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Between creativity and criminality. The art and design of civil domains.

During Integrated2015, cultural philosopher Lieven De Caeter told the public to go and take a hike with his closing act entitled '*Fuck Format*', a clenched quote for which he didn't even require 140 characters. De Caeter was referring not only to the tyranny of the concept *an sich*, but also to how our way of thinking is being indoctrinated by predefined and fossilized paradigms and world views. Like the TINA slogan: '*There is no alternative.*' In other words: vote, shut up and endure.

Nevertheless, despite what populists would like us to believe, there are alternative and possibly even more radical 'groundswells of opinion' are noticeable, not seldom artistically inspired. Citizen initiatives, for instance, occupy an increasingly significant place in society. These are movements that emerge because an authority has (still) not developed a policy for them or because a market has (still) not seen the point of them and is therefore waiting. This civil terrain, also called the '*commons*', occupies as it were a third space between market and state, and it does so under various guises (mental, physical and virtual), and that's why it also often finds itself in a grey zone between legality and illegality. Because whoever launches a citizen initiative or claims civil rights doesn't yet know whether they will be agreed to or not. Will an authority accept and regulate them, or will it work against these initiatives, sabotage them or even criminalize them? To be clear: civil actions are not simply criminal, but they precede the distinction between legality and illegality. That's why it also always involves risky behaviour. The civilian who sticks his neck out, demands something new or sets up an organization puts himself on the line and runs the risk of never being recognized and even of never achieving his social position or losing it for good. It thus requires courage, and the social media also play a crucial role in this everyday struggle, for better or worse. Because online *sharing* is often synonymous with online *lynching*.

Integrated2017 wishes to explore and shed light on the dynamics of this border area. Because citizen initiatives (whether individual or collective) not only make abundant use of design and artistic strategies as well as technology to boost their ideas, but they are also often initiated by designers, artists and architects. In Spain, for instance, the architects of Recetas Urbanas 'illegally' built a school on forbidden land, but where the population 'legally' needs it. In Croatia, DJs, theatre-makers and visual artists have taken the initiative to challenge the construction of a shopping centre and to block the privatization of motorways. In Belgium, Hart Boven Hard rests in part on the cultural sector, and ethical hackers can make hidden facts public on a global scale.

But the activism doesn't have to take place on a political level exclusively. New tools and services are being developed, and from a commercial perspective too people are increasingly seeking the limits of the civil domain. Were Oliviero Toscani's controversial photos for *Benetton* in the mid 1980s a sign of social engagement or merely an extremely clever advertising stunt? And what to think of the so-called ambient screens that, in cities around the world, are shaping a transnational public space? Is this merely visual 'pollution' of the public domain, or are they generating evocative settings for civil actions? The discussions generated by both ambient screens and Toscani make it clear in any case that they too are steering a course in a highly ambivalent area between the public and private spheres, between commitment and commerce.

But there is also a darker side. As we have recently seen, some movements or actions are simply being hijacked for undemocratic political purposes. We all know now that fake news is disseminated among others via fake sites, a powerful instrument in the hands of ruthless, lying propagandists to influence public opinion, to indoctrinate people.

Nevertheless, this involvement of citizens is a source of hope. It also offers another dimension to the concept of 'undertaking'. Because that is also 'activating' and moreover this type of undertaking is not being done here by traditional entrepreneurs, but by a range of actors, also and especially in the social and cultural fields. Services, products and tools no longer simply emerge because they should support a growing economy, but also because they want to break open and reuse an occupied environment. Brussels-based Rotor Deconstruction, for instance, recuperates material from abandoned modern constructions, then reuses it in new constructions and further researches how new solutions can emerge from old ones. Graphic designers are also at work making complex cities and information systems more understandable, more navigable. Well-conceived information design also erects a dam against a soured society.

It is precisely this border area that interests Integrated2017. What aesthetic does it generate and what positions do designers, artists and architects occupy in this? What is their language –not rarely devoid of humour– and what design and artistic strategies do they use? How does this civil domain get designed and shaped? We call this border area the terrain between creativity and criminality, because it often involves creative and highly innovative initiatives that don't yet have a legal status. But it is also about a new aesthetics which –whether minimal or eclectic– falls into the undecided area between art and kitsch, artistic and political engagement, social and commercial design.

Between creativity and criminality. Pascal Gielen & Hugo Puttaert (Antwerp/Brussels, February 2017).