

MOBILITY INTO IMMOBILITY: DESIGNING NETWORKS

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The text is concerned with the networks and flows of information and bodies, discussing other perceptions and movements to perform our everyday life and to comprehend the world. At the end, INmobility, an artwork in progress, is presented and concerns with the mobile technologies as other possibilities of people being temporarily “on the move”, questioning physical and temporal domains to propose narratives.



Fig 1. Visual narrative 1, 2011, Luisa Paraguai, photographic media.



Fig 2. Visual narrative 2, 2011, Luisa Paraguai, photographic media.



Fig 3. Visual narrative 3, 2011, Luisa Paraguai, photographic media.

The text is concerned with networks and flows of information and bodies, discussing other perceptions and configurations of movements to perform our everyday life, and so, to perceive and comprehend the world. “Movements often involves an embodied experience of the material and social modes of dwelling-in-motion,” [1] and we have sewing those organizations and systems upon physical and informational – data networks. Then, the reality can be understood as a negotiation process among different actual events, according to distinct protocols of communication and networks; it means the reality is understood as a dynamic process of flows.

Firstly, the people, technologies and space relationships are explored as possibilities of connections among different networks – as movements in physical spaces and/or as communication processes in digital and radio protocols. At the end, the project INmobility presented is concerned with the idea of technology as an agent to evoke other narrative dimensions to deal with the space and time, revealing different perspectives of reading and understanding the world.

Networks: Topologies Defined by Connections

Mobile communication, evoking characteristic ubiquity and accessibility, has permeated all domains of our everyday life. People have moved around actualizing different networks, physical locations and data nodes configuring a complex structure, programmed and self-configurable at the same time. “The diffusion of Internet, wireless communication, digital media and a variety of tools of social software has prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time.” [2] People have faced different patterns of arrangements, juxtaposed and superposed, trying to transcend the dominant logic of each network and to establish common and collaborative procedures. “Flows are streams of information between nodes, circulating through the channels of connection between nodes.” [3]

The mediated communication devices have configured a hybrid mode of existence, juxtaposing digital and physical domains simultaneously. That concept of hybrid space as a formal structure of those interconnections – visible configuration, has been considered quite important to apprehend the symbolic

and aesthetic perspectives of the reality. “The expression of social relationships, ultimately power relationships, that underlie the evolution of the multimodal communication system.” [4] The cultural dimension of that process, as a multilayered transformation of communication, can be defined by synchronic connections among several networks, with different protocols of communication; it means we have experienced the tension between the parallel development of a global culture and multiple local identities. We have to renegotiate space-time organizations as models of circulating in the world; it means we have to deal with different protocols of communication simultaneously as ‘to be on the move’ – to operate and produce within in-between spaces and times.

“Territorial behavior is a self–other boundary regulation mechanism that involves personalization of or marking of a place or object and communication that it is ‘owned’ by a person or a group.” [5] Nowadays, we have related to different forms of information systems – radio channels, mobile calls, GPS info, emails, text messages, skype sessions, facebook posts, twitter comments – tracing and tracking objects, locations and people. A specific perceptive and cognitive condition has addressed bodies-with-environments – physical and digital, to a specific set of performances. It means others within that system have known each person or object. Such systems, named as “flow architectures” [6] and “network society,” [7] have distributed economies, peoples, objects and activities, across the world. Their social structure is made up of networks that are powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies, improving on the characteristics of flexibility, scalability and portability. The apparently different domains of work, family, and social life becoming more networked, more similar to each other and more interdependent.

What is specific to our world is the extension and augmentation of the body and mind of human subjects in networks of interactions powered by micro-electronics-based, software-operated, communication technologies. These technologies are increasingly diffused throughout the entire realm of human activity by growing miniaturization and we may add portability. [8]

Technological and social organizational convergence has taken place between physical and technological systems and gradually has formed a new ambient, in which the ability to connect from wireless devices has become the predominant form of communication. The project INmobility is concerned with the meaning of materiality and those artefacts through the roles they play in different territorial networks. “In a world of networks, the ability to exercise control over others depends on two basic mechanisms: the ability to constitute networks, and to program/reprogram the networks in terms of the goals assigned to the networks; and the ability to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources, while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation.” [9]

The main characteristic of wireless communication is not physical mobility but constant access and communication; it takes place because of the Internet potential structure of operation: a distributed network that has the possibility of combining distinct horizontal structures. Then, the mobile interfaces have connected those communication systems, not related and based on the Internet network protocol. It is a multimodal, “[...] also self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many who communicate with many” – “a mass self-communication.” [10]

We can stand a spatial structure that dynamically adapts to the communicational demands and necessities from own nodes; it means, for each new connection the network topology can be modified based on the existence of their nodes/users’ mobile phone and their abilities for communication. The attempt to comprehend and incorporate that operational network structure is to formalize a social shared space

as zones of fluxes, and not determined spaces of information distribution. Nowadays, it is necessary to comprehend mobility as the ability to move between different networks – physical and digital communication systems – that have as many dimensions as interconnections.

Automobility and Time-Space Relationships

The first attempt to reorganize public and social, spaces and accesses was made by the cars, extending where people could go to and hence what they are literally able to do. They set others flexible social patterns of commuting, family life, community, leisure, and the pleasures of movements and so on. “Machine space, or territory devoted primarily to the use of machines, shall be so designated when machines have priority over people in the use of territory. Automobile territory in modern American cities exemplifies the concept of machine space.” [11]

The car has reorganized in complex and heterogeneous ways the mobilities and socialities across significant distances and moments; it has created spatially stretched and time-compressed modes of people's moving and being encapsulated in a personal, cocooned, moving capsule – a bubble. “I suggest that there have been four characteristic modes of dwelling with regard to the car, what I term ‘inhabiting-unmade-roads’, ‘inhabiting-the-paved-road’, ‘inhabiting-the-car’, and ‘inhabiting-the-intelligent-car’.” [12] At first, the cars were open, not separated from the around sights, smells, and sounds – presented as the regular basis of commuting or even social life; in the second stage, the important was the tour than the destination – the performance of motor touring, the machine; in the third stage, the driver became a passive observer of the world, passing through the window – a refuge, a mobile privatization, in which the driver's body became fragmented and disciplined to the machine. The car can be thought as an extension of the senses so that the driver can feel its very contours, shape and relationship to that beyond its metallic skin. It is an everyday object and becomes a place to behave in a particular way in which, nowadays, people can organize a series of multiple activities, connecting to distant others through internet, mobile phone or radio.

“The car becomes a symbiotic extension of the driver own embodiedness.” [13] Automobility cannot divide spaces clearly – as work and home, leisure and work; it has produced lengthy commutes into and across the city. Then, cars have become a contemporaneous device, organizing possible complex models of social and cultural organizational structures to approach the urban landscape. Import us, the current instantaneous time involving the resynchronizations of the existent time-space paths. A shift to an individualistic timetabling of many moments or fragments of time – a personal clock-time upon the public timetable every time we drive. People have tried to sustain “coherent biographical narratives in the context of multiple choices filtered through abstract systems,” [14] and the project INmobility is an attempt to register those images and sounds.

The flexibility of movements is modeled by the temporal instance, producing multiple activities, spatially desynchronized from each other but integrated. It means, the traffic is a repetitive order of things independent of drivers whose actions compose it. People try to structure complex, fragile and contingent patterns of social life – self-created narratives – juggling fragments of time and activities. A network of individuals is connected through similarity of actions and intentions, and totally dependent on a social order.

“The difficulty we have in defining all associations in terms of networks is due to the prevalence of geography. It seems obvious that we can oppose proximity and connections. However, geographical proximity is the result of a science, geography, of a profession, geographers, of a practice, mapping system, measuring, triangulating. ... All definitions in terms of surface and territories come from our reading of maps drawn and filled in by geographers. Out of geographers and geography, ‘in between’ there own networks, there is no such a thing as proximity or a distance, which would not be defined by connectivity. The geographical notion is simply another connection to a grid defining a metrics and a scale. The notion of network helps us to lift the tyranny of geographers in defining space and offers us a notion which is neither social nor ‘real’ space, but simply associations.” [15]

INmobility: Texts and Textures of Everyday Life

People have performed their everyday life in metropolitan areas while organize constant attempts of virtualising the space-time relationship. In that text, we have brought the terms networks, cars and communication systems together to configure visual experience maps of moving as a collaborative and multitasking platform. The space and time relationships have been discussed articulating different protocols of communication and modes of distribution not coordinated. The INmobility project is concerned with the visibility of those temporary social networks, physical and digital, juxtaposed by synchronous live messages; the proposal of the narratives produced is to visualize our daily actions as dynamic collaborative networks.

Motion and emotion – the car was taken as a place to exercise the subjectivity, a private bubble in which experiences are released in unacceptable forms and gestures; it is understood as an enclosed space of control, inhabited in different ways and able to evoke new behaviors and gestures. Those body movements are understood as a polysemic representation affecting ways of sociability, formal and informal attitudes. Central to dwelling the car is the soundscape – different technologies can create sound spaces that are occupied by voices, music, sounds, and dialogues. Nowadays, the mobile technologies have proposed to the users other connections not proximal – from the intimate condition of driving to a participative way, to create their everyday routes.

Mobile technologies have set other possibilities of people being temporarily ‘on the move’, creating gaps and holes, other dimensions and domains. The ability of using those devices has demanded from users to comprehend and accommodate technologies on time and space. The ‘nine to five’ culture, in big cities as São Paulo, using mobile and GPS devices, can engender interspaces and reorganize physical arrangements, intertwining different space and time models. Audio and images narratives (figure 1, figure 2, figure 3) have been experimented, trying to track distinct networks and to map distinct social activities. The window and mirror images are explored as modes of recognition and presentation to others. Other perspectives and angles evoke a “fluid choreography,” [16] but still suggest an effective private space. From those visual narratives we can exercise parallel dimensions and to question the feeling of belonging to those urban spaces.

Fig. 1. Visual narrative 1, 2011, Luisa Paraguai, photographic media. (Used with permission.)

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From the project we want to comprehend the tension between distinct materialities of the space and time relationship simultaneously operated by people through mobile devices. The intrinsic operational mode of the networks that conforms some informational patterns – computational and bodily, electromagnetic and spatial, has dislocated the usual understanding of shapes and spaces to propose other articulations. The blurred limits and the possibility of compounding physical spaces and informational contexts have evoked other dimensions for people’s interaction; the audiovisual narratives proposed have pointed out the mediated practices to create particular perspectives of those specific spaces. The perception and action relationship has presented itself as a phenomenological experience in which the individual, car and the ambient are included by media.

References and Notes:

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3. *Ibid.*, 20.
4. *Ibid.*, 57.
5. Irwin Altman, *The Environment and Social Behaviour* (Monterey: Brooks/Cole, 1975), 107.
6. Knorr K. Cetina, “From Pipes to Scopes: The Flow Architecture of Financial Markets,” *Distinktion* 7 (2003): 7-23.
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8. Manuel Castells, ed., *The network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2004), 7.
9. Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (New York: Oxford University, 2009), 45.
10. *Ibid.*, 70.
11. Ronald Horvath, “Machine Space,” in *The Geographical Review* 64, no. 2 (1974): 167-188.
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13. Don Ihde, “The Experience of Technology: Human-Machine Relations,” *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (1974): 267-279.
14. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 6.
15. Bruno Latour, “The Trouble with Actor-Network Theory,” in *Danish Philosophy Journal* 25, no. 3-4 (1997): 47-64.
16. Mike Featherstone, Nigel Thrift and John Urry, *Automobilities* (London: SAGE, 2005), 8.