Title of Paper: Re - placing news

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Abstract

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   The 'Mediating Place' research project (Leverhulme funded) undertaken by members of the Pi Studio, Goldsmiths is focused on an exploration of the ways in which various 'locational' or 'locative' media affect the way we relate to our world, or worlds, now and in the future. It is apparent that our environment is increasingly mediatised – infused with media technologies and their concomitant content - the project is, therefore, also concerned with how this 'media-full' environment, re-mediates our relationships to those objects and spaces to which we are connected, and, ultimately our relationships to each other as well.
   As part of the research, the Pi Studio has designed a number of 'media-things' (locative and locating media) that present new arrangements and produce opportunities for new performances of media.
   One of these 'media things' is a 'news telescope'.
   The 'news telescope' is a located device which may be oriented and focused on different places and draw down different kinds of news from those places, setting them in contrast one to another. It places the news and asks the viewer to physically, and, by extension, in other ways, relate their place in the world to the places and different constructions of news.
   It organises the news as events presented in the spaces of their occurrence rather than in the spaces of 'interests' that are the set format of most newspapers.

RE – placing News

'The point of critique is not justification but a different way of feeling: another sensibility' Doel (1999): p.38.

Research Context

The project – producing the media-thing we have called the News telescope – the subject of this paper - is one of three such projects that have been developed by the Pi Studio (Prospect and Innovation Studio) as part of the Leverhulme sponsored 'Spaces of the Media' research programme. The Spaces of the Media research programme, based at Goldsmiths, is composed of five different research groups each progressing a different programme for researching the effect of new technological developments (particularly communication technologies) on media; and, further, their effect on the practices of media production and consumption, and, indeed, the impact on the technospaces of media generally. 'Technospaces are temporal realms where technology meets human practice … lived, embodied fluctuations in human/machine interaction.' Munt (2001): p.11.

What connects the five research groups are a number of questions that revolve around a need to appreciate what is afforded by the new technologies, and, what is inhibited and lost in adopting them, and, the new practices they spawn. Indeed, there is a collective need to question in what ways the new technologies act on selfhood and the public sphere; there is a further need to question what new ontologies are shaped in and through the technospaces of new media – how we are interpellated by the new media. Directly or indirectly, questions need to be (and have been) asked about the way the new media landscape affects existing power formations, social structures, and cultural conventions, now and may do so in the future. Is the status quo maintained – no discernible change - or are the new technologies and what they afford causing a shift in formation, structure and convention in the public sphere and in our private lives?

Is there any remarkable change? If there is, how are things changed and what is continuing to change in the new media? What are the repercussions of the changes in media in our increasingly extended lives (experientially)?

What has become clear to me (others may disagree) during the course of the Spaces of the Media research programme is that there is no single view, no sharpened point that may be used to inscribe emphatically a line around all the research produced in the programme to present a coherent account and interpretation of the novel, contemporary techno-media-spaces we are researching – they are too fluid. There is less likelihood of settling on any certain pronouncement on what, given the techné, the future may be, across the media-scape.

This is not because we are at odds with each other but because each research group has looked into different areas of the media space and has

looked into them (researched) with different intent and, consequently in different ways.

There are findings that align and some that don't. If what is being researched, ultimately, is within the process of change, is fluid, this is not so surprising. If we are at a turning point in development in the technics of media then it is surely not possible to agree with each other and establish secure knowledge of what the implications of the new techno-spaces are.

Maurice Blanchot makes the point:
'Do you admit to this certainty: that we are at a turning point?
-If it is a certainty, then it is not a turning point. The fact of being part of the moment in which an epochal change (if there is one) comes about also takes hold of the certain knowledge that would wish to determine this change, making certainty as inappropriate as uncertainty. We are never less likely to circumvent ourselves than at such a moment: the discreet force of the turning point is first and foremost that.' (quoted in Stiegler (1998): p.1)

If there were to be congruence in the research across the groups, in how we weigh change, change would need to have singular motivation and determination – one would pick up a linear projection through its history –, which we could discern. Which it hasn't. We would need to look at the differentials of change with the same focus and at the same point in a history and through the same research apparatus. The problematic of change militates against even an aggregated view of how things are changed and how they will change.

Across the research groups, there are similar fears and hopes for developments through the techno–media–space. But the different dispositions of the groups, and individuals in the groups, present different emphases on what might be gained and what lost in the prospect of development, in the evolution of technologies in relation to media. There are profound questions to be asked about a tide of developments, excused by the 'ineluctable objectification of purposive-rational action in technical systems' (Stiegler (1998): p.11), which justifies the power of this technic of new media and the power that traverses it.

Weighing

We mention the difficulties above, because, throughout the course of our research we have been trying to work out what kind of contribution design research (and one through practice) can make to an interdisciplinary research programme researching media; an inter-disciplinary programme that is essentially within the social sciences (led by Media studies, but also including Cultural studies). We, the designers, are in some ways cuckoos in the nest. We, like the other groups, do research the conditions of the contemporary 'landscape'. But, we do so not in order to 'find evidence', in order to present a case for this or that 'truth', and calculate its portent, but rather to 'weigh' the context (prospect) and to make manifest an anticipation of what is 'yet to come' (a-venir). I use 'weigh' here in the sense that Malabou uses it in reading Heidegger (in Martinon (2007): p.27/28). Not as a 'means to decide one way or

another but rather to set a context in order to hazard an interpretation' (in Martinon (2007): p.28) - a context in which one *risks* an interpretation.

Martinon writing of Malabou, but pertinent in clarifying the nature of the research of our group, states: 'The act of weighing something or other represents *a test* that aims to gauge the outcome to a present situation. To weigh is therefore *to set* a context in order *to hazard* an interpretation. There are therefore two sides to this act. Firstly, it establishes the context in which the future will unfold. It creates a situation in which the appliance or the circumstances end up deciding on the course of action. Secondly, once the context or the situation is in place, it provokes an action based on weighing up the results [….] … to weigh is to set in motion, to go off, to figure, to wander on one path or another. The act is therefore paradoxical: on the one hand, it is entirely passive in front of the unknown – it lets the future come – and, on the other it is entirely proactive – it actively engages the future.' (Ibid.: p.28).

'It lets the future come … it actively engages the future'. The research we have been doing, and, indeed, continue to do, is a form of 'weighing'; so, engaged in this paradox - actively engaging the future and, at the same time letting it come. What we are particularly focused on, as is declared in the name of our research group (Prospect and Innovation Studio), is the prospect for innovation. We design things in order to open up this prospect for critical view. There is a touch of the homeopathic in what we do. We invent/innovate in order to understand and open up to critical review the space of invention/innovation itself.

The research is essentially protentive. It has a retentive pull though; we are necessarily weighing past and current forms (of practice, objects, systems etc) in order to reach forward. But it is in essence speculative. It attempts to produce a critical purchase on what the possibilities for different futures are, given the current technic, by presenting a hypostatization of a possible direction.

We design things – systems, services, objects – and, are thus focused on technical invention. We are designing in a system of technic – a technical system or apparatus (Stiegler (1994)). As Stiegler points out the technical system is inevitably enmeshed in social, cultural, political, economic systems. So although a starting point for the research is the technical system, the research extends into these other systems. Stiegler writes that 'the logic of innovation is constituted by the rules of adjustment between the technical system and the others' (Ibid. p.37). Adjustments across these systems – adjustments that move through the interplexuses where systems entwine – are very much at the heart of the research. We are not merely content to see what new forms of technology we can produce because they are possible, but are interested in the way the possible technic (designed) resonates and reverberates in the world at large and what the repercussions of its adoption may be.

Props

We design and produce propositional objects – 'props' - to aid reflection. We design them, in the instance of the Leverhulme research programme, to

help appreciate future opportunities (proposals) of the new technospaces of media. The prop(osition)s are designed to act, as 'apparatus criticus' – providing glimpses of opportunities for development, signalling 'choices to be made' and providing a vantage for critical reflection on the possibility to innovate objects, systems, spaces and practices that lie beyond the *purposive-rational action* that justifies the linear progression of the 'sameness' of the system . The props index how things in the system may be other. The props also act as loci for critical 'reflection' on current practices in media production and reception and the apparatuses through which they are produced – technological, social, political and so on.

Geo-infographics

Under the aegis of the Leverhulme Spaces of the Media project the Pi Studio has researched the way located and locating technologies may be combined with communication technologies to recuperate and reintroduce geography into the in-formational spaces of media. We were (and are) also eager to explore the way informational space reconfigures our geographies. In the accelerated development of communication technologies we have witnessed a 'speeding up of (historical) time and the effective diminution of geographical space, so that: 'the far horizon of our planets antipodes has finally become an apparent or 'trans-apparent' horizon, through the effect of audiovisual techniques (Virilio)'…. [We have] 'a new frontier, one that is not geographic but infographic.' (Dallow (2001): p.63).

We do not see the new critical space of the technic (media) as a bi-polar, either-or, between the past and current developments, but, rather, as a space to remediate our relationships to the new technologies - to re-collect and re-new practices without bracketing all that has gone before. There are interesting possibilities in a synthesis of the geographic and infographic – in the geo-infographic – and this is what and where we explore. It is in this geo-infographic space that we can look at human agency in activating the spaces of new media.

'It is our relation to information, which increasingly effectively defines the space we inhabit, and many of the events, which occur in that space. Virilio suggests that confusion between real space and virtual space and between action and 'retroaction', in turn leads to uncertainty about 'the place of effective action'. … 'The possibilities of the informational space of digital media may be as limitless and uncertain as those of reality, yet the potentiality of the virtuality of new media spatiality, like temporality, is conditional.' … 'Space like place has to be lived … the informational space of the new media has to be actualized through human agency.' (ibid. p.63-64.)

The media-things we design attempt to engage, actually and as questions, the effective and affective human relationships (inter-subject, subject-object, subject-system, and so on) that may be sustained, or developed, in and through the technics of the new media. In resistance to an extropian visioning of the future in which the body (and human subject) is subsumed, or invaded by, or disappears into the technic we wish to understand the body – the human subject

– in other relationships than this to the technics of media; for instance, in a relationship of tact, where the subject is in touch with and can be touched by and through the media.

Researching News

The research of one of the other groups researching alongside us in the Leverhulme Spaces of the Media programme has been focused on the news – referred to within the research programme as the 'news group'. We decided to develop a strand of our research in parallel, and, as it transpires, in complement and in some regards, in contrast to their research. Much of the preamble at the start of the paper outlined the possibilities and impossibilities of coherence across the different research projects, especially when focused on 'change' in the media.

The research of the 'news group', is an empirical enquiry into 'the ways in which technological, economic and social change is reconfiguring news journalism and shaping the dynamics of the public sphere and public culture' Fenton (2011) They 'use(d) interviews, ethnography and qualitative content analysis to investigate news production processes in a representative sample of news media'. In the end 'their research combined macro-social critique with micro-organizational analysis to gain a complex, critical understanding of the nature of news and news journalism in the digital age' (ibid.). Natalie Fenton writes that their research ultimately 'reveals that this latest 'new' world of 'new' media has not greatly expanded the news that we read or hear or changed mainstream news values and traditional news formats; neither has it connected a legion of bloggers to a mass audience. Rather, as the economic model for traditional news production stumbles and falls in the digital age, professional journalism has become the first casualty, the second, if we're not careful, will be the health of our democracy' (ibid.).

Their research is substantive, rigorous and serious. It sets out clear argument and clear findings and the warning that the concomitance of the new technics of media may be an erosion of existing forms of journalistic practice, which, in turn may have deleterious effect on our democracy is of course something to pay heed to.

We set out a different research agenda (described, to some extent, above – exploring a geo-infographic space). We set out to do what Marcus Doel calls *'(s)play'* … [to open up through play] … that is to 'open up the givens; to open up and dissimilate the events; to open up the chaosmotic singularities and multiplicities; and to thereby allow something other to happen. Letting space take place.' (Doel (2000); p. 132.).

In our research, we focus on the spaces of the technics of news (production and consumption) and we *(s)play* in these spaces. In particular (our consistency) exploring the *tact*-ful relation of the technics to ourselves (in the sense that de Certeau uses *tact*. *Tact* de Certeau describes as '.. the apprehension and creation of a 'harmony' among particular practices ...[through]..., the ethical and poetic gesture of religare (tying together)' ...[in]... an indefinite series of concrete acts.' (de Certeau,(1984) p.74).

The News Telescope

The news telescope is one of a number of designs that we produced as part of the research.

The antecedents of the news telescope are the slot-machine binoculars or telescope installed on the pier, the camera obscura, dioramas and other viewing devices that provide opportunity to 'view' objects, people and spaces, in public.

Although referencing these optical prosthetics, what we have been formulating/designing seeks to break with them too and look at what new experiences and understandings may be produced when data given to a positioned eye is interrupted and perverted and informed by other data gained or generated elsewhere and by other devices and other eyes.

In the news telescope, the view is intersected and gives way to matrices of information that are not visible to the eye, but criss-cross the view regard-less (sic). The news telescope allows one to engage with this invisible information; and, in fact, the immediacy of the view itself is bracketed in favour of this other information – news reports from different places; news is worked into the velo of sight and is substitute for the data of vision - vision is overcome by information.

The construction of the telescope

The news telescope consists of the telescope cylinder fixed atop a cylindrical pedestal, which in turn stand on a rectangular platform fixed to the floor. The telescope stands around 160cm high and its barrel is around 65cm long. The pedestal and the telescope are both fashioned as slatted oak cylinders. The rectangular platform is made of the same material. The aesthetic is what we call shaker-tech. The aesthetic of the object provides counterpoint to the technologies that are housed in it. The aesthetic signals a nostalgia for, and a valuing of, past forms and practices; which, also, to some degree works also into what it does too.

Placing the News

The 'news telescope' is a fixed device. The telescope is calibrated so as to place it; and calibrated so that other locations are placed relative to it. The calibrations place the telescope and user virtually within a map – the map in Fig. 4. See below.

The map is composed of the names of cities over 40,000 population; nothing more. The map works somewhere between geography and information. It contains names of cities, which are spaced out in the map in relation to their geo-locations. Other than the names the map is frictionless. One moves over blank space (the space of the page) in moving from one city to another. There are no geographical features – no hills, no rivers, no vegetation, no roads, no

buildings and so on in the graphic interface. It is a Auge-ian non-place – it is there, merely as a passage to somewhere else.

The map performs as the interactive graphic interface of the device. In the device one has the option to use the map, viewed from above, or, viewed in elevation (the map is folded over the curvature of a low and flat horizon so one may traverse it in elevation) in the GUI (graphic user interface).

The news telescope's physical interaction enables viewers to rotate the telescope barrel through 360º. The physical action of the telescope barrel translates to the GUI so that the map is scanned, rotating around the point at which the telescope (and user) has been located. The barrels position gives a viewing orientation.

Then by using the navigation buttons a viewer may zoom across space (distance) until they locate a place (city) that they are interested in (see Fig. 5. top right). By pressing one of the other navigation buttons (on telescope barrel) they select the place and then news feeds are searched to find local news from that location using both city name, country name and geolocation. Feeds are produced as a menu/list, and, if a user wants to read or view a more extended report they may select from the list to view the full report. The viewing list includes text stories, actual website pages and video through YouTube, and, indeed, other sources.

Place and the News

The event, news in this case, is an enfolding of its occurrence, its report, its reception and the various mediums traversed. The news telescope places the news and asks the viewer to physically relate their place in the world to the places and different constructions of news. The mediums traversed are indicated in the movements across the GUI. The spaces in which news is produced is represented; it doesn't just issue from the non-place of the media ether. It is in placing themselves that a viewer may gain tactful purchase on the news. 'Place is the lens, the pause and the location, in which experience happens' (de Certeau (1988); p.117). If news occurs in one's neighbourhood one connects – in sympathy or empathy – with the event reported. We are becoming inured to the event because we cannot place it proximally. As Malpas writes, 'There is no possibility of understanding human existence – and

especially human thought and experience – other than through an understanding of place and locality' (Malpas 2005, pp. 15-16). In the news telescope we place ourselves, and the news is relatively placed and through this we appreciate how we are connected (geographically at least – we need to work through other topologies (socio-economic).

News Mash up

   The telescope accesses a wide range of feeds including youtube films, community news articles, national papers online and twitter messages. This range of sources including, and especially, the demotic news from twitter feeds makes comment on traditional forms of news publication, like newspapers. Again this is no either-or, Twitter news or the Times, it is all at the same time. Increasingly we receive and construct news from a variety of sources. News is contrasted and sifted and assembled from where one is placed considering all that has been heard or seen in that place – this can be anything from hearsay to the authoritative view of a national broadcasting company. We read news as a mash-up of different sources.

Conclusion

   The research is about two things. It is firstly research that explores the technospaces of new media through (s)play and secondly, it is reflexive, it considers and makes case for the kind of research it is.
   The Pi Studio has been (and still is) interested in thinking through the prospects of the new media in the heterogeneity that underwrites what is yet to come (futurity). We are not engaged in prediction or prophecy and do not project the future (unless as a creative strategy) but, instead, wish to engage something closer in viz. futurity or what is yet to come (a-venir) through (s)play. We design things as discursive objects that pick up and run with possibilities of the technics; considerate of the way the technical system enmeshes with social, economic, political systems.
   The news telescope acts as a focus for critical reflection on the way we currently present and consume news. It works through a technospace to place news – through spacing and relating the occurrence, the report, mediums and multiple reading the news is (s)placed.
   There is no single editorial voice that comes through the telescope. News becomes a 'mash-up' - perhaps a master term (signifier) for all contemporary reading/reception; the demotic news of twitter feeds are mashed up with traditional forms of news publication – organs of publication like newspapers. News becomes for the reader/viewer a collage of different news views, a quilt of different viewpoints, offering the potential for a more rounded understanding of the news and its 'investments'. The research also aims to provide clues for the development of new forms and devices that brings this 'mash up' of news accounts together in novel ways.
   Lastly, we are conscious that we as designers are inescapably held by the systems in which we design and our agency is part of the system (or

apparatus). The apparatus/system is produced, and its future is produced, through all the singular agents and idiosyncratic events in the system/apparatus swept up in the momentum for development (or disposition) of the system/apparatus itself (dispositif ala Foucault). Whether quixotic or not, what we are trying to do in our research is advance research where we consider the effect of agency in the dispositif – agency that perverts the progression of the 'same'. In what we produce we are trying to set loci for an understanding of the engine of difference; of invention/innovation; invention/innovation that confronts and confounds *purposive-rational action* that funnels development in the system to the 'same' in the system.

The Pi Studio at Goldsmiths has developed a mobile application of the news telescope (compass), which is a free download at the apps store.

Appendix

Technical Information
The News Telescope is written in Java with the 3D environment created in openGL. The News Telescope gathers data from a variety of sources and media channels. Sources include DayLife, Google Data API's including YouTube, EMM (European Media Monitor), Digg, Twitter, Yahoo Local Search and Associated Press.
Place names, associated metadata including geolocation data were gathered from the open source project GeoNames.
The physical interaction is controlled by the Arduino platform, which reacts to physical interaction via numerous sensors including quadrature encoders to monitor interactive rotation of the telescope housing.

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Illustrations

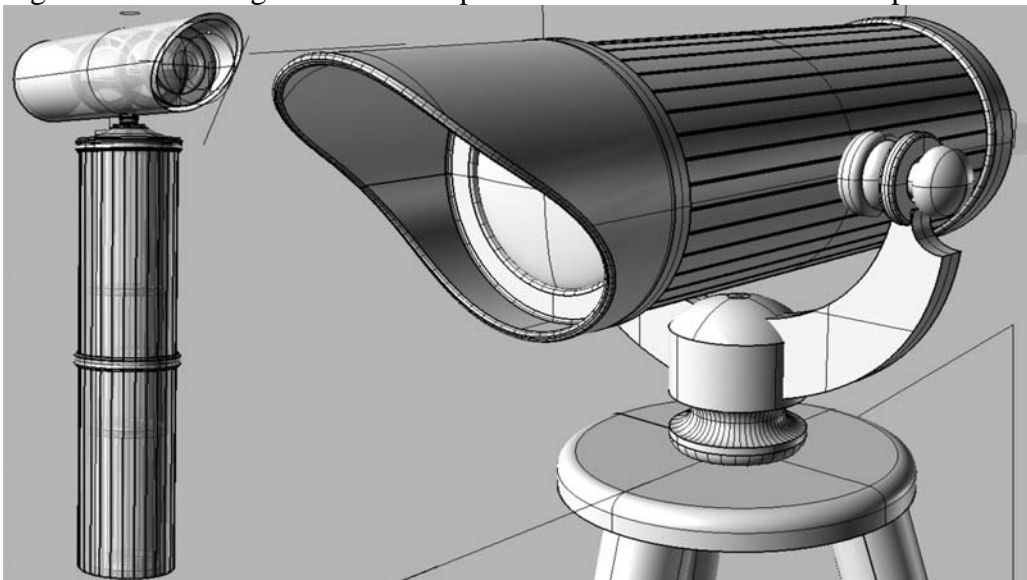Fig.1. CAD drawing used to develop ideas for the form of the telescope

Fig.2. Telescope in use

Fig.3. Left: eyepiece with navigation buttons; Right: front lens

Fig. 4. Geo-Infographic world map: cities/towns over 40,000 population

(gathered from the open source project GeoNames).

Fig. 5. The new's telescopes GUI