Book review:

Mobility and Locative Media

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Locative media have been on the public agenda since the mid- 2000s when GPS became available in smartphones, spawning applications such as GoogleMaps, Foursquare, Runkeeper, etc. They are becoming increasingly significant in the everyday routines of smartphone users, and in media design and innovation. While these issues are clearly important, and the individual contributions in this book deal with them in quite interesting ways – the book itself remains a loose confederation of topics and approaches.

It strikes me as typical of contemporary academic publishing, where the anthology genre is fuelled by researchers' needs to produce a large quantity of articles, and publishers' business strategies of publishing a large number of books and journals at a low cost. As well, anthologies are often based on papers presented at themed conferences (in this case at North Carolina State University in 2012).

This genre of anthologies is characterized by open and inclusive titles, and while the contributions revolve around roughly the same thing, they aren't necessarily based on harmonized methods or the same theoretical foundations, and rarely if ever with a coherent set of findings or criticisms. Anthologies don't have a sustained argument with a narrative curve and accumulation of insights along the way. There is no real difference between such anthologies and special issues in journals, except that it is remarkably difficult to access anthology articles online.

The implication for a book reviewer is that I cannot evaluate such an anthology as a proper book. The best approach is to deal with each article individually, and evaluate them according to criteria for good academic work. I have scrutinized six articles that come across as representative of the research presented in the altogether fifteen articles. I am particularly concerned with 1) theoretical foundations, 2) new insights about the world, and 3) critical perspectives on research and innovation.

First, Adriana de Souza e Silva and Mimi Sheller offer an "Introduction: moving toward adjacent possibles". I like their varied agenda of physical objects and situations, and their descriptions of uses of mobile phones when walking and commuting in the city. The notion of "adjacent possibles" is an important concept for them. The articles collected here are supposed to be "adjacent possibles that are already emerging through the experimentation of artists, early adopters, innovators and everyday users who themselves are exploring the boundaries of emergent mobile technologies" (p. 2). While this is a clever way of trying to make associations between the articles, the concept is not taken up any of the other writers in the anthology, and becomes something of a moot point.

Rich Ling writes an ambitious theoretical article how humans appropriate technologies to satisfy

social needs in his "Mobile phones and the digital Gemeinschaft: social cohesion in the era of cars, clocks and cell phones". The sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies is crucial for Ling's argument: Tönnies distinguished between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, referring (respectively) to a personal, social, localized, community order and a bureaucratic, technocratic, systematic, algorithmic order. Ling writes: "While [digital technologies] often arose in the name of rationalizing society, i.e. *Gesellschaft*, I suggest that they are repurposed for our social needs [in *Gemeinschaft*]". *Gemeinschaft* is approximately the same thing as what Jürgen Habermas describes in terms of the lifeworld, in contrast with systems as rationalized processes and structures of control. Whereas Habermas famously argued in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987) that systems colonize the lifeworld – Ling observes: "In a sense this reverses Habermas in that it is the colonization of the system by the lifeworld" (p. 19). Ling is onto something really interesting here, and it reminds me of Bruno Latour's concept of "anti-program". Ling could have been even more ambitious, and argued more systematically for his case, engaging more directly with Habermas and bringing out more nuances.

Robin van den Akker in the article "Walking in the hybrid city: from micro-coordination to chance orchestration" introduces the city as a major topic in this anthology. Urban behaviours such as commuting, shopping, dining out and exercising constitute a central driver in the development of locative communication technologies, and thus merit sustained attention. A number of articles deal explicitly with technological behaviour in cities. Van den Akker starts from the argument that the growth of cities shifts the balance to the use of one's position in urban space rather than the use of clock time to coordinate social life. Meetings between humans in cities can happen as chance encounters or instrumental coordination. Van den Akker presents an analysis of Foursquare with 10 informants in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Antwerp, and presents a range of nuances relating to the act of walking in a city.

Didem Özkul presents interesting material in "Location as a sense of place: everyday life, mobile, and spatial practices in urban spaces". She has conducted a qualitative study in London, and presents a distinction between two categories of locational information, namely "the instrumental (as in the navigational location information use) as well as a

more inner, personal (as in the place attachment) aspects of place making" (p. 112). She also distinguishes them as "retrieval" and "sharing". There is an echo of Tönnies' Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft here, and with a stronger editorial hand there might have been explicit cross-references to support the book's focus.

In Taien Ng-Chan's article, "Performing city transit", the scene has changed from London to Montreal, Canada, and the question is "Can infrastructures be understood and comprehended within the realm of aesthetic pleasure?" Ng-Chan argues that they can, if you include all the minute interactions of everyday life in urban settings. It is interesting to read about the bubble experience, a social phenomenon in cities that has been addressed by a range of writers. Ng-Chan writes an autobiographical analysis of the pleasurable retreat into isolation on public transit (p. 120). The quiet morning commute "allows you to emerge with your mask on, or to take it off, or to change roles" (p. 121). There are evocative descriptions here, but they lack a proper basis in empirical material and remain hypotheses.

The last article to be scrutinized is Gunnar Liestøl and Andrew Morrison's "The power of place and perspective: sensory media and situated simu-

lations in urban design". They call it "research by design", and personally I am an avid spokesperson for "media design" - where the research project consists of designing and testing an original prototype. Their design project is architectural, and located in Oslo. It deals with the possible designs for the new national museum to be built in combination with a protected railroad station. They have designed an app for visualization of the buildings, what they call a situated simulation or "sitsim" (p. 208). The article presents hypothetical designs that will inform real solutions about how things are going to be organized in this particular urban space in the future. Liestøl and Morrision call it "preconstruction" (p. 219). The project has great potential for further expansion, and there should be a section about the value orientations of the various actors involved in such research and development projects.

Summing up, I will point to some general impressions of the anthology in regard to value orientation and writing style. The authors are overly diplomatic in relation to on-going developments. The book doesn't have a critical agenda, neither towards the developments in society or the analyses by other academics, in other traditions. This is regrettable, as there is so much writing now about mobile and locative media that a critical consideration of the research field and the media industry would have been in place. The editors could have summarized shared criticisms and values, or the authors could have been challenged to stake out their individual values.

Another weakness is the speculative writing style that can be found in many of the articles, as characterized, e.g., by smooth sentences that sound smart at first sight, but turn out to be confusing. For example, the notion of hybrid cities remains opaque, and would have to be explained much more systematically and comprehensively in order to come across as useful. At their worst, the authors speculate on the basis of phrases and jargon that don't really help to explain the empirical world.

Despite some critical remarks I consider this book a useful contribution to the field of "locative media", and it deserves a wide academic audience.

REFERENCES

Habermas, J. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 1, Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

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