

## 1. Title

No more bowling alone? Locative Media and Urban Culture.

By

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## 2. Abstract

No more bowling alone? Locative Media and Urban Culture.

In this paper/talk I would like to address the concept of locative media from the perspective of urban culture. My main questions are: how does the emergence of locative media change our understanding of urban culture, and the related concepts of 'dwelling' and 'meeting'?

Urban culture can be understood as the philosophical idea of the city as an 'organization of differences'. Starting with the Chicago and German School, urbanists have pointed out that the modern city brings together diverse groups of people with diverse backgrounds and different identities, lifestyles and goals. Urban culture is often described as the interface – both geographically and culturally - that makes the city liveable, and that confronts these differences and/or reconciles them into a whole and that could even (Soja, Jacobs) lead to (cultural) innovation.

Two practices play an important part in this definition of urban culture: 'dwelling' and 'meeting'. 'Dwelling' (related to German 'wohnen') is the domain of the private sphere, it is the process of 'making or feeling oneself at home', the process in which local structures are appropriated or exerted to express or strengthen one's (group) identity. 'Meeting' takes place in the domain of the public sphere, it is the place and process of confrontation and exchange, of clashes, innovation, political organization and cultural development.

The relation between 'dwelling' and 'meeting' is a precarious one and partly defines the urban culture. An urban culture that is completely focussed on dwelling results in an urbanism of non-communicating archipelago's or even hostile relations between different groups of dwellers. An urban culture that has too little opportunities for dwelling might risk the replacement of a community of locally rooted, involved citizens by indifferent, footloose subjects.

The Hertzian space (Sant) of GSM, GPS, CCTV, UMTS, WIFI, RFID, ETC that overlays the geographical space of the city clearly has the capacity to re-organize the differences within the city, enabling new spatial and cultural practices and altering the balance between 'dwelling' and 'meeting'. These practices are no longer solely connected to specific places (the house, or public places like the piazza or coffee house). One could even argue that these have become attitudes rather than places. This way, locative media can be placed in a longer tradition of processes of mediatization. Mass media brought the public sphere into the private sphere, the

homepage and mobile media brought the private sphere into the public sphere. If now locative media have the capacity to establish new types of mediated geospatial experiences (Bleecker), producing new spatial practices and new interfaces to appropriate space, how then should we re-theorize the spatial production and organization of differences that we have called urban culture? Theories range from optimistic ones (Rheingold's *smart mobs*-scenario in which thanks to the mobile phone, location technology and social networks, nobody has to bowl alone anymore) to overtly critical ones, in which 'software sorted cities' (Graham) extend current trends of privatization, parochialization and exclusion and disciplinization. This talk/paper will thus analyze the philosophical concepts of urban culture, dwelling and meeting, relate them to the discourses of locative media and address its most pressing issues and contradictions for the field of urban culture.

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#### 4. CV for Presenter

Martijn de Waal (1972) is a PhD-candidate at the department of practical philosophy at the Rijksuniversiteit of Groningen. He is also connected to the department of Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam. He holds MAs in Cultural Studies and Mediastudies, both earned at the University of Amsterdam, with parts of his studies followed at UC Berkeley.

His PhD-research focuses on new media and urban culture. The Dutch city of Rotterdam is taken as a case study in which the relation is studied between processes of identity formation, the concepts of dwelling and public culture, and the spaces of geography (the city) and both transnational and local (locative) medianetworks. Apart from his academic work, he is also an advisor on new media developments for – amongst others - Dutch Public Broadcasting, the Mondriaan Stichting and the Fund for Dutch Public Cultural Broadcasting. He is also a fellow at the Dynamic City Foundation, a research think tank on Urban Culture. Recent and upcoming publications include a chapter on Chinese urbanization in the DCF-book *The Chinese Dream A Society under Construction* (Timezone8, 2007) and a chapter in the catalogue of the Rotterdam Architecture Biennale (NAI Uitgevers, 2007). He is also one of the founders of DeNieuweReporter.nl a Dutch professional weblog that discusses amongst others technology, new media and public culture.