



CODE-
WORLD

WWW.
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TV



▶QR or Quick Response Codes are printed patterns that contain information, such as links to web sites. These codes can be scanned by a smartphone running freely available reader software.

▶The codes were originally developed for use in factories to track components, but are now seen on advertising billboards and in print magazines, linking to money off coupons, movie trailers and nutritional information to give but three examples. The act of linking from a physical object such as a printed QR code in this way, is known as a hardlink or physical hyperlink.

▶Manchester's City Art Gallery added QR codes to the plinths of public statues to let scanners(?) link to a web page with more information about the sculpture.

▶Mobile phones have become central to our daily lives. For many people they have replaced diaries and address books and become *the* storage centre for personal data. Increasingly with the advent of 'smartphones' such as the iPhone or Blackberry, people also read emails and browse the web on a phone rather than a personal computer. And now we are seeing phones take on the function of credit cards, beoming so-called 'mobile wallets' to pay car parking fees or acting as a cinema tickets for example.

▶QR Codes need the participation of the user, who has to see the code and be interested enough to choose to physically do the scanning. At the moment people do seem interested enough. It has been estimated that about 40% of mobile phone users in Japan scan QR codes. However the choice to participate will soon be taken from people as they move through the city.

▶We are developing a weary immunity to many of the old tricks of advertisers – but they are always looking for new ways to re-engage a sometimes cynical, yet still persuadable public.

▶When we use a mobile phone, information about who we call, when we call them and where we are when we make the call, is recorded and stored. It is inevitable that our phones as they carry ever more personal and commercially valuable information, will give away more about us. This is of interest to people who want to sell us stuff. As we have seen with store loyalty cards, there will be the promise that 'sharing' our information will mean 'tailored', 'interactive' advertising, that more closely matches our interests.

▶Instead of us actively choosing to share information, we will be passive recipients, as we are with billboards – we do not have the choice but to see them when we enter the public space. Soon our mobile devices will broadcast personal information that other devices respond to. It may be in the form of adverts that change and talk directly to passers-by, as imagined in the 2002 film *Minority Report*. In such a case we will be invited to react instantly and impulse pay with the same phone that triggered the advert's appearance.



Fig. 1: Debenhams want you to scan the code, download the app and spend, spend, spend.

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Three of my previous projects came together in this work. *Sold Out* (Kiosk Gallery, 2008) dealt with how the carefully contrived imagery used on advertising hoardings could be corrupted when it was put in the less controlled public space. We have seen that it is in fact the public who are losing control of the public space.

Reality TV (Royal Exchange Theatre, 2010) was about CCTV and its role in policing the public retail environment and *Memento Mori* (Salford Art Gallery, 2007) looked at how statues and memorials were used to reinforce a particular moral and social view of society. Here I have tried to use a technology developed for commerce to offer a more playful, less material and hopefully subversive view of the city.

This part of the project used a number of QR Codes that linked to on-line propaganda posters (which had originally been produced for an exhibition in Manchester at The Convention of the Left political conference). The codes were put in magnetic holders and placed near to CCTV cameras in places I thought had some link to what was being shown on the poster. Passers by could scan the codes, link to the images and download a pdf of the poster.



We now move through the public space not as citizens, but as consumers to be targeted with advertising messages. QR Codes were developed in 1994 to track car parts in Toyota's factories. Now, consumers are parts in cities. Cities such as Manchester grew as factories for production. Now they are re-developed as shopping malls for consumption.



Like other proud Victorian cities, Manchester's city fathers erected statues to honour those deemed worthy and worshipful by those who had the money (or the control of money) to pay for such things. More recent public art in the city has been of indifferent quality, from an engineering perspective (B-of-the Bang) or an artistic one (Messenger of Peace). QR Codes link to photographs celebrating statues that to me, say more about Manchester than the likenesses of the great and the good which Manchester City Art Gallery linked to with their QR Codes in Albert Square.



Fig. 2: Art Gallery QR code on statue plinth linked to web page which gave further information.

