Exhibitionists and Voyeurs : Human Communication Patterns and Their Impact on Locative Media

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Subtitle	Human Communication Patterns and Their Impact on Locative Media
Lead-in / Abstract	Many locative services rely on mass participation and interaction between strangers. I posit that the majority are looking for traditional consumption models of voyeurism and vicariousness. Through this lens, I will present a brief history of locative media, and future trends in situated software.
Participants and speakers	Heathcote, Chris (FI / GB)
Short biography of participants	...
Full text	Locative media is not new; it is as old as human evolution. The recent attempts to digitize and socialise this media falls down when basic communication patterns are not respected.

People have always created public annotations, from cave paintings (designed to communicate actions, places and messages - where food is available), through Greek and Roman graffiti and flags (used to indicate ownership and conquest). In recent times, such public annotation has been quashed by private ownership of space.

This has led to modern graffiti, which indicates ownership of a place in a parallel mental construction to real land title. The most social version is the toilet wall, used to communicate and converse in itself, but also as a medium for organising real meetups (often of a sexual nature). As technology has advanced, so has public annotation, incorporating stickers, scratching and etching.

So, learning from the past, can we determine what future locative media will look like? [1]

Most current digital locative services either rely on just making technology available, or concentrate on unusual communication patterns - public speaking, talking to strangers, exhibitionism, and display of real identity to all. This is compounded by a move towards more voyeuristic media consumption, and display of the general public's banal lives as entertainment.

We cannot and should not expect digital media to be different. We need to build on the patterns of public anonymity, the population split between exhibitionists and voyeurs, and use of our identity to reinforce trust, gain respect and worth within small known private groups.

On the Internet, we have seen several examples of services where the few create for many. Most online communities work this way, with a small number of people creating the core of content, and tending and managing the community to ensure survival. **Marc Smith** of Microsoft Research quotes a figure of 2% taken from newsgroups. As long as 2% of the community care, and are willing to work (normally purely for credit and recognition), the community will survive.

Conversely, many online systems, especially file sharing, rely on much higher active participation rates. Those that just 'take' content get branded as leechers. This goes against older warez communities, where a select few cracked software to prove and brag about their technical prowess. Locative media has also so far concentrated on mass active participation (citizen journalism, locative storytelling, geopositioned photography), and correspondingly the services have been designed for creators rather than consumers.

When designing social and locative software, we need to respect the distinction between exhibitionists and voyeurs, and create interfaces designed for consumption as well as creation.

Being digital, we have a distinct disadvantage over physical media: visibility. I cannot see digital slices of my current space. If I do interface with a digital representation, it is unlikely to be the same representation (media or service) that others have. This makes the basic need for creators (of exhibitionism, space and place ownership, community recognition) very hard to fulfill. You also lose the voyeurs, as they have nothing to look at.

This is a side effect of one of the advantages of being digital. We are not bounded by physical space, even though we can reference it and use it for contextualisation. Physical space is bound in three finite layers: physical geography, built environment and places, and physical augmentation. Digitally, we are constrained only by what we can visualise and how much information can be modelled mentally. This means that information visualisation and filtering become our most important needs (and therefore becomes the critical focus for interaction design in the future).

The other big advantage is that we can grant selective access to digital spaces. As well as public anonymous spaces, we can create many private layers, and even personal places for just ourselves. [2]

One way to create understandable, usable locative services is to place the service within a situation. Current online services suffer from trying to work everywhere (or at least over a large area, such as the US), for large groups of people. These are hard to use, especially when context such as location is needed, hard to write and manage, and do not scale.

Situated software [3] is a term used by **Clay Shirky** to describe services that are normally physically grounded in a particular place, and maybe for a particular user group, defined for a real-world situation.

These do not even have to be connected to the public Internet: wi-fi and LANs replicate the physicality defined by the design of the service. However, adding dislocated access for those part of the situation allows the place to become elastic.

An example of this is *Bass Station* [4], a project by ITP students at NYU in New York. This places a ghettoblaster in a student lounge. The ghettoblaster is fitted with a computer, MP3 player and wi-fi. Any student in the room can throw an MP3 at the device, which is either played immediately or queued. It is bound by its context - the people and place.

However, this idea could be extended by adding access via the Internet just for those who also regularly inhabit the lounge. This keeps the situation, but allows the place to become slightly virtual. Those outside the room cannot hear the music, or know who is there to hear it, but anyone who is there knows that someone from their peer group has put the music on (and has someone to complain to if Britney Spears is put on a continuous loop).

Airport Express incorporates some of the ideas, and I'm waiting for a hacker to create a software version of Bass Station. Suddenly this idea blooms from one situation to thousands.

Situating software can also make it easy to deploy and use. I created an experimental location based review service called *Gaslamp*, situated in downtown San Diego. The physical boundaries meant that location could be found easily, using street crossings: the context of San Diego was implied. As well as being easy to use and easy to design, I managed to code it in under 2 days, mainly because I didn't have to deal with larger context such as the whole of the US, or the world.

More services will be used at a sociable level. This means authentication can be carried out via human communication rather than more technical breakable solutions. Monitoring of the public Internet means that much activity will move to smaller hidden networks (or hinternets, defined by **Jo Walsh**, **Simon Wistow** [5] and **Simon Batistoni** [6] on the (void) mailing list - a place outside the "controlled web", the back alleys and the dark, unregulated bits of the Internet). With wi-fi, these can be created in seconds, and have physical understandable bounds (at least with 802.11b). File sharing will be carried out in pubs and bars, with the transaction agreed over a pint rather than the anonymity of the Internet. We're back to the sneakernets of the 80s and early 90s.

As shown, people have always appropriated place for their own ends. Digital places will be no different. People will hack, bend, shape and destroy service to meet their own ends, not those of the creators. A few examples - wi-fi SSID, a technical hook that lets computers see each other via wi-fi, has been used by people in a space to communicate. I saw this happen at a conference called DIS (which definitely falls into the idea of a situation), where several people could not figure out the correct SSID to get Internet access. This is the conversation I saw:

rate DIS so far -1 to 10
8-altogether, cool projects
this is the best talk ever
heh, i sense sarcasm
no sarcasm, this rocks!
actually, this is kindamything
naw DIS is the best conf ever
are you DISpleased?
DIS rocks!
don't DIS DIS
iamonline... type \"DIS2004\"
create network... \"DIS2004\"
aolIM - pobs09
DIS2004 didnt work
dis2004
still there?

and then it broke up, presumably as they found the proper SSID. This group (2 or 3) had no idea who they were conversing with, but shared a situation (and a need).

Another example of appropriation is the social networking site **Orkut**. The only way to access Orkut is to be invited by a current member. Well, one invitee was Brazilian, and they invited their friends, and they invited their friends. This would not have been noticed, apart from the fact that many conversations on the service switched from English to Portuguese. When appropriated, some incumbents tried to get the service to mandate English use; they felt their spaces had be appropriated. They failed, and presumably have either left the service and found another, or found a way to coexist.

Situation, more than context, allows us to create truly locative services. Understanding human communication, carried out both off and online, means that these services have real social value, and consequently gain and keep users. These users will start off consuming information, watching how others act and react. Some of these will turn out to be digital exhibitionists, creating content and becoming the soul of the service. Appropriation or change will happen, and it is up to the core users, not the owners, as to how the systems react.

■ 1. Inspired by Hotel & Farm by Ben Katchor, McSweeney's Quarterly Concern #13, http://www.anti-mega.com/antimega/isea/iseahotel.gif

■ 2. Diagram at http://www.anti-mega.com/antimega/isea/isealayers.png

- 3. http://www.shirky.com/writings/situated_software.html

- 4. http://www.bass-station.net

- 5. http://thegestalt.org/simon/cluetrain.html

- 6. http://husk.org/void/hitherto_hinternet.txt