

# A Virtual Modus Operandi

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## Towards a new territoriality

New social uses of the Internet advocate a new territoriality; however, while the New Technologies have advanced positions towards social, geographical and economic autonomy, everyday life remains subjugated by the mechanisms that control urban space. Reviewing key discourses on spatial autonomy against emergent forms of autonomous production in the context of the New Technologies suggests the necessity to shift the production of value within disciplinary urban praxis towards the public's agency over urban space, and situates the emergent social dynamic as the framework to construct the new spatial value.

The social dynamic of our current technological time is ever more geared towards public autonomy. Yet, rather than appropriating urban space through virtual tools, new media users have successfully applied the "tactics of living" to the less regulated virtual environment. Influential Urban discourses of the past decades, from Michel de Certeau's "tactics of living", through Lefebvre's "space as a social construct", to Bakhtin's subversive carnival, imply that the production of 'habitable' space requires the user's autonomy over its control and production entailing an essentially cultural, (not necessarily material, subjective and collective), and tactical (unintentional, adaptive and elusive), process; Meanwhile, in the current context of globalization and neo-liberalism, New Media theorists are speculating on the potential of the New Technologies to empower the user in and in-between all fields of life, political, economical and geographical. Hence, inspired by both these trends urban thinkers and activists have sought in New Media effective tools<sup>1</sup> to subvert dominant spatial politics. Indeed, the New Technologies have delivered a decentralized intelligence of social networks reminiscent of Certeau's "tactics of living", which he has described as an "unmappable" form of subversion without a specific site of operation, strategy, or ideology. However, its application to urban space has remained at the level of activism with a political agenda; i.e. land speculation continues and borders abide. In that order,

politically driven uses of technology such as during the 1999 protests in Seattle, or the 2001 series of events in various cities around the world, digress from the premises of previous urban theorists whose main concern, far from ideology, is the experience of everyday life. If technology has caused an unprecedented efficiency and momentum towards the autonomous production of space, it is the "ordinary practice of everyday life", in Certeau's words, that still describes the modus operandi of a cultural spatial praxis encompassing both, virtual and tangible space at the bases of urban life. Yet today, the possibilities for autonomy are much greater in the virtual realm.

## Between the ordinary and the disciplinary: A new economy of place

This discrepancy suggests the necessity to invert spatial use value from the object/product to the production process, notably 'Architect's concepts' vs. 'autonomous production of space'. Michael Hardt has argued that the implication of autonomous production in capitalist structures augments their capacity for subversion without necessarily compromising the anti-capitalist project; after all, without ideology or strategy, the practice of everyday life escapes the very category of 'project'. Besides, while it may be true that there is a growing interest in alternative free networks and open source software, their likely implementation amongst computer programming literates is not comparable with the ubiquity of the Web 2.0. In fact, it is the architecture of the web 2.0 that has put into value the participation of the user in the production process, thus impelling the corporate players, such as Google and Yahoo, to invert their mechanisms of production and delegate control in order to profit from the new and relentless modus operandi. Similarly, disciplinary urban praxis could be revised to valorize, and ultimately affirm, city-dweller's autonomy over spatial production.

Outside the disciplinary urban, while deeply involved with everyday life and the locations where life take place, the attitude in some forms of experimental Japanese



Figure 1: Kawanaka, Nobuhiro. 1987-1996. *Shishosetsu*. Tokyo: Image Forum

documentary can help intuit the *modus operandi* of a revised urban praxis vis-à-vis public autonomy. In discussing its methods as spatial tactics, disciplinary means of spatial valorization, such as the concept and the strategy, are questioned through notions of participation, subjectivity and indeterminacy underlying the ongoing discourse on the cultural production of space.

Likewise Lefebvre's inversion of the productive hierarchy, Filmmaker Kazuo Hara swaps positions between agent and subject to the extent that the subject assumes the control of the aesthetic of the film. His documentary does not aim at establishing the Filmmaker's standpoint, but to provide the conditions for change in relation to an undetermined course of events. He explains: "I become the receptor of the action and its evolution as it takes place in front of me. The act of filming and being filmed cannot be separated".<sup>2</sup>

Analogous to Bakhtin's carnival, more than act of fakery, Kawanaka Nobuhiro's aesthetic manipulations perform

a celebration of time and place. Continuously filmed, re-edited and re-projected over the years his documentary constitutes a mediated memory-work, which produces a social bond and sense of place. The footage, including both public and private events, is projected to a returning audience of friends, colleagues and newcomers. Like Lefebvre's "social construct" the process entails the collective construction of a virtual memory over time, whose origins may or not have ever been experienced by members of the Audience.

Lastly, Oki Hiroyuki employs de Certeau's tactics of living to construct a map of possibilities of the places he visits. It is in his personal perspective and attentiveness to the unexpected of everyday life that he reveals and projects latent and new aspects of the social context. The outcome of a productive exchange with the locals, inhabiting a place and documenting it become essentially the same thing.



Figure 2: Kawanaka, Nobuhiro. 1987-1996. *Shishosetsu*. Tokyo: Image Forum

As well as an attitude to re-valorize space, these practices can help intuit a properly tactical use of the New Technologies towards an evolving urban praxis, located between the ordinary and the disciplinary. In conclusion, if on the one hand the New Technologies, along with the collective appropriation of virtual space, have inspired

equivalent possibilities and expectations with respect to the urban environment, the successful application of the same technologies to mediate public control over urban space may entail a whole new economy of place, centered on the practice of everyday life.

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1 E.g. Internet trends, like Web 2.0, VoIP and Geoweb; network dynamics, such as free networks open source code, and Tactical Media; locative and visualizing devices, like mobile phones, GPS and digital cameras; and their hybrids, blogumentaries and smart-mobs.

2 MacDonald, 178

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