Information non-place as a mirror of glocal subconsiousness

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Introduction: emergence of data-double

One of the principles of modern meta-narration was the myth of total visibility. Transparency, recognized as an effect of rationalization and development of technology, was closely related to the issues of power and control. While referring to the idea of *panopticon* Foucault pointed out the importance of the transparency-control-power relationship, which defined specific characteristics of modernity but, at the same time, he stressed the utopian character of the modern project.

Nowadays, together with the development of various types of surveillance technologies (from CCTV to satellites and biometrics) it seems that the idea of transparency is being realised in material form. Though commonness of optical and post-optical surveillance is not in doubt, its influence on broadening spheres of visibility seems problematic. The inflation of the information obtained makes a proper analysis nearly impossible and in fact causes opposite effect – instead of being transparent the reality of more and more data creates a complicated labyrinth of data.

Surveillance technologies together with the popularization of wireless, wearable, and mobile technologies, this labyrinth of data becomes a hybrid reality which is invisible. Analysing the specific forms of digital surveillance Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson indicated that the strongest characteristic is the phenomenon of surveillance assemblage. (Haggerty and Erckson 2000). In the age of total information digitalization, control is based mainly on the gaining, storing and processing of data. This process engages various sources of information which, albeit operating with different motivations and aims, constitute a coherent network. Surveillance assemblage consists in an exchange of information which consequently leads to profiling a shadow of reality called 'data double'.

Data space – the other side of reality

The popularization of the post-desktop model of human-computer interaction has led to a change in the structure of everyday life. As diverse wireless digital devices have become articles of daily use, the invisible, immaterial net of information has developed in parallel with the material physical space. These two levels of reality, which belong to different ontological orders, infiltrate each other, overlap each other and form various relationships. As Lev Manovich observes, the new form of space which develops as a result of the use of mobile information technologies, and which he himself calls augmented space, is characterized by a constant, multidirectional flow of data between the physical and data level of reality. This flow occurs in both directions; on one hand it consists in the extraction and digitalization of information from and about physical space, and on the other - the stored and processed digital data moves back into the material sphere of reality. Yet the unstable, heterogeneous, discontinuous, internally incoherent and hybrid - to use the terms of Adriana de Souza e Silva (de Souza 2006) - of digitally augmented space, makes the impression of being a natural space. The constant passing between both levels of augmented space has become one of the fundamental dimensions of life in a mobile information society. Common access to data and the easiness with which the virtual sphere infiltrates physical reality and its influencing the behaviour and experiences of the users - are facts which raise questions about the rules that govern and determine the structure of data space: its content; diversity of forms in terms of the relationship between physical and virtual levels of reality; the ways of using data and the directions and currents of their flow.

Although built of electromagnetic waves and thus an invisible data level of hybrid space - data space is not a void, but 'something that needs a structure, a politics, and a poetics' (Manovich 2006: 240). Manovich's short remark points to crucial considerations on the content and ways of organizing such a space. The issue of data space structure is a creative challenge for architects and artists and equally important as concentrating on the future possibilities of organizing it. I presume that data space can be understood, not only as an extension or a supplement of material space, but as its opposite - as a 'digital double'. Technological augmentation of reality calls into being a kind of data-shadow of physical reality, an invisible space which exists and grows in parallel to the perceptible world, in which we dwell and act leave traces of our existence. Invisible, yet definitely present, the virtual is closely related to real space, being a result of technological mediation. Data space enables close,

often intimate relationships between people, it is global yet full of private and local data: an invisible network can be viewed as a never-ending source of information about its creators and inhabitants. The dualistic nature of augmented space has inspired me to compare it with the psychoanalytic idea of it's having a personality and to consider it as a form of subconsciousness of our information society. This comparison seems relevant because of the increasing use of mobile wireless devices which are rarely accompanied by a reflection or awareness of the consequences of the pervasiveness of computing on our everyday existence. Furthermore, the disappearance of technology is one of the axioms of a post-desktop paradigm of culture.

Invisible technology, transparent data

According to the assumptions of the *ubicomp* idea, the liberation of computational devices from the leash of the cable leads to their proliferation in all spheres of reality. Wireless and mobile technology becomes not only pervasive; it becomes invisible at the same time. 'The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it.' (Weiser 1991: 1). As a natural, apparent element of augmented space, they constitute a background, which facilitates, enables and also determines the common everyday activity of the users. Their functionality is based on the combination of global range and location awareness. Access to endlessly growing data space and the opportunity to participate in the global flow of data depends upon the possibility of tracking and monitoring a particular place and activity by a particular user. Thus, in the very core of *ubicomp* there is the issue of surveillance and control because, as Manovich puts it, 'augmented space is also monitored space' (2006: 224). Balancing between the utopian optimism of the followers of pervasive computing, and the fatalist vision of post-optical data *panopticon* I would like to stress the fact that two dialectics are crucial for understanding the post-desktop culture. The first one is marked out by the tension between location awareness of wireless computational devices and the process of naturalization of technology. The more ubiquitous and location aware technology is, the more automatically it is used, the better it fits in the reality around us: it seems to be a natural element, ceases to be the subject of attention and it disappears from the field of view. The awareness of the presence of technology and a reflexive attitude towards it is inversely proportional to the pervasiveness of computing. The technology, invisible, thus operating below the threshold of consciousness, however makes the users totally visible. Taking

advantage of the freedom that *ubicomp* offers, they become the subject of no less pervasive, and constant, monitoring.

The second dialectic describes the paradoxical status of data space, which is both invisible and transparent. Although dependent upon the spectrum of our natural perception, electromagnetic waves could be regarded as the ontological foundation of data space, which can be easily scanned, tracked and measured with help of monitoring technology. Thus, data visualization, understood as a possibility of turning the invisible into visible; as making an image of the imperceptible reality, opens hidden zones of data space to pervasive surveillance. As Peter Weibel notices, the dialectic of visible and invisible, transparent and opaque, defines principles of culture in the time of ubiquitous vision machines. Optical and post-optical surveillance digs through the layers of invisible data to analyse and manifest hidden currents of data space that drive visible, physical reality. '(…) excluded from the natural "scopic regime", unavailable to the human eye, with the help of technical instruments the objects become transparent, or more precisely, become *diaphanes*, transparent images. In the mask (of invisibility), the truth shines through.' (Weibel 2002: 209). Looking into and searching through the 'dark side' of augmented space is one of the most important strategies of critical art at a time of ubiquitous computing. While the object of artistic research is liquid and in constant motion, art can get deeply into augmented space and try to actively penetrate zones of invisibility. Art has the potential power to point out important issues by asking questions about things which seem to be obvious, normal and 'natural'. Art can bring insight into the global subconsciousnes of our information society by means of subvertion and the deconstruction of augmented space. Inspired by the formulations of Michel Foucault and Jean-Francois Lyotard, many artists try to manifest variations of the play between the visible and invisible. I would like to briefly refer to the artistic practice of Steve Mann and Michelle Teran as the two examples, which seem to thoroughly represent this attitude.

Sousveillance - mirroring invisible

We live in the era of neo-panopticon where surveillance has become ubiquitous and mundane to such degree that we tend to forget about being constantly under the controlling gaze of various technologies of invigilation. This summary diagnosis of contemporary control society establishes a starting point for the experiments on the

field of 'sousveillance'. Sousveillance is the subversive process of reconfiguring the panoptic gaze, which Steve Mann has been carrying out since the mid-eighties. Using custom-made wearable electronic devices, which in different configurations, combine video cameras, displays and wireless computers used for data storing, processing and transmission, Mann pursues interventions in public space. These interventions aim to reveal the system of pervasive technological observation and problematise the taken for granted rhetoric of surveillance. Sousveillance is a form of reflectionism, which he defines as the 'philosophy and procedures of using technology to mirror and confront bureaucratic organizations' (Mann 2003: 333). The act of sousvellance consists in a temporary, surprising change of positions of the surveilee and agents of surveillance, which result in an inversion of the gaze and observation of the organizational observer (Mann 1998). This strategy is an open declaration of an equal status of the observed and the observers - based on provocatively asked questions: why, what for, in whose name, in whose business is the invigilation conducted? Observing observation becomes the source of socio-psychological information on the state of public awareness and, at the same time, reveals unconsciously assumed foundations of monitoring and invigilation in public space. Mann's interventions trace and make visible the technology and rhetorics of surveillance and simultaneously, questions the position of agents of control. As a form of psychodrama his actions are directed at raising critical reflection on the part of agents of surveillance. By being put in a new, unusual, strange and troublesome situations, and by facing defiant acts of counter-surveillance, workers of surveillance are forced to reconsider, or at least reflect, on the system they work within. Although Mann does not take hierarchical relationship between employees and the institution they work for into account, which could be regarded as a weak point of sousveilance (Monahan 2006), his strategy unveils the invisible, complicated inner structure of relationships within the system of surveillance. Thus it manifests inner fractures, lack of coherence and contradiction inside the system - which presents itself as monolithic and impenetrable.

The image of data space in Michelle Teran's projects

Introduction of wireless transmission of data has had a dramatic influence on video monitoring, which is the most common and pervasive technology of modern surveillance. While cables connecting camera with monitoring desk guaranteed that the system was integral and closed (hence the name CCTV) the broadcasting of data in the form of electromagnetic waves opens the system and makes it prone to

external interventions - such as scanning and interception of signal. Although this change of technology contributed to the fast development of networked video surveillance, it also made it possible to access data that were previously kept under control and invisible for outside observers. In several of her works Michelle Teran has been exploring video data space, as the endless source of information on behaviour, dreams, needs, fears, and values which sketch individual and collective portraits of members of information society. 'Life: a user's manual' was a series of walks performed in public space where she confronted two different visions of the same reality: the physical space directly accessible for the senses, and its media representation created by means of private surveillance camera. The map of data space created in such a way, was a recording of the ways of perceiving the valuing of public and private space by diverse, individual and collective subjects. The map was characterized by a specific monotony and a lack of inner variety: the electronic gazes, intercepted in different places of different cities, presented a highly homogeneous image, governed by the rhetoric of security. Similar effects characterise another project 'Friluftskino. Here she experiments with open air surveillance cinema and she shifts the centre of gravity towards the spectacle of voyeurism and exhibitionism. By placing images derived from surveillance cameras in the context of cinema she makes them even more abstract and rootless - losing their original primary function as they become just one of many elements in the global spectacle of visual pleasure. This tendency is even more apparent in her 'Parasitic Video Network'. Here the work is a surveillance performance for one viewer. Equipped with a special portable device which captures feeds from surveillance cameras was located by the artist in various public spaces, like office buildings, shopping malls and parks. The user navigates through physical space being directed by mediatised information that comes from the surrounding electromagnetic field of data space. As the appearance of the image on the screen of the monitoring device depends on the proximity of the wireless security camera, the movement in the physical space depends on invisible data flows. The user walks on the border between visible and invisible, yet the invisible layer of augmented space functions as a guide. The user's activity is determined by the will to capture images, and his/her knowledge of the space is a result of following the gaze of the cameras. Teran creates a framework like a kind of game of chase - playing with the fact that that data space is no longer an augmentation of physical space: data space becomes more 'reliable', and importantly, a more desirable and pleasurable source of information.

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