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Curdin Tones & Frank Mueller

Kenniskring / Knowledge Network: Curdin Tones & Frank Mueller

Out of home: Assembling moments of intimate publicness

Public space promises public life: hanging out with or without purpose, meeting or observing strangers, socializing. Yet, public spaces are not per se places of publicness; they do not automatically invite an interest for the other and trigger mutual engagement. To become public spaces, we suggest, publicness depends on an additional productive unsettling of individual rhythms: an extending of one's own values, perceptions and routines, to overcome one's own home, that is, to leave one's comfort zone.
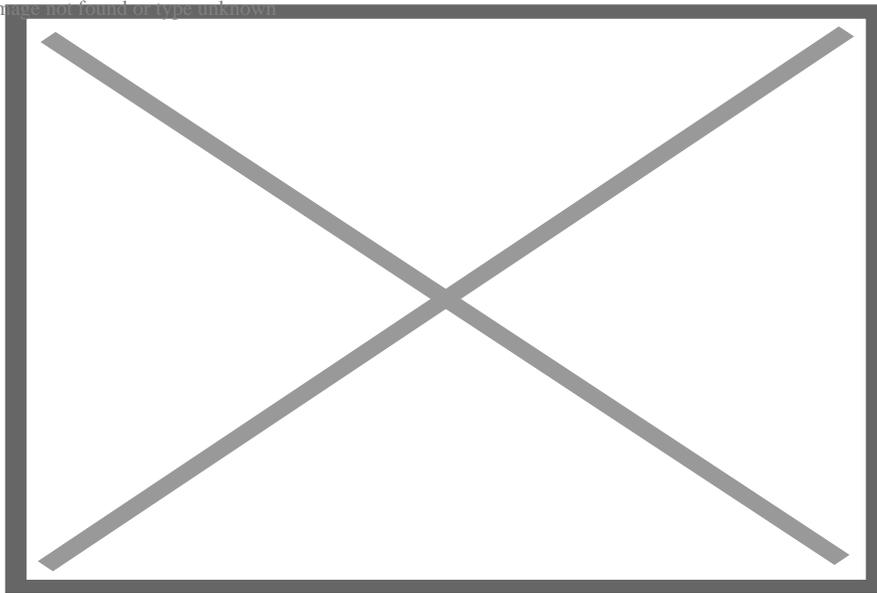
In our research we locate publicness in what we call intimate encounters. This intimacy as micro-spatial engagement with the other is not (and probably never) a purely solely experienced state of mind. In public space it's always already a social condition, the social condition of leaving "home", which is the privileged place of intimacy as protected being-in-oneself. The home provides that comfort zone in which we experience the world as ours, as a domesticated, routinized, familiar place. Leaving that comfort zone of home towards an engagement with the other is thus a moment of becoming public, through intimate encounters.
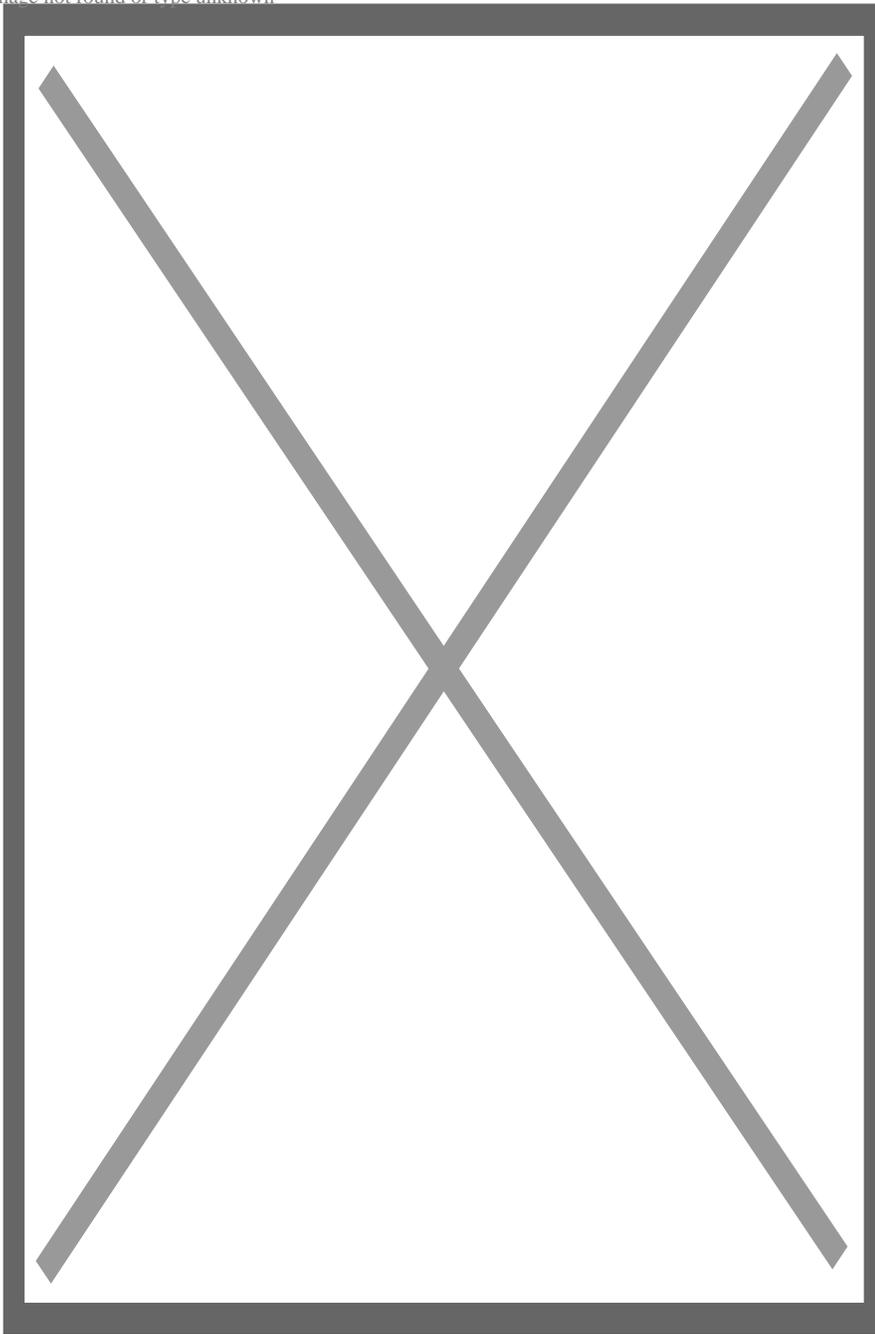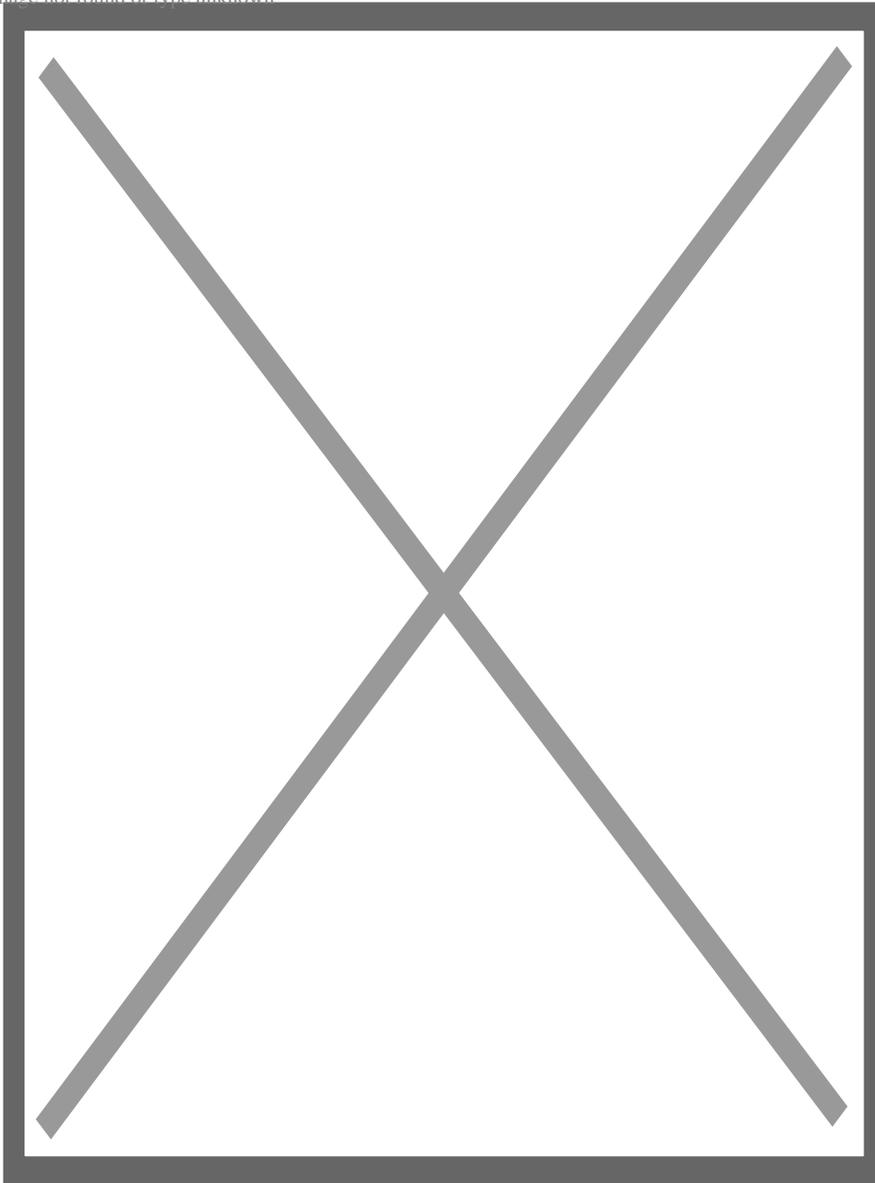
We assume that it is such sensorial, intimate encounters in and through which *publicness is produced*. Thereby we aim at further unpacking publicness as a productive process: We understand publicness not as a given *condition* for "public" life, but as a socio-material relation that emerges from intimacy, from the most micro-spatial engagement with the Other. Providing access to this intimacy, the encounter is the minimal move from which publicness can emerge.
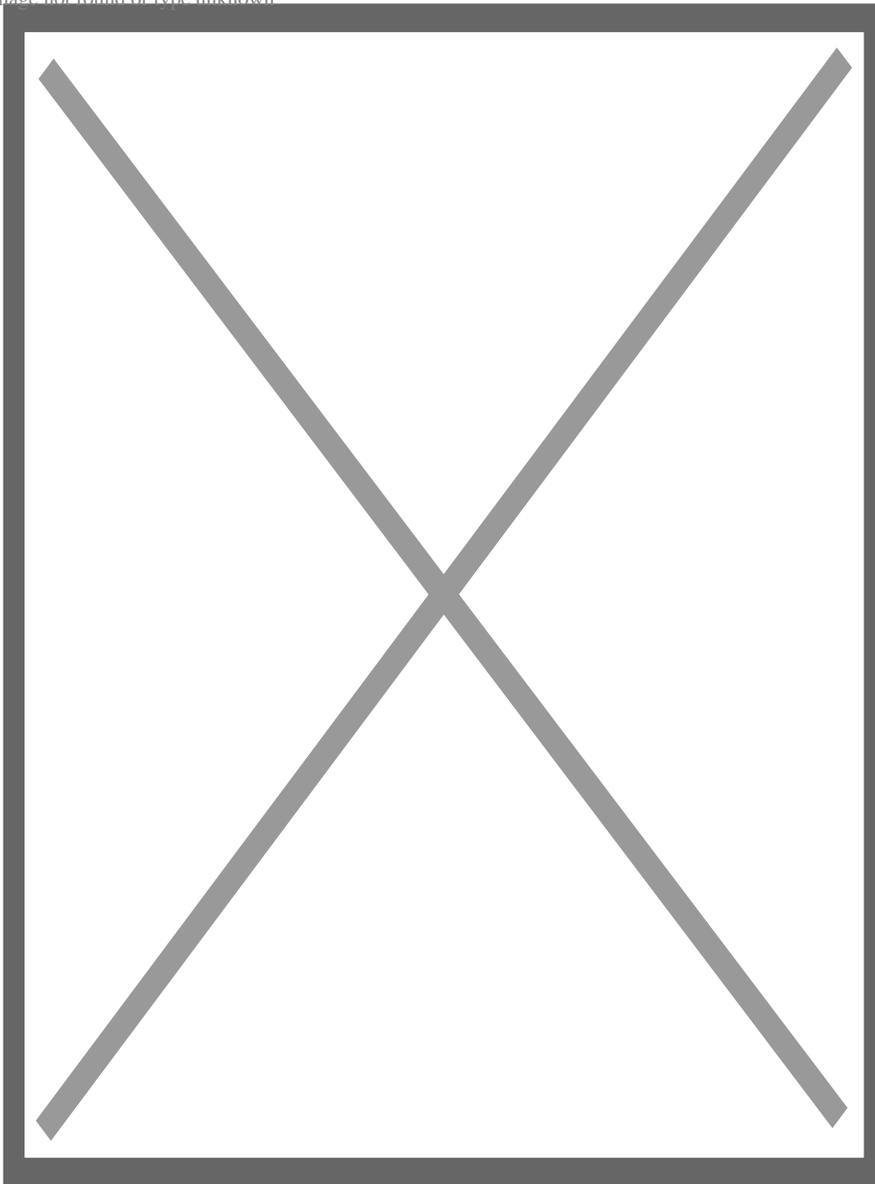
Such encounter we do not limit to the level of clearly defined bordered objects – intimacy reaches into themicro-biological exchange of bacteria, molecules. The intimate encounter does not only draw us to a touchableobject, exterior to ourselves, or another human being, but towards the inside of our body as home, urging us toengage with what it is that constitutes its walls. Mostly in everyday practice, we do not discover ourselves asothers, nor the other as intimately connected to us. Thus, drawing attention to the always-already connectednesswith our social and built environment, the public, is the aim of our procedures.


Our interest is it to collectively develop several research projects that allow to experience this encounter. By creating moments of shared intimacy in projects such as 'Il Bügl Public' and 'Fuori di Testa', we aim at experiencing the boundaries of the self and the other in the intimacy of encounters between humans, things, spatial arrangements, plants and animals. The intimate encounters, triggered in and through our projects, destabilize routinized ways of object-uses and evoke more-than-human interactions.

With our research we pursue two interrelated objectives: First, we theorize the mutual connection of publicness and intimacy with anthropological perspectives on "affordance". We argue that these can be fruitfully seated within artistic research literatures and become practical in artistic research projects. Second, we plan to demonstrate this by assembling moments of intimate publicness as artistic research practice.

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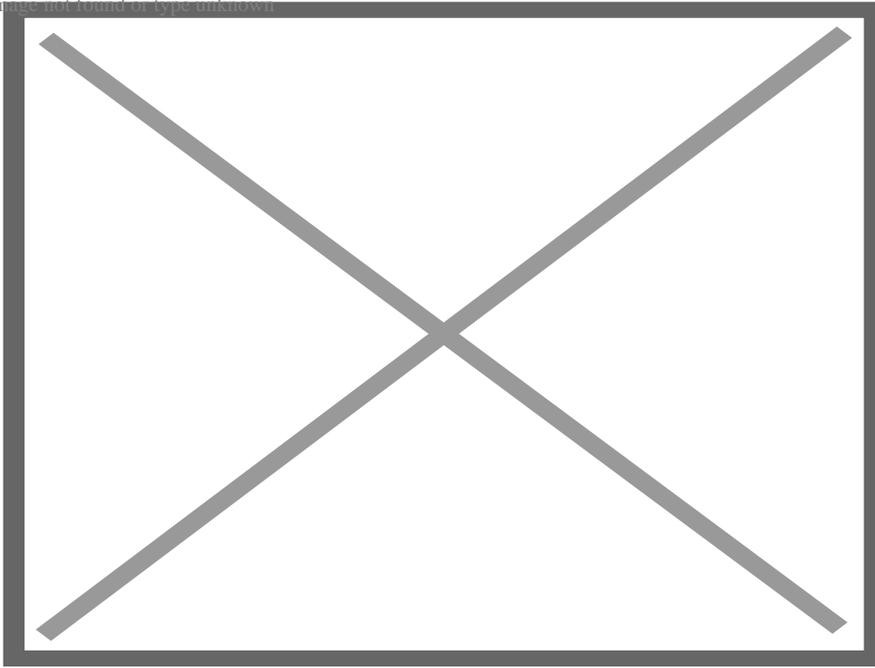
Frank Müller (Langen (D) 1977) is a political scientist and urban geographer, researcher and lecturer at the Technical University Dresden and the Centre for Urban Studies of the University of Amsterdam. His research mainly focuses on urban security politics, housing and securitization in Latin America. He has studied land conflicts, "pacification", and involuntary resettlements in Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, and Medellin.

In his artistic practice Curdin Tones (Tschlin (CH) 1976) focuses on contextual works in relation to the societies he is living in the Netherlands and Switzerland. Currently he founded the cultural initiative SOMALGORS74 in Tschlin, Switzerland. As an independent initiative, SOMALGORS74 is engaged in processes of collective creation. All the activities aim at addressing timely topics, which have a specific reference to the village, its alpine environment, its past and future. In order to inscribe these projects meaningfully in their local contexts and societies, both art and design strategies are used.

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