WHEN DOES IRL MATTER? LOCATION AND NETWORKED CREATIVITY IN GAMER, HACKER AND MAKER PUBLICS

Kat Braybrooke
University of Sussex Humanities Lab

Tim Jordan
University of Sussex School of Media, Film and Music

Annika Richterich
Maastricht University

Karin Wenz
Maastricht University

Summary

This panel examines how communities engaged in predominantly digital practices rely on offline and online environments for public and private interaction. We argue that understanding how these spaces are used for these forms of interaction is crucial in order to make sense of the networked practices of digitally grounded communities.

Through four papers, we analyse gamer, hacker, and maker communities as examples of networked actors known to rely on and create Internet technologies. To what extent do these networked publics require collocation (Trainer et al. 2016), physical co-presence more casually referred to as IRL and direct face-to-face interaction? In the early days of gaming, LAN parties were common means of getting together (Jansz & Martens 2005). More recently, such practices have been complemented and affected by new possibilities for online sharing such as twitch.tv. Early hacker groups not only set up conferences that persisted for years (Defcon began in 1993 and persists to this day) but also met regularly (Coleman, 2010; Kostakis, Niaros & Giotitsas, 2015; Moilanen, 2012). In recent years hacker-, makerspaces, Fab Labs and other sites have arisen to bring together the spirits of hacking and making in specific, persistent locations − some of those within institutions (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014; Richterich & Wenz, 2017).

While participants increasingly collocate in dedicated offline spaces to train skills and exchange knowledge, they likewise strategically continue to use online environments to demonstrate and enact their expertise (Kubitschko, 2015). Acknowledging the relevance of such developments, genealogical and practice-oriented approaches to internet

research have gained in importance (Pink et al., 2015; Bräuchler & Postill, 2010; Braybrooke & Jordan, 2016). Within this field, however, little attention has been paid to the motivations of actors/communities for deciding on, shifting between, and combining offline and online interaction related to private/public divides.

Therefore, this panel asks whether 'networked publics', i.e. the concept that power in a network society is exercised through the existence of networks (Castells, 2011), need to take greater account of co-located activities among what are heavily 'digitised' groups. boyd argues that "Networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they simultaneously [exist as]: (1) the space constructed through networked technologies, and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (boyd, 2010, p. 39). We will explore if restructuring in these ways through networked technologies also involves the network and its technologies being adapted to ensure collocation is fostered.

The panel will do this by exploring four different yet comparable groups to offer case studies from which we can discuss how a networked public creates different kinds of public/private divides. We will examine what seem to be 'online founded' networked groups of hackers and gamers, both of which generate their own sense of what they make public and what they try to keep private. In contrast, we will also examine physical communities of makers who are heavily afforded by networked technologies but, unlike gamers and hackers, require on-site collocation to create their public/private divides.

Papers will address two questions: What are the main factors in facilitation that a community focuses on to move between online interaction and collocation (and is this a false binary)? What kinds of practices and motivations foster an interest in combining digital and physical collaboration? We will reflect on the role of institutions, corporations, Internet technologies, and communities themselves in defining these choices.

Particularly, we will explore − through the effect of face-to-face elements across the groups we are studying − how they create not just a sense of being a networked public, but that this is complexly constructed out of a number of different public/private divides. In particular, the way collocation is integrated is different across the groups this panel studies, and these differences, point to ways that each group is constituted by a number of ways, dividing public and private. The ongoing location of a makerspace in the U.S. contrasts with a pop-up Fab Lab in a museum in London. The episodic collocation afforded by an annual conference contrasts with regular meetups of hackers in similar regions. These developments point to a more complex and fluid vision of networked publics in which it is important to trace multiple public/private divides and how they integrate online and offline interactions.

We will finish by posing two challenges through our examination of cases and theories of networked publics. First, we will ask whether collocation or physical connection remains a structuring element in different networked publics, and why this has been under-appreciated and theorised. Second, grasping the roles of collocation, we will make it clear that when discussing networked publics, it is important to be explicit that this is a public/private relationship that is continually created and re-created, and that each group is constituted by not just one such divide, but several.

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When mailing lists 'don't work': Digital-material entanglements in maker- and hackerspaces

Annika Richterich
Maastricht University

This paper explores how individuals affiliated with maker and hacker communities interact in online and offline environments. I will examine the role that digital platforms and physical spaces play for communal interactions and individuals' creative practices. Making and hacking do not merely take place in private homes. They are not necessarily solitary activities. Instead, they are commonly networked through digital platforms and set in shared, communal and public, spaces.

Physical, communal settings have been described as increasingly important places for explorative, creative and political engagement with digital technology (Davies 2017; Toupin 2014). Such settings are, for example, hacker and makerspaces, fablabs, and shared machine shops (Kostakis, Niaros, and Giotitsas 2015; Dickel, Walter-Herrmann and Büching 2014; Ferdinand and Petschow 2014). It is likewise characteristic for these communities to rely heavily on digital platforms, for example for knowledge sharing, coordination or collaborative projects. But for what kinds of activities are online or face-to-face encounters preferred in such communities, in what cases and ways are they intertwined? How are public/private boundaries drawn and negotiated, among others by choosing and combining online/offline environments?

In various (online) instructions on how to create a hackerspace, the relevance of Internet tools for these communities has been frequently stressed:

> "The first thing the founders of Noisebridge did, even before we had the name, was create a Google group so that anyone could communicate about getting involved. Within weeks we'd registered our chosen name online; started our website, email list, and IRC channel". (Altman 2012; see also London Hackspace n.d.)

At the same time, potential members "[…] begun meeting every Tuesday night at a local café" (Ibid.). The significance of physical interaction for actors involved in hacking and making has been emphasised in prior research (see e.g. Moilanen 2012; Coleman 2010). In various communal online environments, one often encounters suggestions that some topics should be discussed 'IRL', stating that 'it's not really working' via e.g. the mailing list. This applies for instance to decisions concerning communal governance.

Kubitschko moreover highlights that hackers do not solely *acquire* skills, communally or privately. Hackers, in this case the members of the *Chaos Computer Club*, also perform expertise publicly: "Media-related practices – ranging from individual websites to personal blogs, from podcasts to radio shows […] – were fundamental for the hackers' construction of and articulation of expertise." (2015, 398) Such practices indicate that hackers (and makers) deliberately choose certain public spaces for communication and interaction – and that these spaces may be physically or digitally grounded.

I will analyse communities describing themselves as hacker- and makerspaces alike, since these are often home to similar practices. Making has been described as more

strongly linked to creative approaches involving diverse materials (rather than focusing mainly on information technology). Yet, locally at hacker- and makerspaces the equipment tends to be similar. Conceptually, some hacker and makerspaces can be described as 'communities of practices' (Hughes 2013; Rohde et al. 2007; Wenger 1998), characterised by situated learning, knowledge exchange and strong social ties. Others are rather noncommittal and loosely based on shared interests and expertise, thus better depicted as communal 'affinity spaces' (Gee 2005). In this regard, it will also be examined whether groups that classify as either 'communities of practice' or 'affinity spaces' differ in their use of online/offline environments.

The analysis will be based on different primary sources, such as websites, wikis, forums and mailing lists. Among others, I will draw on online interactions of hacker- and makerspaces as well as observations and informal interviews from physical hackerspace visits (mainly in England). Content will be selected based on the main criterion that it implicitly or explicitly reflects on reasons for communicating and interacting in online or offline public/private spaces. I will first examine what kind of communication/interaction typically takes place online and in what cases face-to-face meetings appear preferred. Second, I will analyse what public/private boundaries are drawn: for example, if environments are meant for communal communication or aimed at reaching wider audiences. In doing so, this paper responds to the panel's main question how actors involved in 'heavily digitised' communities and cultures negotiate multiple public/private divides. I argue that physical, material spaces and digital environments are selectively used as well as combined by hacker and maker communities. This does not imply that physical spaces are considered per se more private: Instead, I address how online and offline alike are used to create and reach communal or broader publics.

The practices set in maker-/hackerspaces are compounds of digital-material interactions, selected and intertwined depending on respective conditions, objectives and needs. Individuals' interactions indicate that certain tools and spaces are used in attempts at heightening accountability and engagement and fostering distinct public/private divides. With this analysis, I contribute to the panel's overall aim of shedding light on entanglements between online/offline spaces and public/private negotiations in communities which heavily rely on Internet technology. More generally, this also adds to an argument emphasised by some Internet researchers: that online and offline activities can rarely be separated. Instead, they should be considered as practices in which individuals and diverse (im)materials are entangled (Pink et al. 2016; Hine 2015; Miller and Slater 2001).

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Power geometries in the museum: Introducing the 'collections makerspace' at cultural institutions in London

Kat Braybrooke
University of Sussex Humanities Lab

"How people think about the institutions under which they live, and how they relate to the culture of their economy and society, defines whose power can be exercised and how it can be exercised." – Manuel Castells, A Network Theory of Power, 2011.

This paper examines the recent phenomenon of shared machine shops (SMSs) for digital making and learning that are opening at cultural institutions around the world. Combining historiographies of hacking-as-practice and SMSs with empirical research and working with Doreen Massey's feminist technoscience theory of space as power-geometry, 'collections makerspaces' are introduced as fourth-wave exemplars in a SMS canon. Ethnographic findings drawn from a year-long study of three such sites at Tate Britain, the British Museum and the Wellcome Collection are presented, enabling the paper to explore how these sites fit within the historical tradition of SMSs while also remaining distinctive. In conclusion, the collections makerspace is claimed as a new field for transformative experimentation that both reinforces and reframes the museum.

Digital studio, innovation lab, makerspace, hackspace, fab lab, tech shop, incubator, reading room, media lab, hardware studio, maker library, design hub – the role of the shared machine shop as a space for embodied hacker and maker cultures is changing, its variations becoming as myriad as the titles used for it. What, exactly, does a shared machine shop look like today? Is it an "occupied factory of peer production theory… a worker-owned production unit which often look[s] like the perfect illustration of revolutionary theory on first sight, yet on closer look exhibit[s] all its contradictions" (Troxler & maxigas 2014)? Has it instead become a classical sanctuary, a place for highly skilled experts and craftsmen to weld finely-detailed fabrications using complex systems (Culpepper 2016)? Or is it merely a free and open workshop, a public community space that provides "different tools and equipment where people can go independently to make something" (Nesta 2014)?

The answers, it turns out, are as varied as the questions. What many do seem to agree on is the fact that shared machine shops are evolving. There are enthusiastic visions of a digital fabrication revolution, a society transformed through peer production, a future where anyone can make anything (Gershenfeld 2012; Fleischmann et al 2016). There are explorations of SMSs becoming new centres of lab-style experimentation, places where groundbreaking sustainable innovations are fostered (Dickel et al 2014, Smith et al 2013). There is evidence of unexpected new collaborations as an increasing number of SMSs open in partnership with companies, institutions and governments, ranging from the Inspiration Lab, a public space for digital making installed in the Vancouver Public Library in Canada in 2015 with the support of the municipal council, to the global Fab Lab network which began as a collaboration between the Grassroots Invention Group and the Center for Bits and Atoms at the Media Lab of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2001 (Wolf et al 2014). There are now 1,000 fab labs in 78 countries, many of them opened in partnership with local organisations, such as the Shibuya Fab Lab in Tokyo's Co-lab workspace in Japan, and a fab lab at the National Innovation Foundation in Gujarat, India

(Fab Foundation 2016, Fablabs.io 2016).

More recently, there is also a new generation of SMSs that are opening within the walls of cultural institutions as they attempt to bring in both new sources of funding and new audiences to foster novel modes of belonging for the once-excluded (Oates 2015). In London, census data suggests that while visits to museums and galleries are increasing, there remains a strong causal correlation between sustained participation in 'high' culture and socioeconomic status (Department for Culture, Media & Sport 2016, 2017; Trust for London 2015). At the same time, a blurring of once-clear boundaries between popular culture and fine art is fostering a process of general commodification which renders museums in an increasingly competitive setting "alongside shopping malls within the realms of consumption and entertainment" (Prior 2005). Institutions themselves are reflecting on the particular transformations brought about by digital media. In 2014, Tate Research collaborated with the Royal College of Art and London South Bank University on a study entitled "Modelling cultural value within new media cultures and networked participation", exposing a still-persistent false binary opposition regarding conceptions of culture being separate from the digital, a segregation rooted in historical separations of technology from art (Walsh et al 2014).

The Tate study also found many museums continuing to employ the digital merely as a tool for traditional broadcast models of a one-to-many transmissions instead of two-way or many-to-many models of networked participation, and furthermore that the separation of policy, theory and practice restricted the birth of new cultural value models which could better recognize "contemporary socio-cultural conditions of online production and consumption of culture" (Walsh et al 2014, p. 3). New museology-style revelations of this kind have meant the learning departments of institutions like the Tate are increasingly being given the power to employ informal and 'free learning' practices, allowing for participant experiences that are "free-choice, non-sequential, self-paced and voluntary" (Falk & Dierking 1992, quoted in Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri 2000). This builds on a general orientation towards hands-on social practice artforms since the 1990s in Europe, based on a shared art world aim to overturn the traditional oppression of institutional relationships between artists, audiences and objects (Bishop 2012; Bourriard 2002). Experiments take various forms, from interventionist artworks installed in 'white box' style pop-ups (Bishop 2006), to robot tour guides remote-controlled by publics to roam museum grounds at midnight (Kennedy 2014), to a series of hands-on digital making workshops in collections makerspaces dedicated to these activities.

This paper explores the status of these new generation spaces – and the experiences of the those who gather within them, 'online' and 'offline'. Are they merely the corporate steward-sites of technology companies, who provide funding and tools in return for product promotion in a late-capitalist experience economy (Bishop 2012, Pine & Gilmore 1999)? Or are they transforming future possibilities for the museum to become pioneers in radical, open co-creation? The aim of this research is to address such questions. The paper unfolds as follows. First, a brief historiography of SMSs is outlined in four temporal waves. Conceptual inspiration is then drawn from Massey's understanding of the power of spatial power geometries (1993, 1994), exploring empirical data gathered from a year as researcher-in-residence at three representative sites at Tate Britain, the British Museum and the Wellcome Collection, with a focus on canonical and distinctive characteristics that define each space. The paper concludes by positioning the collections makerspace as an

experimental field site for future transformations of the museum through peer-led cultural (re)production and co-creation.

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Hacktivists in the Flesh

Tim Jordan
University of Sussex School of Media, Film and Music

This paper will explore the digitally mediated networked publics associated with hacktivists and will explore how offline physical copresence plays a role in creating their boundaries of public and private. It will also provide examples that establish the layers of complexity within a number of hacktivist actions and will then discuss the implications for understanding networked publics. (Papacharissi 2010)

The first example will be *Project Chanology* of Anonymous because this marks a moment when a primarily, if not at this time wholly, online group moved offline. The street protests that followed recreated the public--private divide for Anonymous bringing what had been primarily online jargon and norms into offline settings putting them into necessary conversation with others offline. The role of the 'V' mask will be discussed as a key element that allowed some of the prior public/private divide, which had a major role for anonymity and pseudonymity, to persist offline in a redrawn way. The 'V' mask allows for an assertion of anonymity in an offline environment in which anonymity may be created in highly different ways to online. (Coleman 2014, Olsen 2013)

The second example will be the announcement of 'Back Orifice' by group Cult of Dead Cow at Def Con 7 in 1999. (Jordan and Taylor 2004) This event will be used to explore the relationship between the related but different publics created by hackers and hacktivists and how launching hacking software at a conference by a hacktivist group demonstrates the key place for physical co--presence in a predominantly online group. The use of conferences and journals, such as 2600, within hacking will be traced to explore how even among a criminalised hacker groups such physical copresence was structured by events. The use of Def Con 7 to announce a hacking/hacktivist software release will be examined for the emphasis this has on publics with the simultaneous reliance on the prior generation of code and definition of the purpose of the code through online discussion and cooperation. (Jordan and Taylor 2004, Sauter 2014).

The third example will be Anonymous' Operation Payback which involved the ddos'ing of some major corporate sites in response to their removing of services previously used by Wikileaks. This will be particularly traced through the layers of chat rooms through which the actions were organised. The more open and publicly available chat rooms, where most hacktivists discussed action and organised ddos'ing using software called the 'low orbiting ion cannon', will be connected to the series of secured chat rooms where use of bot nets were co--ordinated. (Sauter 2014) Finally, the public nature of this action and its announcements will be connected to the actions, drawing out different levels and types of copresence and the control of copresence using open or closed spaces. This example has minimal physical copresence which will allow it to also be used to compare with the other two examples to identify where physical copresence is associated with different kinds of publics. In conclusion, these examples will be compared and contrasted. They importance of some physical copresence will be examined across the three examples in relation to two different concerns. Changes in the nature of the networked publics of Anonymous and Cult of Dead Cow when the group moves from primarily online networked to mixed online/offline networked public will be established. Further, the multiple divisions

of public/private that make up the networked public nature of the two groups will also be explored. These multiple divisions will be seen to operate not just whether there is physical copresence or not, or in what degree there is such presence, but also in primarily online spaces (such as the different kinds of chatrooms in Operation Payback).

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Get a life? Mediated Collocation in Gaming Communities

Karin Wenz
Maastricht University

In Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games (MMORPGs) the game space is divided in specific ways, partly dependent on the game design and its coded and formal rules, partly in gaming conventions or its informal rules (Carter et al 2015). This leads to a diversity of subgroups of players within an online game. We find factions, guilds, and alliances of guilds, nations, and families. When we look at the names chosen for the different social groups within a game space we notice that the terms refer to political concepts such as nation and alliance, social groups connected by craftsmanship such as guild and intimate social groups such as family. The terms chosen for the groups seem to imply scale (a faction can consist of thousands of players, while a family usually is small scale) and a specific degree of intimacy between players. The different groups also might be involved in "server politics", and might fight for dominance in the game environment. This leads to discussions of what is considered public and private, discussions of trust and reliability of group members (Kocurec 2014). The different groups are highly dependent on internet technology for their public and private interaction. Physical co-presence of players as in LAN parties is rarely experienced or organized by MMORPG players. Instead a wide array of Internet technology is used to strengthen the bond between groups playing together.

While the game characters of players share a physical space, the players often don't. They use different communication channels to interact. These are partly provided by the game technology and partly additionally used such as voice-over software (TeamSpeak, Ventrilo) creating a co-presence of voices. The platform Discord and forums allow players to communicate cross-faction or even cross server, which is not possible in games usually. Games and Discord also show who is online the moment a player logs on and they therefore create a sense of co-presence in the digital space. Game videos are shared on YouTube or twitch.tv, a streaming platform (Lowood 2011, Frolunde 2013). Gameplay is streamed in real time and the player streaming the content comments on the activities at the same time.

Streaming is interesting in those cases where the player does not only record gameplay in the game environment but also him-or herself in a picture frame sitting and playing in front of the screen. Thereby the player's face and real environment is part of the video Glas 2015). Those streamers go public in a way, gaming communities only did in the case of highly competitive groups of players competing in national or international tournaments. While YouTube videos are usually edited before they are published and shared, the streamed content is not (Smith 2013). This leads to a discussion within guilds when and what the streamer might stream and guilds develop norms what is acceptable and what is not. When streamers are connected to a voice-over software the stream can also include guild communication. For many YouTube videos it is a norm already to not include written chat in those videos and even more to exclude voice communication. Thereby gameplay is made public but not the discussion of strategies or jokes and comments of guild members. In some cases videos are shared first internally and only shared publically after agreement of the guild members.

Voice-over software allows for recording of the communication of guild members. A sound announces when recording starts and often players who try to record discussions without asking for consent first are kicked from the channel to stop them or their rights to connect to the channel are even removed. We can clearly observe that gamers generate their own rules of what they make public and what they try to keep private. We can observe different practices dependent on the goal of the nation, guild or family and different stages they go through as described by Trainer et al (2016) as forming, storming, norming, and performing.

Dependent on the group investigated in MMORPGs those stages appear differently. Both forming and norming stages sometimes are already set either by game design or by a guild before a game is launched and members join. As guilds move from game to game players might be in different stages of the process. Guilds knowing each other for years and fighting each other in different games often try to keep the "storming stage" on a server and within a faction alive as an element they consider to be fun for public interaction. In private interaction performing matters most and therefore storming and conflict between team members is avoided. Those stages are also impacted by the different rules at play in games as coded and formal rules are strong and often overruling informal rules for forming, storming, norming, and performing.

Direct face-to-face interaction is only possible in real life meetings of gamers as e.g. during game conventions or guild meetings. Real life meetings are difficult to organize as players join servers and guilds from a huge diversity of locations (e.g. Asia, Canada, Europe, US). They do take place though. In case of one guild I investigated – and whose core members play together now for more than 15 years – a 1-week summer holiday is organized yearly. Those face-to-face meetings are rare and considered private. This special community developed as a multi-gaming community over the years where the game(s) played do matter less than staying together and having fun playing Online games. Migration from one game to another always means that many new members want to join and therefore the group has to go through the stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing over and over again but with a core already monitoring these stages and presetting norms.

This paper will discuss (1) the different private and public divides of gaming communities, (2) in which ways Internet technologies play a role as structuring element for those communities and (3) in how far mediated collocation plays a central role for "the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (boyd 2010, p. 39).

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