

# URBAN INTERFACES



**Utrecht University**

**2020-2021**

## URBAN INTERFACES MCRMV16045 RMA elective course, period 3

### Instructors

Dr. Michiel de Lange ([m.i.delange@uu.nl](mailto:m.i.delange@uu.nl)) (this year without Prof. Nanna Verhoeff, who is still involved in the [seminar series](#))

### Class Schedule

Tuesdays 13.15 – 16.00 via MS Teams (fully online course this year due to Corona). MS Teams link:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/l/team/19%3a9fb57241fb564afeb4ff18aa56118047%40thread.tacv2/conversations?groupId=1f67959e-895a-4e62-ba2f-f7ab67306573&tenantId=d72758a0-a446-4e0f-a0aa-4bf95a4a10e7>. **Code for self-enrolling: qxjt8y9.**

## Content

In this course, we 1) investigate how media technologies and interfaces pervade urban space, 2) examine the diversity of creative, ludic and artistic practices in urban, public spaces, that involve media, art and/or performance, and 3) how creative design and practices around mobile and situated media, art and performance can be used to reflect on the role of media and technology in urban space and culture.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, cultural researchers have been concerned with how modern media technologies, rapid urbanization and massive social upheavals impact social mobility, civic engagement and modes of belonging. Today, globalization, the spread of digital information and communication technologies and the intensification of data and information flows in the urban domain on the one hand, and the debate on participatory culture and civic engagement on the other, spur further transformations of urban culture. In response, cultural critics, scholars, as well as artists and designers enquire into how urban, public spaces may invite collaborative and playful practices of appropriation, engagement, resistance.

Complementing in-class discussions on theoretical texts, and the analysis of existing urban projects, we will examine some of these issues through a research-by-design approach like e.g. critical making. Critical making entails critical reflection by creating design interventions that give rise to debate. This term is coined by Matt Ratto “to describe the combination of critical thinking with hands-on-making: a sort of pedagogical practice that uses material engagements with technologies to open and extend critical social reflection.” During *and* outside of class sessions, you will develop as part of a team a joint critical design project that explores and reflects on contemporary issues in our technologically mediated cities (more below).

### **[urban interfaces] Research Group at Utrecht University**

This course connects to ongoing research of the [urban interfaces] research group at the Department for Media and Culture Studies ([www.urbaninterfaces.net](http://www.urbaninterfaces.net)). [urban interfaces] investigates contemporary urban transformations and the role of mobile and situated media, art and performance in urban public spaces. During the course you will hear more about ongoing research, and you will be offered possibilities to join and contribute to meetings and events.

### **[urban interfaces] research seminar**

The [urban interfaces] research group is organizing an online **seminar series** in parallel with the course in block 3 called “Interfacing the (In)Formal City”. More info & registration:

<https://urbaninterfaces.sites.uu.nl/seminars/interfacing-the-informal-city-urban-interfaces-graduate-seminar-2020-2021/>.

### **[urban interfaces] event MAB20**

This year, the course will connect to the postponed Media Architecture Biennale (MAB20) which the [urban interfaces] research group is co-organizing. MAB20 was originally planned for November 2020 but is now taking place in June/July 2021. For more information, see [www.mab20.org](http://www.mab20.org).

### **Journal Special Issues**

Leonardo Electronic Almanac special issue: <https://www.leoalmanac.org/urban-interfaces/>

Interface Critique Journal (2 volumes so far): <https://interfacecritique.net>.

Interface journal for/about social movements: <https://www.interfacejournal.net/archives/issues/>

## **Learning Objectives**

### **After completing this course, you will have:**

- increased your knowledge about (some) current debates about participatory media, art and performance situated in urban public space, within the broader field of Media, Art and Performance Studies;
- trained to succinctly, clearly, and carefully analyze, summarize and discuss the main ideas as formulated in the assigned academic texts;
- trained to professionally communicate your insights, reflections and questions about the discussed topics in oral presentations and discussions as well as academic writing;
- trained to communicate reflection on the relevance of the topics and reading of the course in relation to your own research interests.

## **Assignment and Grading**

### **Assignment: research-by-design project 'Critical Urban Interface'**

In teams of 3 people, you will work on conceptualizing a critical urban interface that engages with one or more of the issue brought up and discussed during class. During each class, we will do a series of iterative research-by-design workshop sessions aimed at developing your team project. Teams are expected to continue working on their joint project during non-class hours.

While developing your project, think about the following aspects:

- *Critical*: your project departs from an existing urban interface and subverts the dominant logics of most (urban) interfaces aimed at optimizing, efficiency, control, and so on.
- *Speculative*: your project opens up alternative perspectives on possible urban futures; it asks the question "what if?".
- *Participatory*: your project should give citizens or even non-human actors a voice to speak and engage with the urban environment and/or a particular issue.
- *Relational*: your project connects one or more different worlds: e.g. more-than-human.
- *Frictional*: your concept is ambiguous, provocative, and draws attention to itself (reflexive).

### **Grading: portfolio (report + weekly reflections)**

The course grade is based on your individual portfolio, which in turn is based on your research-by-design project and your weekly reflections (100% of grade). Please post your work in MS Teams, under Class Notebook, or via OneNote). The portfolio consists of:

#### **1) Weekly reflections (max. 200 words, 5 in total)**

For weeks with mandatory readings (1-5), you are expected to prepare for the seminar meetings by closely and critically reading the assigned texts and possible additional readings, and by preparing the digest of your reading in one succinct reflection in advance (max. 200 words in total, ex. title and references. These reflections must be grounded in the assigned texts. During class, we will use your reflections to spark the debate, so you should be ready to present and initiate the discussion based on your reflection. This assignment aims to 1) kickstart discussions during class 2) inform your individual and team-based research trajectories. This part is not graded separately. Submit via MS Teams Class Notebook (OneNote) before each meeting (Mondays before 17:00).

#### **2) Final research-by-design report (2500 words)**

At the end of the course you hand in a well-documented, illustrated and motivated report about your design project of about 2500 words (ex. footnotes, bibliography, appendices). This individual report is based on the research-by-design concept developed with your team. Deadline: April 1 2021 end of the day (in OneNote).

The final report needs to include (not necessarily in this order):

- **Description:** a description of the design process and developed design concept for an urban interface (based on the research-by-design process and product);
- **Conceptual reflection:** a reflection on the way this design concept connects to (e.g. sheds new light on) theories and debates on issues discussed during the course and/or explored with your team;
- **Methodological reflection:** a short discussion of creative methods deployed, and the relationship between design and scholarship;
- **Documentation:** a full bibliography (including inspirational projects, artworks, and other materials); any additional relevant materials and documentation, such as drawings, images, descriptions, interviews, reviews, announcements, etc. *Include your weekly reflections as an appendix too.*

**Feedback** Nearly every stage of your project will be discussed in group meetings. You will pitch initial ideas and get feedback on your ideas and the subsequent steps from your peers and the course instructors during classes.

**Assessment** Assessment of your portfolio will be based on the following criteria:

- **planning:** the competency to adhere to all given deadlines for assignments throughout the course;
- **level of research:** the quality of the portfolio; are the collected materials and reflections based on solid research, do they reflect a careful analysis of the urban project(s), thorough reading of texts, and critical digest of class discussions, and feedback;
- **level of reflection:** does the portfolio provide a clear positioning of ideas, does it reflect on issues related to the central course topics, readings, and discussions in a manner that evidences precise, nuanced and critical thinking;
- **academic professionalism and integrity,** as evidenced in the carefully written and correctly annotated reflections.

## Course Schedule

<p>Class 1 9 Feb</p> <p><b>Urban Interfaces</b></p>	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Drucker, Johanna. 2011. "Humanities Approaches to Interface Culture." <i>Culture Machine</i> 12. <a href="https://culturemachine.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/3-Humanities-434-885-1-PB.pdf">https://culturemachine.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/3-Humanities-434-885-1-PB.pdf</a></li> <li>● Toft, Tanya and Susa Pop. 2016. "Preface." In: <i>What Urban Media Art Can Do: Why, When, Where &amp; How</i>. Edited by Susa Pop, Tanya Toft, Nerea Calvillo, Mark Wright. Stuttgart: avedition GmbH: 21-30</li> <li>● de Lange, Michiel, Nanna Verhoeff, Sigrid Merx. 2019. "Urban Interfaces: Between Object, Concepts, and Cultural Practice." In Nanna Verhoeff, Sigrid Merx, Michiel de Lange (eds.), <i>Urban Interfaces: Media, Art, and Performance in Public Spaces</i>. Special Issue for <i>Leonardo Electronic Almanac</i> (MIT Press) 22, 4 (March 15). <a href="https://www.leoalmanac.org/urban-interfaces-between-object-concept-and-cultural-practice-nanna-verhoeff-sigrid-merx-michiel-de-lange/">https://www.leoalmanac.org/urban-interfaces-between-object-concept-and-cultural-practice-nanna-verhoeff-sigrid-merx-michiel-de-lange/</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Preparation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Read the course manual and assigned literature</li> <li>● Write your weekly reflection</li> <li>● Prepare to briefly introduce yourself and your research interests that are relevant to the course</li> </ul>
<p>Class 2 16 Feb</p> <p><b>Media Architecture, Smart Cities</b></p>	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Colangelo, David. 2020. <i>The Building as Screen: A History, Theory, and Practice of Massive Media</i>. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. Ch. 1 "Massive Media" pp 11-48. <a href="https://utrechtuniversity.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1130906057">https://utrechtuniversity.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1130906057</a></li> <li>● McQuire, Scott. 2016. "Introduction" and "1. Transforming Media and Public Space." In: <i>Geomedia, Networked Cities and the Politics of Urban Space</i>. Cambridge: Polity Press: 7-49 <a href="https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=4675591">https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=4675591</a>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Preparation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Read the assigned literature</li> <li>● Write your first weekly reflection and submit via OneNote by Monday 5PM before the meeting</li> <li>● Photograph and document three examples of an urban interface that you encounter in your daily routine. Prepare to share your work during class!</li> </ul>
<p>Class 3 23 Feb</p> <p><b>#FuturesImplied: imaginative alternatives for techno-urban futures</b></p>	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gidley, Jennifer M. 2017. <i>The Future: A Very Short Introduction</i>. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Ch.3 "The Evolving Scholarship of Future Studies" (63-81); Ch. 5 "Technotopian or Human-Centered Futures?" (100-115).</li> <li>● Shepard, Mark. 2011. "Toward the Sentient City." In: <i>Sentient City: Ubiquitous Computing, Architecture, and the Future of Urban Space</i>. Edited by Mark Shepard. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 16-36</li> <li>● Pelzer, Peter, and Wytse Versteeg. 2019. "Imagination for Change: The Post-Fossil City Contest." <i>Futures</i> 108:12-26. doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2019.01.005">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2019.01.005</a>. <a href="https://networkcultures.org/blog/publication/the-critical-makers-reader-unlearning-technology/">https://networkcultures.org/blog/publication/the-critical-makers-reader-unlearning-technology/</a></li> </ul>

	<p><b>Preparation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the assigned literature</li> <li>• Write your weekly reflection</li> <li>• Project work with your team members + homework</li> </ul>
<p>Class 4 2 Mar</p> <p><b>More-than-human cities</b></p> <p>note: starting later at 14:00 because of an online seminar I'm organizing (and you are welcome to attend):  <a href="https://www.uu.nl/en/events/save-the-date-gds-webinar-february">https://www.uu.nl/en/events/save-the-date-gds-webinar-february</a></p>	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harraway, Donna. 2016. <i>Staying with the Trouble</i>. Durham: Duke University Press: Introduction and Chapter 1: <a href="https://utrechtuniversity-on-worldcat-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/olc/934194942">https://utrechtuniversity-on-worldcat-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/olc/934194942</a></li> <li>• Foth, Marcus &amp; Caldwell, Glenda Amayo. 2018. "More-Than-Human Media Architecture." In: <i>Proceedings of the 4th Media Architecture Biennale Conference</i>. Edited by C. Zighang. Association for Computing Machinery (66-75) <a href="https://eprints.qut.edu.au/121705">https://eprints.qut.edu.au/121705</a></li> <li>• Doucet, Isabelle, and Hélène Frichot. 2018. "Resist, Reclaim, Speculate: Situated Perspectives on Architecture and the City." <i>Architectural Theory Review</i> 22, 1: 1-8. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/13264826.2018.1418127">https://doi.org/10.1080/13264826.2018.1418127</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Preparation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the assigned literature</li> <li>• Write your weekly reflection</li> <li>• Project work with your team members + homework</li> </ul>
<p>Class 5 9 Mar</p> <p><b>Creative methods</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Herz, Garnet. "What is Critical Making." <a href="http://current.ecuad.ca/what-is-critical-making">http://current.ecuad.ca/what-is-critical-making</a></li> <li>• Ratto, Matt, and Garnet Hertz. 2019. "Critical Making and Interdisciplinary Learning: Making as a Bridge between Art, Science, Engineering and Social Interventions." In: <i>Critical Makers Reader</i>, edited by Loes Bogers &amp; Letizia Chiappini. (18-28) <a href="https://pure.hva.nl/ws/files/6354445/CriticalMakersReader.pdf">https://pure.hva.nl/ws/files/6354445/CriticalMakersReader.pdf</a></li> <li>• Pezzullo, Phaedra C. 2020. "Between Crisis and Care: Projection Mapping As Creative Climate Advocacy." <i>Journal of Environmental Media</i> 1, 1: 59-77. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1386/jem_00006_1">https://doi.org/10.1386/jem_00006_1</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Preparation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the assigned literature</li> <li>• Write your weekly reflection</li> <li>• Project work with your team members + homework</li> </ul>
<p>Class 6 16 Mar</p> <p><b>Feedback sessions</b></p>	<p><b>Non-mandatory but nonetheless stimulating reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gordon, Eric and Stephen Walter. 2016. "Meaningful Inefficiencies: Resisting the Logic of Technological Efficiency in the Design of Civic Systems." In: <i>Civic Media: Technology, Design, Practice</i>. Edited by Eric Gordon and Paul Mihailidis. MIT Press. pp. 238-260 <a href="http://proxy.library.uu.nl/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=4573752">http://proxy.library.uu.nl/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=4573752</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a team, prepare a prototype of your concept, for demonstration and peer review during class.</li> </ul>
<p>Class 7 23 Mar</p>	

<b>Final presentations</b>	<b>Assignment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With your team, prepare the final version of your concept.</li> <li>• With your team, prepare (pre-record) a short presentation of your work to be shown during the final class session.</li> </ul>
1 April end of the day	Final paper due, hand in via OneNote (Class Notebook in MS Teams)
<b>Deadline paper</b>	
16 April	Today at the latest the course instructor should give you your final mark.
<b>Deadline grade</b>	

## Course Evaluation

We are always looking to improve our program and are interested in your feedback on each course – both the good points and what can be improved. We will have informal moments of evaluation during the seminar meetings for which you will be asked about your experiences and possible suggestions for the course.

At the end of each block, you will also receive an invitation via email to fill in a questionnaire and to provide feedback for each course in the digital evaluation system Caracal ([caracal.science.uu.nl](http://caracal.science.uu.nl)). You can log in to Caracal using your Solis-ID and password and find the course evaluations that apply to you. These course evaluations will be processed anonymously.

If you have more general feedback about the organization of the RMA program of Media, Art & Performance Studies, please contact the program coordinator: [maps.hum@uu.nl](mailto:maps.hum@uu.nl) (Laura Karremans & Nanna Verhoeff) or your mentor.

## Fraud & Plagiarism

Don't do it! Here's why: <http://students.uu.nl/en/practical-information/policies-and-procedures/fraud-and-plagiarism>