Computing the City (Lüneburg, 9-10 Jul 14)

Lüneburg, Jul 9–10, 2014

Florian Sprenger

Computing the City - Ubiquitous Computing and Logistical Cities

Ubiquitous computing is often referred to as a prime example not only of a new mode of computing, but of a new paradigm of mediation itself. The ‘smart city’ is promoted as its primary site of materialisation: the integration of computational systems with architectural design turns inefficient urban settings into smart cities that manifest as the penultimate value-extraction machines. Yet the contested history of this transformation, and much of its politics, remains largely unwritten. This workshop investigates the urban dimensions of ubiquitous computing and infrastructural organization at different scales – the home, the neighbourhood, the city, the region – which merge in a common, exchangeable currency of data. The workshop focuses specifically on the pre-history of ubiquitous computing, its status as media infrastructure, its complicity with logistics, as well as its virtual futures.

Such an approach to smart urban environments is embedded in a theoretical trajectory which questions the accustomed self-descriptions of a mediated society – as a new infrastructure of living and dwelling. Town-planning has, since the early 20th century, relied on ecological concepts of environmental transformations. By drawing a line from these early urban development plans to todays digital infrastructures, it becomes evident that the current condition of smart cities has to be understood as part of a transition of environments from natural habitats to objects of planning, management and control.

Yet what are the operational logics of this infrastructure? Pervaded by visible and invisible networks, the city becomes a playground for global corporations to play and experiment with technologies of surveillance, big data and endless feedback loops, continuously improving the passageways of commerce. The smartness here is that of technical systems that render urbanites into subjects of cybernetic management, supposedly empowered by their involvement in perfectly organised urban environments, whether it be in terms of efficiency or sustainability. Logistics is what defines not only the internal flows of the city but what links them up. Where the smart city expands, is duplicated and traded in a protocological fashion, logistical infrastructure - transport and software - connects the smart cities in an intelligent web that only knows its own protocological rules and limits. Logistics reveals the logic of smart cities as that of trade and circulation: of data, things and people.

The coincidence between the smart city and logistics implies a certain foreclosure of its possibilities and virtual futures. Many accounts of smart cities recognise the historical coincidence of cybernetic control and neoliberal capital. Even where it is machines which process the vast

amounts of data produced by the city so much so that the ruling and managerial classes disappear from view, it is usually the logic of capital that steers the flows of data, people and things. Yet what other futures of the city may be possible within the smart city, what collective intelligence may it bring forth? Can one fathom the possible others of the logistical city e.g. in the visions of the cybernetic revolutionaries of Project Cybersyn or the cyberpunks of the 1990s? What other historical or contemporary examples of resistances to or alternative visions of ubiquitous computing in city could one draw on?

Timetable

Wednesday 9th July

10:00 Welcome and introduction

10:30-11:30
Orit Halpern
Test-bed Urbanism: The Zonal logic of the Smart City

11:45-12:45
Florian Sprenger
From well-tempered Environments to Environmental Media - Reyner Banham, Urban Infrastructures and architecture autre

12:45-14:30 Lunch

14:30-15:30
Jussi Parikka
Ubiquitous Computing and Cultural Techniques of Cognitive Capitalism

15:45-16:45
Clemens Apprich
New Babylonian Dream: InfoCities and the well informed citizen

18.00-19.30
Movie screening (&drinks): Urban Mapping Experience
followed by discussion with director Violeta Burckhardt Razeto,
led by Paula Bialski
Venue: Mondbasis (http://mondbasis.co)

19:30-21:30 Informal dinner

[22:00 Football World Cup Quarter Final]

Thursday 10th July

9:30-10:00 Reflections on previous day

10:00-11:00
Christoph Neubert
The city as extension and environment. Historical views on urban eco-logistics

11:45-12:45
Ned Rossiter
Coordinating Life in Predictive Cities

12:45-13:15 Concluding discussion & next steps

13.15-14.30 Informal wrap-up lunch
Venue: Osteria del Teatro (http://www.osteriadelteatro.de)

Venue and Further Information
The event will be held at the Centre for Digital Cultures, Sülztorstr. 21-25, 21335 Lüneburg. The entrance to the CDC, which you find on the 2nd floor of the building, is through the entrance on the very left of the building (in the same building but around the corner from the post office). The venue can be reached via a 20min walk from Lüneburg Station or a short bus or taxi ride. The closest airports are Hamburg and Hanover.

For any further information please contact Armin Beverungen on armin.beverungen AT leuphana.de or for emergencies 0n 01709102328.

Reference:
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