

# LEGAL PERFORMANCE

## Aim of the exercises

These three short exercises investigate permitted behaviour in public space as specified in local laws. Every time we act according to the law, we are contributing to its confirmation, we become 'legal bodies'; trained and instructed by a law we might or might not support. Through these exercises and the issues they touch upon, we propose to reinterpret definitions of public space, to test and stretch moral and public social boundaries.

Starting from a Free Software point of view, we feel that exchange should be built on the belief that everyone should have the freedom to use, customize, improve and redistribute resources. Could these 'resources' also include rules and regulations for public life?

The relationship between citizens and law is mutual. We sometimes have the impression that the law is forced upon us, but social evolution implies that the current regulations have to be adapted to changing expectations of civilians concerning peace, safety and public health. Therefore, participation of civil organisations and citizens in the continuous reshaping of their (legal) environment is vital.

If we perceive the city as a network of social relations, it provides us with an excellent interconnected shared and public platform on which communication tests could be executed. Sharing of knowledge is a political process. The process of 'sharing' differs from a hierarchical knowledge distribution. It doesn't just mean copying (duplicating) knowledge, it also encloses another connotation: Sharing as in: 'Sharing a cake': Splitting, dividing, breaking up in pieces and distributing over multiple persons. Following this, the distributed nature of shared knowledge could prevent it from being 'owned' or 'controlled' by one party. Instead: the knowledge is embodied in the network of relationships between people.

## Local Specificity

Before starting the exercises contact the city council, or a police headquarters, and ask for a document in which the rights and limitations of civil behaviour are described for the location in which you are executing the exercises

These exercises are based on local law texts in which behaviour of public space is described, so every time you choose another location you should obtain a copy of the local legislation. In EU countries, these laws are more or less comparable, but to experience the local relevance of the exercises it is important to try and be as locally specific as possible. Depending on the differences in regulations, you might have to adjust the exercises.

## Case Study

The recipes as written below are fed by experiences from Routes and Routines, an ongoing performative research of the Brussels based arts and media collective Constant. Images, examples and law articles mentioned originate from a two walks in the Ixelles quarter carried out by a group of Constant affiliates. As a reference document these walks have used the police regulations on public behaviour in that neighbourhood: the REGLEMENT GENERAL DE POLICE D'IXELLES.

If it is not possible for you to get legal documents from your local authorities, you could use these paragraphs as example material, although this is not recommended. The whole document can be found as a pdf online, in French and Dutch:

<http://www.elsene.irisnet.be/site/downloads/rgp.pdf>

# 1: Collective production of public noise

## Goal:

The aim of this exercise is to experience that public norms derive from what we find to be normal or acceptable. Norms of public behaviour are not fixed, they are flexible and can be influenced. Discuss this issue after the exercise.

## Method:

What is a socially acceptable level of noise an individual is allowed to produce? In police regulations concerning street noise, it is likely that you will find that the sound volume a person may produce is measured by comparing it to a 'normal' level of street noise. The question ofcourse is: what is normal. This tends to depend on type of location and time of day: A highway produces different volumes than a residential area, normal volumes at daytime might be too perceived as too loud at night.

In this exercise we control both streetnoise and individual sound. By adjusting both levels, we will experience that streetnoise is not an abstract / neutral entity, it is the culmination of (our) individual sounds.

## Recipe:

### *Roles:*

A **Group** of people is standing in the streets, carrying objects that produce noise: pots pans, claxons, ghettoblasters, voices:

One **Person** is inside, behind a closed window, a stereo-installation within reach capable of producing loud volumes which can be heard in the street: **The Individual**

In clear sight of both the group and the person inside, a person is positioned: **the Normalizer**.

### *Actions:*

Normalizer controls the volume produced by Group and Individual:

By moving Left arm upwards, Group starts producing louder volumes,

By moving Left arm downwards, Group starts producing less volume.

By moving Right arm upwards, Individual starts producing louder volumes,

By moving Right arm downwards, Individual starts producing less volume.

Practice this method a few times until it is working properly and clear to everybody.

### *Start exercise:*

Normaliser instructs Group to produce low level sound and hold it steady

Normaliser instructs Individual to produce a sound level that is just audible above the level produced by Group

Normaliser instructs Group to produce more sound than Individual

Normaliser instructs Individual to produce more sound than Group

Normaliser instructs Individual to produce less sound than Group

Normaliser instructs Group to produce less sound than Individual

Repeat, improvise and play

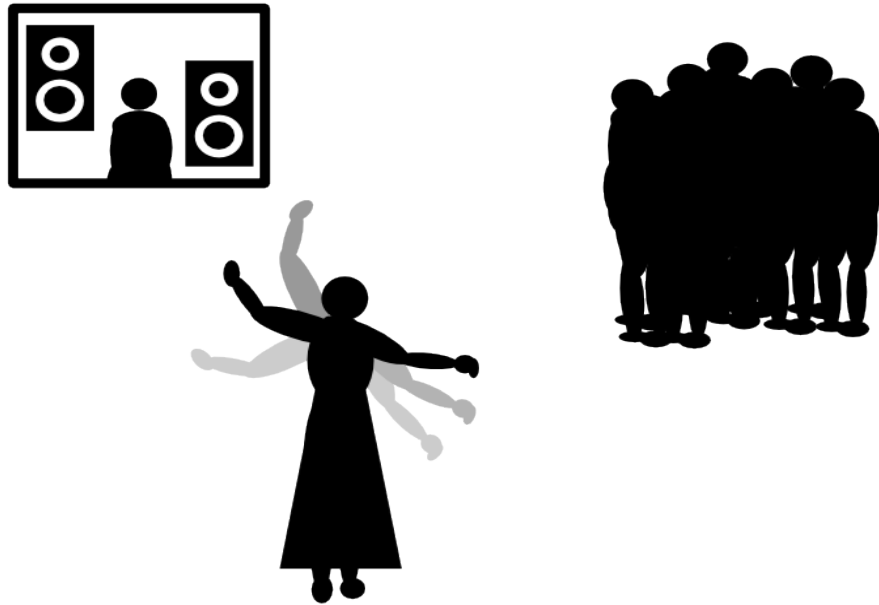


Image From left to right:

Individual behind window with 2 loudspeakers, Normalizer instructing Group and Individual to lower or raise their volumes, Group

Extra material:

Paragraph from the REGLEMENT GENERAL DE POLICE D'IXELLES summarizing the principle of relative noise:

"If they are audible in the public streets, the intensity of soundwaves produced in private properties or vehicles placed in the public streets may not exceed the level of streetnoise."

*(Art. 87. Sans préjudice de la réglementation relative à la lutte contre le bruit, l'intensité des ondes sonores produites dans les propriétés privées ou dans les véhicules se trouvant sur la voie publique ne pourra, si elles sont audibles sur la voie publique, dépasser le niveau de bruit ambiant à la rue. Les infractions à la présente disposition commises à bord des véhicules seront présumées commises par leur conducteur. )*

## 2: Codes and signalisation

### Goal:

In many places it is forbidden to paste posters, to spray graffiti, to write on walls, streets, to correct texts, paste stickers on street signage. It is the aim of this exercise to develop low key strategies to communicate in public places using furniture, objects, signage, plants, bicycles, car, pavement, streetlamps or whatever you encounter on site, without breaking the law.

Usually when you read regulations concerning public communication there are many restrictions given, but the law will probably not give examples of what you are allowed to do. It might tell you to ask permission at the the local authorities, but what if you want to communicate a message that will never be authorised or that is illegal?

For this purpose using means of communication that falls outside legislation would be convenient. It is up to the participants in this exercise to use their creative skills to create appropriate methods of communication that make space for new types of messages

### Recipe:

#### *Before starting:*

Look up local laws on signage and leaving messages in the streets. Take this article to the exercise.

Find a streetcorner with lots of street furniture, decoration, street signs. It needs to be tranquil so you can hang around for a while with a few people, the street should be quiet and not too broad.

Inform the participants about the intention of the exercise and contextualise the exercise by referring to local permissions and restrictions concerning communication in public space.

#### *Action:*

Make two groups of minimum 4 people.

Both groups take 10 minutes to think of a message it wants to communicate to the other group, and discuss a method of communication that is appropriate.

- Try to avoid known media: (spoken language, written words, gestures ... )
- Try to draw your inspiration from the location: use stones, objects, street design, urban layout rhythms, shadow etc.
- Adapt your message to the tools for communication you selected
- If your means of communication requires time to construct, build, practice: negotiate with the other team

Group 1 executes message.

Group 2 guesses which message group 1 sends and the method / manner / language / code they have chosen.

Group 2 executes message.

Group 1 guesses which message group 2 sends and the method / manner / language / code they have chosen.

Repeat and improvise.

Evaluate results.

Example:

A messenger (white shirt, black shorts in picture) transmits a message in Morse code by stepping rhythmically on the white / yellow striped pavement. The rhythm of his steps matches the short and long intervals used in Morse. In this case the messenger transmits a short and wellknown message: S O S. This translates to 3x short, 3x long, 3x short.



Extra material:

Here's a fragment from the REGLEMENT GENERAL DE POLICE D'IXELLES which addresses communication in public place.

English:

*Article 27*

*without permission of the appropriate authorities or owner of the place, and without respecting the rules as put down in permissive documents drawn up by authorities in power, it is forbidden to paste or hang up posters, writings, messages, stickers or sticky notes. Without permission of owner and / or authorities it is also forbidden to place writing, graffiti, or drawings in public places, and also to damage these by cutting, scratching or carving.*

Curiously; the article also mentions that " it is forbidden to cover, smudge, damage, tear, or remove these stickers, notes, posters regardless whether they are put up with or without permission of the authorities." Removing illegal messages is illegal too. Remember this if during your exercise you have produced something of a (semi) permanent nature.

### 3: Human Renderfarm

#### Goal

This exercise deals with the issue of distributed memory. What is it that makes working and thinking in groups powerful? How is a distributed system different from a centrally organised learning system.?

#### Method:

We draw an analogy with the system of a 'renderfarm': A network of linked computers that together contribute to execute exhaustive calculations.

The group possesses a knowledge which is larger than the knowledge possessed by each group member separately. No individual member knows what the totality consists of. The collective brain capacity present in the group is used complementary: the knowledge stored in one memory is useless unless complemented by the memories of the other group members.

Important: The more people participate, the better. Aim for a big group which will permit you to work with a long text.

#### Recipe:

Find a local law concerning groups in public space.

Select a fragment from this law and split this fragment in as many parts as there are participants to the exercise.

Try not to overestimate how much one person can memorise in a few minutes. A few lines per person will do.

Print out each fragment on an A4 sheet of paper

Create a group of people and form a circle

Distribute the printed A4's

Participants take a few minutes to learn the fragments of the law by heart.

When ready: the participants speak the text they have memorised one after the other.  
Take care that the original order of the text is respected when speaking the text.



Example:

Initially the exercise was executed in a public space in Brussels where demonstrations and group meetings are prohibited unless explicitly permitted by local authorities. A fragment of the REGLEMENT GENERAL DE POLICE D'IXELLES is printed here and could be used to quickly test this exercise with a few people.

English

*Chapter III - Public safety and safe passage*

*Section 1: Groupings, manifestations, marches*

*Art. 30*

*Every get together, demonstration or march - of any nature - on the public road or in the galleries and corridors of publicly accessible private terrains is subdued to the permission of the mayor.*

*Every application for authorisation needs to be directed to the mayor at last ten days before the beginning of the foreseen date and has to include following information:*

- name, address and telephone number of organisor(s)*
- the subject of the event*
- the date and time of the meeting*
- the planned route*
- the place and time of the end of the event and if so: how the march will be concluded.*
- is there a meeting planned at the end of the event?*
- estimate of the amount of participants and available vehicles*
- the by the organisers arranged security measures*

a separation for a test with 4 people could be:

**person 1**

*Chapter III - Public safety and safe passage*

*Section 1: Groupings, manifestations, marches*

*Art. 30*

*Every get together, demonstration or march - of any nature - on the public road or in the galleries and corridors of publicly accessible private terrains is subdued to the permission of the mayor.*

**person 2**

*Every application for authorisation needs to be directed to the mayor at last ten days before the beginning of the foreseen date and has to include following information:*

- name, address and telephone number of organisor(s)*

**person 3**

- the subject of the event*
- the date and time of the meeting*
- the planned route*
- the place and time of the end of the event and if so: how the march will be concluded.*

**person 4**

- is there a meeting planned at the end of the event?*
- estimate of the amount of participants and available vehicles*
- the by the organisers arranged security measures*