

## The Locative Utopia

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It was Aristotle who said that, mobility combined with perception is what allows us for urban culture, but to 'move effectively' (as the German philosopher of scientific culture Albert Borgmann points out) you need information, and I would add that information can only effectively be parsed by perception at a certain rate. Unmoored from physical space the virtual mobility made possible by the Internet seems to allow one to approach the speed of perception itself.

### Dromology

The French media theorist Paul Virilio, who's original training was as an architect and urbanist, proposes a quite unique approach to analyze this event. His theory of social control through regimes of speed views cinematic --and what he (and Baudrillard call) "telematic"--media (essentially the Internet) as forms of simulated transport that in effect immobilize the viewer in a state of interactive catatonia. Furthermore a military historian Virilio will argue that speed is the first and best tactic and that technologies of speed tend to originate from the military, implicating their spin-offs with military logic. (Indeed, in the context of the debates on locative media, Virilio has in *The Art of The Motor* [1], carried this argument through to augmented reality which represent what he calls a "substitution" of military logic.) In spite of this, and with all due respect to Virilio, this text seeks to propose an argument in favour of locative media as a means, amongst other things, to transcend Virilio's hyper-reality, by paradoxically engaging directly and personally with emerging sophisticated mobile mapping technologies.

After a period of designing supermodern architectural utopias based on his theory of the "oblique function" (in which the ground is tilted to put the body in motion) Virilio quite consciously shifted his attention from topology to theorizing speed, a method he would call 'dromology'. In an interview with Sylvain Lotringer in 1982 entitled *Pure War* [2], Virilio proposes that the invention of the military-industrial complex (or what Bruce Sterling will later refer to as the military-entertainment complex), militarization indeed continued following the end of WWII unabated, but now on a societal level. His inversion thesis then goes on to propose that the era of outward colonization now inverted into one of "endocolonization" in which States effectively declare war on their own people through such weapon as the immanent threat of nuclear war, suburbanization (as an urban status for him is consistent with citizenship not passive consumption) and television. I needn't go into the theories about *The Spectacle* in relationship to television and the Consumer Society here, suffice it, then, to say here that, as Sylvain Lotringer notes in the introduction to his new book of interview with Virilio '*Crepuscular Dawn*' [3], Virilio's hyper-reality is not an effect of ideological manipulation, as Guy Debord may have claimed, but rather "a product of speed, instantaneity, and interaction of \_images\_ in the media". It is not that propaganda does not exist in Virilio's thesis, but rather that medium's power comes from its grasp which is an effect of its flood of images, from which it is so hard to escape; like a deer caught in the headlights, its messages take-on a certain inevitable quality.

### Vision for 2020

Formerly an architect, Virilio believed that the impact of real-time telematics on the city is that the bricks and mortar of architectonic space have become a relic of some "dead past society whose technologies were intimately aligned with the visible transformation of matter" [4]. In the seminal *War and Cinema*, for example Virilio developed did an archeology of technologies of machine vision in relation to military tactics, arguing that the ability to visualize a space was directly related to its domination control. His thesis seems particularly relevant at the moment in the context of the current US program for the militarization of outer space where the Bush administration has moved from a discourse of simply controlling space to one of outright ownership (which it should be noted, like their infamous initiatives to legalize torture, is in direct contravention of international law, established, in this case, following the moon landing in '69). The doctrine of "full spectrum dominance" laid out in the Pentagon's Long-Range Plan and Vision for 2020 in fact conflates outer space with virtual space, seeking "unilateral total domination of land, sea, air, cyberspace and outer space through weapons and sensors that would come from proposed sea, land, air and space-based defense systems." [5]

Meet the military (and commercial traveler's) map of the 21st C... It can instantly dissect the geography of a city, showing users the electrical power grid, all rail, roads, pathways, and and other man-made features, plus much more both in map and photographic form... HeraclesMaps digests satellite imagery, mapping data, and allows users to access the full range of the data quickly and intuitively through an interface that anticipates questions. [6]

By 2020, vision itself will connect cyberspace with architectonic space so that the territory and the map become inseparable. It was spin-off from the military that brought civilians both the Internet and GPS, and now, in combination with each other, it brings "augmented reality". The possibilities inherent in this hybrid have led the noted "augmented reality" researcher Scott Fisher to proclaim the radical potential of the medium as 'a doorway to other worlds': "as the processing power and graphic frame rate on microcomputers quickly increase, portable, personal virtual-environment systems will also become available. The possibilities of virtual realities, it appears, are as limitless as the possibilities of reality. They can provide a human interface that disappears--." [7] An early example of such a system that I have experienced first hand is ARQuake, which was displayed at last year's Art+Communication 6 festival in Riga [8]. ARQuake uses a wearable computer mounted into backpack to project the 3D space of the popular so-called "first person shooter" game over the landscape of "the real world" through a head-mounted display that coordinates the two "spaces" via GPS (Global Positioning System) technology [9]. Following Fisher, the "super-equipped" citizens of the 2020 will interact with a layers over space in which programmers will constructs a "urban" realities, potentially shared by millions worldwide, as is now the case with networked interactive games like Quake. Further still, following the French architectural theorist Marc Dessause, we can frame the mobile "road warrior" as the citizen of a new kind of utopia -- in so far as utopia has always been about total control.

Transport is the generic transcendental event that not only enables the description of the ideal, designed, or equitable city, but as well confers on it its intoxicating value... within this perspective, utopia has always been motopia. Marc Dessause [10]

### Locative Media Reformism

With new mobile mapping technologies such as HeraclesMaps as well as the development of numerous location-based games in the past several years (such as, for example *Botfighter* [11] which allows players to "hunt" one another with their mobile phones), 2020's 'way of seeing' is already becoming a 'consumer reality'. New Media artists, whom often play the role of early adopters/explorers to emerging media, are also exploring this new space, often under the handle of locative media [12], with projects such as *Interurban* [13] and *Aura*, using GPS to "locate" interactive sound-scapes in urban space --both were displayed at the 2004 Futuresonic arts festival in Manchester. The term locative media was initially proposed in order to distinguished the latter creative explorations of the medium from the corporate hype surrounding location-based services (LBS) --for which the Locative list-serve was set-up as a discussion forum [19]. A tentative category for new media art that sought to explore the intersection of the virtual space of the internet with the physical space of the urban (or non-urban) environment, the idea of "locative" media has been actively explored by artists, technologists, theorists and activists during a

series of workshops organized under the banner of the Locative Media Lab throughout 2003–04. [14]

Perhaps the Ur-project of locative media is Blast Theory's Uncle Roy All Around You [15] a mobile game that takes participants guided by PDA on a chase through the city's streets as they interact with other players online. The project is basically a treasure hunt which ends, for those who were successful, in a ride a limo-ride through town with an additional command-and-control interactive networked gaming layer that allows online players at home to interact with the mobile participants and feed them misinformation to detract their objective (whose real-time location-data appears as icons in a 3D same space). Blast Theory's work is built with technology spun-off from the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham's [16] (from a 50 million pounds EPSRC R&D grant known as the EQUATOR project [17]) and sponsored by corporations like British Telecom. While it is only a very young medium, as in the case of other more established fields of artistic practice, it seems that Locative Media is developing its own stars system of artists like Blast Theory who are supported by the State and, perhaps, somewhat more interestingly, by industry. Unlike its predecessor movement, Net Art, which developed a radical political stance in opposition to the libertarian/entrepreneurial ideology of Wired magazine that dominated the discourse on the Internet in the 90's (what Richard Barbrook famously called the Californian Ideology) in projects such as Carnivore by Alex Galloway [18] for example, Locative Media artists seem often to occupy a less critical position, often collaborating directly with industry and government. Because they do not actively positioning their work as politically avant garde, some theorists such as Andreas Broekman (director of the Transmediale Festival in Berlin) accuse "the Locative Media movement of being something of an 'avantgarde of the 'society of control'", in which, according to Deleuze "[w]e are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure [in which] the societies of control... are in the process of replacing disciplinary societies" [19]. According to this critique it is the social duty of the artist to address issues of surveillance and control, upon which the technologies that make Locative Media possible are built. Indeed, when Blast Theory's Matt Adams, gave a talk as the keynote at last year's Futuresonic festival in Manchester, his work was met with what can only be described as outright hostility by several prominent figures of electronic arts world including Broekman, Amin Medosh (media theorist and former editor of Teleopolis magazine in Berlin) and Karel Dudesek (director of Ravensbourne college in London), whom, in fact, applied a pseudo-Virilian critique to Blast Theory's work, accusing Adams of masquerading what in essence was a military weapon of perceptual control as art.

While it sometimes seems as though the media arts intelligencia are hell-bent on exposing Locative Media as some kind of counter-revolutionary movement, it should also be pointed out that in this very same text Deleuze himself states "There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons". Perhaps a critic with an interest in the political avant garde might turn their attention to smaller projects (what Deleuze might have framed as Locative Media minor literature), which are explicitly positioned as activist tools, works such as London Free Map by Jo Walsh and the University of Openness a project that is creating London's first ever open-source public map [20], or MapHub by Nathan Martin and the Carbon Defense League [21] a similar project designed to facilitate organization amongst protest groups. Not, however to attempt to displace the Control Society criticism completely, I might offer a rebuttal to Broekman and company for all those projects that do not seek to actively engage with this political avant gardist discourse. Perhaps Locative Media artists hold the "Societies of Control" hypothesis to be self-evident, recognizing their chosen medium as one which is itself based on a fundamental contradiction --as so many things are in a post-modern world are. Why should the Locative Media artist have to have her feet held to the fire because she chooses to explore a more commercial path? Are Locative artist the hapless pawns of industry, unwittingly preparing the field for a military of perception simply because they have chooses to build her practice directly within their circuits of power? Or might the Locative Media be experimenting with a new field of techno-cognition of potentially utopian dimensions? Of course, all utopias are by definition exclusive, but that does not mean that they do not serve a valuable social function.

#### The Function of Utopia

According to the literary theorist Fredrick Jameson (1982) "the 'science fiction' utopia serves not to give us "images" of the future... but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own present"; we need new visions of the future in order to understand the present moment. The architectural theorists Collins and Koetler have used the term 'science fiction' to refer to a genre of utopian architectural design created by theory-driven ateliers, primarily in the late '60's, the purpose of which were less to propose an actual plan that to put forth a social critique of modernism through its own technologies. Perhaps we can see then see locative media in the historical context of a 60's utopian architecture like the Italian Superstudio group who chose to express their oppositional political stance in construction of fantastical landscapes --based on what a member of Superstudio called: "the instinctive right that every individual has to create his own environment" [22]

Superstudio's best known work is the Continuous Monument, or No Stop City, an ironic prefiguring and response, to the postmodern urban non-space. A continuous featureless Euclidean space, the Continuous Monument was intended as a refutation of the "system of consumer objects", to paraphrase on of Baudrillard's early works [23]--himself a member of a similar 60's utopian architectural school known as Utopie. Freed from the fragmentary space of the modernist tower-block, the inhabitants of the hypothetical Continuous Monument were nomads who could plug-in at any point (this was pre-wireless), and spontaneously materialize a minimal domestic fantasy life. Projects like the Continuous Monument should be understood as ways of understanding the possibilities of technology and not as prescriptive models (as most other architectural plans are meant to me). Superstudio and their contemporaries were, however, summarily accused of being guilty of the worst excesses of the modern project, and written off for years in favour of projects that scaled back the ambitions of architecture from social change to the level of semiotics. Perhaps, though, like so many visionaries, the supermodernists were simply far ahead of their time and the value of their vision should be reassessed in light of contemporary locative technologies. No longer will it be necessary to demolish the old in order to construct anew, with the vision of 2020 we could construct the Continuous Monument as a selectively-accessible, yet spatially-situated realm. But, in order to fulfill this papers proposal of escaping interactive catatonia, it will not be enough merely to model this locative space after architecture, it must be user-centered and dynamic.

#### Tactical Cartography

One self-described locative media projects that for me suggests a direction for the locative science fiction utopia is MILK. A collaboration between the Dutch artist Esther Polak and the Latvian artist Ieva Auzina's [24], MILK uses GPS devices to map the routes taken by dairy products from the udders of a Latvian cows, to the mouths of the Dutch consumers. Initially conceived of as an update to the tradition of landscape painting, MILK hints at a way of augmenting the vision of 2020 by allowing people also to see the social and political issues of globalization associated with consumer reality. In my interpretation then, MILK suggests a model for creating "tactical cartographies" of Baudrillard's "System of Objects" allowing one to "deconstruct": i.) the routes taken by the various sources that constitute a certain object --i.e. a GPS trace-route from the farm to the factory to the grocery store; ii.) the conditions of a product's production --i.e. photographs of the farm and/or factory; and potentially even iii.) the complex web of relations between the company that has produced a product and its parent and sibling companies --a form a mapping can help ease comprehension of complex social networks as effectively demonstrated by the work of Richard Rogers [25], Josh On [26], and the Latvian researcher Valdis Krebs [27], to name but a few.

It would not take an expert in sociometrics to tell you that this proposal for a consumer advocacy mapping project of this sort would be practically impossible at this stage; for one, companies producing at a global level like to keep their organizations oblique and are rarely required law where their products originate. But this is exactly why I characterize this as example of utopian science-fiction. We need evocative projects like MILK in order to help us envision the horizons for the endocolonized eye of the 21st century. While campaigns for ethical consumption have traditionally attempted to reach the consumer through a process of reasoning and argumentation, this tends to require a commitment of both time and concentration that many people feel they do not necessarily have to spare (when when the season

finale of Bachelorette is one tonight!). Extrapolating from MILK, and the above-mentioned social network mapping projects, we can perhaps, however, imagine a form of locative media that tactically uses the aesthetic appeal of maps to reach people more on the level of affect. Operating on a register closer to that of entertainment, such a project might seek to captivate the consumer by presenting itself as a kind of X-Ray device into the black box of consumer society, that permits one the experience of peering under the organized surface of consumer society to reveal a Matrix-like web of interconnected decentered complexity. Crucially, however, the objective here would not be to mystify this complexity, but rather to present this as a visually compelling world (game-space) for a consumer to explore through a variety of maps that convey information regarding the products conditions of production, facilitating a degree of awareness into the process perhaps even creating a new category for consumption that we might call "awaretarianism".

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