

Computing the City

Ubiquitous Computing and Logistical Cities

Workshop, 09.–10.07.2014, Leuphana University of Lüneburg

Organized by Florian Sprenger and Armin Beverungen.

Background

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 today's 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?

Workshop Program

Wednesday, July 9

10:00	Welcome and introduction
10:30–11:30	Orit Halpern <i>Test-bed Urbanism: The Zonal logic of the Smart City</i>
11:45–12:45	Florian Sprenger <i>From well-tempered Environments to Environmental Media - Reyner Banham, Urban Infrastructures and architecture autre</i>
14:30–15:30	Jussi Parikka <i>Ubiquitous Computing and Cultural Techniques of Cognitive Capitalism</i>
15:45–16:45	Clemens Apprich <i>New Babylonian Dream: InfoCities and the well informed citizen</i>
18.00–19.30	Movie screening (& drinks): <i>Urban Mapping Experience</i> followed by discussion with director Violeta Burckhardt Razeto, led by Paula Bialski

Thursday, July 10

9:30–10:00	Reflections on previous day
10:00–11:00	Christoph Neubert <i>The city as extension and environment. Historical views on urban eco-logistics</i>
11:45–12:45	Ned Rossiter <i>Coordinating Life in Predictive Cities</i>
12:45–13:15	Concluding discussion & next steps