century. She discusses a subversive strategy that enabled women to ride bikes in the strict and normative Victorian age. A skirt with a concealed option to transform into a trouser-like garment, freeing women to be mobile; challenging violence with viscosity, which resulted in sustainable changes. Referring to Howard Caygill's analysis of the ambivalences of resistance, the women performed a *calm*, continuous, intelligent and *sustainable* revolution that could be taken as a model of interventions in digital cultures.

Outlook: Differences, Discomfort, Sustainability

The interplay of contributions to this volume reveals a common call for interventions capable of introducing differences

concerning racial, gender, or political inscriptions on the level of technology, concepts, habits, and thinking (see McPherson 2012).

It has also yielded a second result that is just as important. Instead of following the hype about never-ending performative intervening, it is an affirmation of calm and sustainable interventions (see Kat Jungnickel), and the building of alternative and sustainable infrastructures (Alexander R. Galloway) that will be effective and productive. Now, just when digital cultures have become part of everyday life, interventions seem less invested in interruption, which used to be the primary aesthetic, and more invested in construction and building. At the same time, as it becomes obvious in Steve Kurtz's interview, there is still a need for pranks, subversion, stumbling blocks, and thus methods, aesthetics and dramaturgies for enabling a permanent and sustainable indicating of problems and strengthening of attention and perception, as well as rethinking in order to follow critical and problematic progressions in the current and future development of digital cultures.

References

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