

Transient Media

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The transit of Venus brought Cook to Tahiti in June 1769. Cook's voyage nearly ended in disaster, with the Endeavour beached at what is now Cooktown after colliding with the Great Barrier Reef. Sic transit gloria mundi. Venus transits the sun in an irregular cycle: twice in eight years, and then a hundred and twenty



year hiatus. This was the urgency of Cook's voyage, spurred on by Edmund Halley's plan to get an accurate measure of the distance to Venus – and hence the size of the solar system – following bad weather that spoiled observations during the 1761 transit.

The ocean-going sailing ship, the most complex technology of its age, takes Enlightenment European science to the far side of the world, there to begin the process of colonisation and genocide. For the Tahitians, the Endeavour arrives, stays and sails on. On board the ship, the world floats by, until the day the mobile and immobile clash.

Transience and Ephemerality

Transience occurs, like any event, in time, but its structure is spatial. All media are time based, even those that sit still, because they are experienced in time. But certain media are mobile, or, alternatively, certain media are fixed in places where their audiences are mobile.

It is important to distinguish transience from ephemerality. All media are ephemeral to some extent, and it is a truism to note that the more contemporary a medium, the more ephemeral it is likely to prove. I speak here of the material substrates of different media. Paper is surprisingly robust, and inks surprisingly fast. Photographic film is reasonably trustworthy over periods of decades. Magnetic media are at risk after about ten years, and optical media even sooner. So much so

that contemporary digital film producers are storing their data files as well as their master copies on film stock, an unnerving parallel with early film archives at the Library of Congress, where the only surviving copies of early movies were printed to paper for copyright purposes. The Refresh conference held in Banff, Canada in 2005 brought together curators and archivists concerned that much of the early generation of digital artists' work was already lost. Though it is possible to emulate the code for some of these pieces on modern computers, the response times, colour gamuts, refresh rates – the whole look and feel – are changed by their migration from 5-inch floppies and prototype touchscreens like Ivan Sutherland's 1963 *sketchpad*. Ben Laposky's works survive because he photographed from oscilloscope screens, but for many other artists this would be documentation, rather than the work itself. Much the same can be said of emulators.

The reality is that a vast quantity of the world's information will not survive long. The Berkeley "How Much Information" (2003) project estimates that

Print, film, magnetic, and optical storage media produced about 5 exabytes of new information in 2002. Ninety-two percent of the new information was stored on magnetic media, mostly in hard disks . . . *Telephone calls* worldwide on both landlines and mobile phones contained 17.3 exabytes of new information if stored in digital form; this represents 98% of the total of all information transmitted in electronic information flows, most of it person to person. . . . About 70 million hours (3,500 terabytes) of the 320 million hours of radio broadcasting is original programming. TV worldwide produces about 31 million hours of original programming (70,000 terabytes) out of 123 million total hours of broadcasting.

(An exabyte is 10 to the eighteenth power, a terabyte ten to the 12th power). A few notes are needed to contextualise these figures. Firstly, no single researcher could watch a year's worth of new television programming: it is unlikely that the whole community of television scholars could do so. No archive, not even the virtual archive composed of the international federation of archives, could contain the whole output. Some kind of sampling is all that can be afforded, and the media that are most capable of recording the sample are themselves subject to speedy loss of quality. Secondly, we do not expect our calls to be stored, indeed we distrust attempts to do so. We are culturally acquainted with the fact that mediation is not the same as storage. Thirdly, the attempt to make statements about the unknowable content of all the data produced in a single year not only adds to the pile of unread data; it opens the question of *what* we consider to be data. Among the many questions to be answered are those concerning what constitutes information and what might be the legitimate interests of future researchers. While we might be able to answer the former, it is to be hoped that we are incapable of answering the latter in its entirety. The origins of a future pandemic may lie in X-ray archives of some hospital, but we cannot know at which football match

the future emperor of Peru is shouting from the stands, still less what lines of intellectual enquiry are likely to emerge in the coming centuries. Like the widow of Richard Burton, translator of the *Arabian Nights*, we may be in the process of destroying, out of shame or economy, works of whose value to succeeding generations we have little or no idea.

Ephemerality is then built into the very fabric of contemporary media. Those that we wish to preserve, that we intuit will form the canon of the future, we make our best endeavours to care for, but increasingly in the knowledge that whatever pains we take, and regardless of the positive or negative prioritisation of archiving among future governments, much of what we prize will be reft from us, and much of it sooner rather than later. The same goes for this conference paper, which will have its little time in the sun and then, as Rutger Hauer's Roy Batty says at the end of *Blade Runner*: "All those moments will be lost in time like tears in rain". As a media historians, we regret this deeply. As citizens of the 20th century, we mourn it. But as media analysts in the 21st century, we welcome it. Ephemerality is an intrinsic quality of the contemporary, and therefore of contemporary media. It is the price we pay for ubiquity. The ephemerality of our media is to be treasured like the ephemerality of a performance, of a kiss. Mere repetition is not virtue. The specificity of any moment of mediation is precious, and to some extent incommunicable. That the material objects of such mediation may also perish is no more significant than that I can never kiss my partner for the first time again.

The transient is not the same as the ephemeral. It describes not a relation in time, but a relation in space, a relation normally between one moving and one unmoving or two moving parties to an act of mediation. If we accept the traditional distinction between subject and object, we might situate the transient as an axis between them, a vector which goes both ways, and which inaugurates a material process between them which cannot be distinguished as 'subject' or 'object' and which in honour of its technology we can think of as *project*. In what follows, I hope to identify some characteristics of the project of transient media. To make this a little more manageable, we focus on one form of transient media in particular: large scale screens in public spaces.

Beijing

By far the largest assembly of large-scale public screens is being built in Beijing for the 2008 Olympics, a collection of 162 screens, one for each competitor nation. Olympic villages are of their nature utopian projects, stitched to the goals of the Olympic Movement. The 2004 Olympic Charter gives as its first two Fundamental Principles the following:

1. Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.

2 The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity. (IOC 2004: 9))

They call for universal ethical principles (Principles 4 and 5 declare sport a human right and condemn discrimination) grounded on principles of joy and the good. While this might appear to be hedging bets between virtue and utilitarian ethics (and between balance on the one hand and will on the other), the second principle embraces the harmony fundamental to Asian ethics, the peace that was once the highest value propounded by the Communist Party, and the dignity which is enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. This catholic embrace of multiple ethical priorities in an effort towards their synthesis through sport, education and culture is exemplary of the difficulty any international body, or indeed any cosmopolitan individual, is likely to find in verbalising formally the qualities for which we would wish to strive. The desire to unify these qualities into a single movement is nowhere more concretely expressed than in the design of Olympic villages. In the case of the 2008 Beijing village, Sydney based PTW Architects promise an ecologically themed, designed and built environment featuring solar power, passive ventilation, water conservation and walkways allowing fauna as well as humans to cross into the nearby Forest Park.

The screens will form an element in this design, but one which may not last as long as the Olympic Village, which is destined for commercial and residential use post-Games. Their key role will come during the games themselves, when an estimated half million foreign visitors are expected, in addition to domestic visitors and the thousands of athletes. The screens will be in place specifically for the purposes of the Games: to cater to a transient audience. According to china.org, people in Beijing will also be able to watch the games for free on digital mobile transmissions (DAB), suggesting that the large screens will not be restricted to relaying events from the various stadia (<http://www.china.org.cn/english/scitech/180356.htm>). This profusion of mediations is likely to offer only restricted interactive capabilities, given regional and national governments' sensitivities. But interactivity is not necessarily exclusively political, and after all, harmony is also an Olympic ideal. In fact, according to an early announcement on the official site of the Beijing Olympics,

Large electronic screen walls will be erected in large public places such as Wangfujing, Xidan, Capital Airport, the Beijing Railway Station, the Beijing West Railway Station, the China Millennium Monument, the Olympic Green, and the CBD. These screens will be used to publicize the purpose of the Olympic

Games, socialist moral standards, and useful information to the public.

(<http://en.beijing2008.cn/70/92/article211929270.shtml>, 11 Sept 2003)

The BOCOG (Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad) explains the 'purpose' of the Games through their core concepts: 'the Green Olympics, the High-tech Olympics and the People's Olympics', adding that they aim 'to advance cultural exchanges, to deepen understanding and friendship between the peoples of the world, and to promote harmonious development between mankind and nature' (<http://en.beijing2008.cn/49/66/column211716649.shtml>). In these ambitions, the BOCOG are not out of step with the curatorial ambitions expressed by a number of people working in the large screen environment, like Kate Taylor, who reports on the Manchester Bigger Picture project (in *First Monday*) that the political space of Exchange Square is as important to the ambient functioning of the screen and screen works as the content, or the climate, noting that

The area is inscribed with the political values of the City Council and the commercial businesses operating there. While the marketing managers of Triangle shopping centre on which the Big Screen is attached have a strong view of their target customer for the area; 'the young urban achiever', the behaviour of people in the space is physically regulated with the City Council's anti-skateboard partitions and a no-alcohol zone.

This branding and regulation exclude certain people and behaviours, and counter-publics emerge in the form of homeless people, young skateboarders and activists. To some extent, the Big Screen – with its overtones of the big brother state – can encourage such fragmentation, both in terms of social groupings and normalised patterns of behaviour (Taylor 2006).

In short, the project of transient media, whether in the benevolent dictatorship of curatorial intention and public service broadcasting in Manchester, or in the combination of civic duty and Olympic ideals in Beijing, must operate within the specifics of its situation.

An Ethic of Situations

The situation of transient media may be understood, in a preliminary fashion, through a statement made on the eve of the founding of the Situationist international, the 'Report on the Construction of Situations' written by Debord for the 1957 Cosio d'Arroschia conference, which states

Our central idea is the construction of situations, that is to say, the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality. We must develop a systematic intervention based on the complex factors of two components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the behaviors which that environment gives rise to and which radically transform it.

The *dérive* modelled this new practice: a psychogeographical tour of the city seeking out the situations it offers, exposing its contradictions, its hidden truths. In the *Report*, Debord proposes an 'integral urbanism' which will draw not only on architecture but on cuisine, performance, poetry and

cinema. The situation stands in opposition to the spectacle, or rather begins in the ruins of spectacle, whose central characteristic is 'non-intervention'. The processes of Situationism, the situations it is to create, will, according to Debord, resist both the immortality of the discrete artwork and the repetitions of frustrated desire that characterise contemporary life. Instead, they will produce new events, both intensive (on the model of the classical tragedy) and extensive (on the model of the *dérive*), whose purpose is to fragment the narrative of life, end the dissimulation of self as narrative, and produce the city as a field of emotionally charged districts, each of them in dynamic disequilibrium.

Given that the vast majority of transient media, including billboards, billboard vans and public screens of every size, have as their major function to deliver audiences to advertisers, the chances of their delivering anything else to anyone else without intervention of the style later adopted by the Situationists under the rubric of *décollage* is unlikely. But such destructive activities do not chime well with Debord's later insistence that the 'negative' vanguardism of Beckett had already been assimilated into the dominant culture of the spectacle, an observation in defiance of Adorno's aesthetics which is supported by the 'philistinism', to use John Roberts' and Dave Beech's term, of the yBa group.

At the same time, as Rancière argues in a 2004 speech, Debord's critique of spectacle still rests on Plato's distrust of drama: that looking is antipathetic to knowing, and likewise replaces action with passivity. The spectacle, which Debord accuses of alienating life from the living and representing it back for their passive contemplation, cannot be destroyed by a 'good' theatre that 'deploys its separate reality only to suppress it, to turn the theatrical form into a form of life of the community' (Rancière 2007: 274). Such self-suppressing mediations do not resolve Plato's antithesis of representation and action: they pretend to abolish the distance between spectator and stage. But, Rancière argues, 'Distance is not an evil that should be abolished. It is the normal condition of communication' (275). Such communication can only occur when the condemnation of spectatorship gives way to a realisation of the situation: that every spectator acts in her own story, and every actor spectates.

Debord did suggest, prophetically, that 'One can envisage, for example, televised images of certain aspects of one situation being communicated live to people taking part in another situation somewhere else, thereby producing various modifications and interferences between the two'. Such a strategy has been employed quite often in large-screen presentations, linking city to city, city to

country, or city to its own history. Yet this raises a question about what constitutes the situation of any given screen.

In common parlance, a situation is simply the arrangement of forces at a given moment in time that must be taken into account in selecting the correct action to take. Badiou develops the idea of situation as an ontological category in which 'if we put to one side the diverse singularity of the existence of the existent [*étant*], we come to a thought of being that is itself suspended or deferred [*suspendue*] in fairly problematic fashion' (Badiou 2001: 129). Badiou's 'situation' is in effect the realisation of ontological possibilities, but a realisation in which the presence of the situation to itself in all its mathematical rigour is always incomplete. It is for this reason that he sees the situation as the ground on which ethics is to be built: 'There is no ethics in general. There are only – eventually – ethics of the processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation' (Badiou 2001: 16). Since human thought is always thought in and of situations, truth is also situational and situated (as opposed to knowledge, which presents itself as universal). Badiou's ethics depend on the multiple truths of singular situations, truths which correspond to actions.

In a remarkable essay, 'Some Questions of Moral Philosophy' (2003), Hannah Arendt distinguishes two great strands in ethical thinking: one grounded in the good and the right, the other in right and good action. The former can be located in Kant's categorical imperative ("Act so that the principle of your action might become a universal law"), but Arendt notes that the categorical imperative depends on a prior imperative: 'Thou shalt not contradict thyself'. The second strand depends on the Pauline discovery of the will, but the will is itself grounded in contradictions: 'I will but I cannot', 'I will but I cannot force myself to act' and 'I will to abide by the commandments, but another part of me wills to break them'. In the era of biopower, we have to add a third strand: the virtue of efficiency. As George Yudicé (2003) details, publicly funded cultural activities cannot claim simply to achieve aesthetic goals. Nor is it sufficient to be economically viable. They must also demonstrate social and moral outcomes, precisely those outcomes that are otherwise excluded from consideration in neo-liberal economies. Not only should they pay for themselves, perhaps by creating new creative industries opportunities, but they should also provide the ethical, educational and welfare services that are no longer supported by the normative practices of contemporary globalised capital. They must then be virtuous in a new circumstance and according to a new model: the model of efficiency.

In these circumstances, Badiou's situation dependent ethic of truths displays a fatal weakness. In seeking to resolve the age-old antinomy of universal right and right action, Badiou offers loyalty to truth as the fundamental ethical obligation. But this conforms to the ethics of efficiency, to the extent that it is no longer a question of what is good, nor of right action, but of the *delivery* of good to the deserving. It is less a problem of believing we know already what is good (human rights, commodities), nor of the sacrifice of will, but rather the nature of the processes by which we arrive at such belief. Truth is not, pace Badiou, an ontological category but a social one. As an ex-Maoist he should have remembered that 'correct ideas come from social practice'. That practice is what appears in Habermas as discourse ethics. As an action-oriented ethic, discourse ethics has as its goal agreement on what constitutes a problem and how to solve it, or what constitutes an opportunity and how to seize it. It is, in its everyday deployment, an ethics of efficiency. Arendt identified the banality of evil with a perversion of the categorical imperative, but it is surely the case that the banality of evil negates Habermasian discourse ethics, for here, among rational and cultured people, a general agreement was formed to perpetrate horrors.

The love of goodness and the ethic of right action have today been assimilated into the discourse ethics of efficiency. And yet, in the era of ecological consciousness and in the wake of Freud, we are only too aware, not only that our motives may not be conscious, but that we may be unaware of the consequences of actions we take, even though unexpected consequences – such as global warming – may be the most serious consequences of what we do or do not do for example, in the utilitarian pursuit of the happiness of the greatest number. Transient media, particularly in the case of the large screen projects that form the focus of our research, are new in the sense that they begin to operate in a new situation: that of an ethics of responsibility for unintended consequences.

Ecological ethics stands aside from the biopolitical ethics of efficiency. Unlike Badiou's or Debord's situations, the ecology of situations understands that consequences arise not only from individual but from collective activities. Distinct from law, such an ethics recognises the responsibility of collectives. The aggregation of populations into responsible agents is not in itself a brand new thought: it is implicit in Marx, and before him in Rousseau, but it takes on a new form in the age of what Deleuze (1997) refers to as societies of control. This is yet another periodising move, distinguishing network societies from the earlier disciplinary society discussed by Foucault. As developed by Hardt and Negri, (2000) the concept refers to a distributed network of self-regulating systems, a thesis further refined by Alex Galloway (2004) in the term 'protocol', referring to the common standard software used to operate the internet and other network functions, embedded standard

codes which, rather like the road network, simultaneously make possible but also constrain the kinds of behaviour possible in them.

For us the most significant aspect of protocol and control is that they operate at the level of aggregate populations, rather than individuals. Their terrain, as in Foucault's biopolitics, is no longer the individual but the statistical and probabilistic behaviours of populations. It is at this level that large screens in public spaces address their audiences. In terms of 'outcome', the most observable consequence of installing a screen is that it modifies the group behaviour of crowds transiting the space where it is installed. Rather like the process used in urban design which observes people's average pathways through an area as a guide to the layout of pavements, a civic space is always characterised by common routes of transit. A large screen, if it has any effect at all, will have an effect on the movement of people through the space, creating a kind of gravitation towards itself that will alter the ways in which people make their ways across a plaza or square, encouraging them to dwell a little longer, or at the least to slow their progress, turn their heads, and catch a glimpse. Older models of aesthetics focus on the transformative effect of the artwork on a single consciousness. A significant role of large screens is to create situations which have a minor impact on large numbers of consciousnesses.

It is in this climate that the screens confront the silence of the silent majority.

Transition

It is a salutary thought that 'Psychoanalysis and passports were introduced at almost the same time' (Papastergiadis 2006: 71). The opposition individual/society that drives sociology emerges in their mutual construction through media formations like these. The passport is that absurd object: a universal signifier of uniqueness. In the ecological situation, such constructions are not unreal. On the contrary, those especially which bear their own and other contradictions are deeply real, in the minimal sense that they have consequences, and in the maximal sense that they are media and therefore material. The question arises, however, of what order of practice can be undertaken in these situations, where control seeps deeper into more areas of life, and where the human ecology is perhaps the last alternative avenue.

Early digital works used simple iterative behaviours modelled on flocking algorithms or 'termite' instruction sets. Many deployed emergent properties in chaotic systems. Many contemporary works are grounded on remote-sensing of statistically significant network behaviours, such as Mark

Hansen and Ben Rubin's *The Listening Post*. Here human activity is raw material, in much the same way as weather conditions or telemetry from the outer planets for other artists. Works like *Drawball* distinguish themselves by encouraging 'stigmergic collaborations' (Elliott 2007), large-population interactions which use not simply iterative but locally-scaled creativity to encourage large populations to come together to make a global change to the installed situation. While individual acts in *Drawball* are often highly evocative, and their histories intensely interactive, what is most impressive is the emergence of large activities requiring the coordinated actions of sometimes hundreds of agents. The VIP symbol, which has been maintained on *Drawball* almost since it began, is, like other islands of achievement, always open to the statistical likelihood of vandalism. The significance of such practices for the probabilistic activity of large screens is that they indicate the possibility of assimilating personal creativity into group actions, much in the way that individual programmers contribute to the development of Linux. The principle of many-to-many communication embedded in network protocols encourages that scale of ambition.

At the same time, a very unambitious project can prove immensely fruitful. Linking the site of a screen to itself is enormously popular: many of the online images unearthed by Googling 'federation square large screen' are photos taken by tourists of themselves projected on the 20 metre screen.

The practice may perhaps seem facile, and to lay itself open to the charge of being merely touristic. And yet the role of a screen in constructing the reality of a place also forms a part of its functionality. That the practice has little artistic or cultural kudos shouldn't detract from its potential value as an intervention. For the duration of their presence on the screen, any passer-by can occupy the place in a way that, in general, urban spaces are not occupied otherwise. The act of occupation then may transform the experience of space, an experience which, since Lefebvre, we should be able to read as constitutive of it. The 'non' of 'non-space', the '*non-lieux*' of Marc Augé's supermodernity is a 'non' of experience, a nullity, an annulment, the vacation of space by anything recognisable as a project. What is left is perhaps just that subject which is the object of biopolitics: a statistical probability, an actuarial likelihood, and no more. To take possession of space even through the simulation of scale brought about through the feedback of large-screen CCTV is to occupy the place of Big Brother. And while this may be analysed as a false consciousness, or an ideological hailing to identify with omnipotence, it is equally analysable as satire.

Nor are participants naive enough to believe that it is their 'self' that appears on screen. Everyone mugs for the camera, or performs the ritual of being photographed: straightening hair, tucking in shirt, standing up straighter, smiling. Such performances, ritualised or improvised, are the stuff of the public presentation of self which always only unveils the lack of a self to present, or rather, that the self is only present when it is presented. Otherwise, we shuffle through the square as invisible to ourselves as we are to others. But in this making visible, this singling out, there is a magical invitation to existence which transforms the public space.

The touristic moment of photographing yourself posing for what is in effect a surveillance camera is so fascinating not only because it seizes an opportunity to assert your own existence, but also because the act is entirely typical. The nexus of surveillance and self-assertion should bring to mind the reality TV show *Big Brother*, whose ideological function is to emphasise what everybody knows – we are all individuals – in a global situation in which individuality counts for less and less. The assertion of individuality becomes a typical and necessary act for the reproduction of a system of distributed control. We must retain our capacity for action in order for what is now a cosmopolis to work. At the same time however, it is incumbent on us to act within the parameters set for us by the protocols of biopolitics, that is, within the range of statistical probability. The depressing truth revealed by micro-targeted advertising, for example is that even at what we regard as our most idiosyncratic, we are behaving within norms that still attract advertisers. In a summer when cinema audiences decline, it's more than likely that you also failed to visit a cinema. In a year when the biggest worry expressed in opinion polls is the cost of oil, you too are probably worried by petrol prices. It is not that norms are in some way more normative today than in earlier epochs, but that the mode of their operation is now fundamentally actuarial. What counts is not the individual but the aggregate.

A similar dialectic holds good in the construction of place, such as occurred around the Federation Square big screen in Melbourne during the 2006 Soccer World Cup. It is vital to capital flows that cities are in some sense indistinguishable: that every major population centre hosts standardised protocols for financial flows, trade relations, intellectual property and tax laws. Likewise each major city is expected to have an exhibition centre, a conference facility, hotels with certain standards of efficiency, cleanliness and service, restaurants of a particular range of quality, a selection of the big touring entertainments plus an opera house and a ballet company, the latest Hollywood films, a sporting venue capable of hosting international events. But it is also true that each city is expected to deliver a special experience, typically symbolised by an iconic building or engineering feat. The

irony is that iconic buildings like the Petrobras Towers, the Sydney Harbour Bridge or Auckland's Skytower, while distinctive, are interchangeable. Like the individuality of individuals, the specificity of the icon is a component of its typicality.

Big screens, which are increasingly obligatory furniture of global cities, in one sense are a visualisation of just this non-specific specificity of public spaces. As furniture, that is to say considered apart from their content, they announce the arrival of contemporaneity. In their frequent use to connect disparate cities, they reproduce the smoothness of global flows as spectacle, indicating at once the specificity of each terminal screen's location in one particular city, and the fact that all cities are transmissible, and to that extent equivalent. Big screens are in this sense new expressions of an already existing situation. However, it is in their relation to their audiences that they indicate their capacity to do more than reproduce the protocols of global capital flows. At the heart of this relation is the embodied nature of the audience, not only as individual bodies but as a crowd. The invitation to dialogue is only apparently extended to individuals. In fact it is extended to crowds. This level of intervention is effectively actuarial: a matter of a more or less unlikely statistical event, such as a mass sit-down in a public square. Art history and criticism envisages a far more intensive and individualistic experience. In everyday journalism about art, in classic essays like Fried's 'Art and Objecthood', and in Ferlinghetti's line 'In Goya's greatest scenes we seem to see' (Ferlinghetti 1960: 130), the 'we' refers to an individual experience. The well-known if possibly sourceless urban myth that viewers spend only fractions of a second on average is phrased according to something closer to what I want to uncover. This is a statistic derived from a population, not from individual behaviour, still less from an intensity of individual experience. The values of each account of art, the intense and the statistical, rest on different value structures. Both are capable of saying "Dali's lobster telephone is the most popular exhibit at the Tate Modern". But the evaluation implicit in each statement is entirely different. In a more positive light, both accounts distinguish between their forms of value and cash, even when blockbuster shows not only have to count the box-office returns, and turnstile figures but frequently use them in marketing pitches to drum up more trade and sponsorship.

The actuarial mode thus addresses transience as transition, initially as the transit of people through open urban spaces. Such spaces are always artificial, being the scion of a contradiction between the urban and the open. To a great extent such spaces have either lost or never possessed the ritual tracks and pathways afforded by processions and displays of strength. Instead, daily navigation is usually unconscious. What big screens do is intervene quietly in that unconscious navigation, draw-

ing tracks towards them, creating a curve in habitual straight lines. Individually the impact is trivial; collectively it sculpts a new shape out of the aggregate movement of the crowd. It may also slow a walk to a saunter. It is an effect like slow-motion.

And slow-motion itself is a statistical effect brought about by changing the rate of sampling (the shutter speed) or the read-rate (projection speed). Cinematic movement as a whole is a statistical aggregation of moments averaged across time. This is why it is important to realise that the unit of film is not the frame but a cluster of three frames: this one, the one presently vanishing, and the one about to appear, plus the framelines which separate them. In the case of the pixel-based digital screen, a similar truth is unavoidable: the unit is not the single pixel but the array, and the array itself is driven statistically by its refresh rate. Rates of exposure and rates of scanning interlace with the already formidable complexities through which an image, especially a representational one, functions as a sampling of light from the area, and a sampling of its rates of change. That its effectiveness should be likewise statistical is entirely fitting. And this is the platform which allows a public screen to *take place* in a situation without invading existing territories. The screen supplements the organisation of space, so typically organised around civic values, moral laws and the necessity to provide infrastructure for services, production and shopping. The bending of aggregate practices around the screen is then an action entirely in accord with the normal working practices of the space, and yet one which has specific capabilities very different from either the movie house or the art gallery, the domestic TV or, in a certain sense from the mobile screens by which it is surrounded and with which it so often integrates.

That interface is one of the most intriguing aspects of large screens, their ability to integrate with the invisible networks of mobile media. Phone calls and text messages are among the most ephemeral of all media, but they too can have their moment in the sun on large screens integrating SMS text with other screen elements. In that moment, rather like the opportunity to catch yourself and your family or friends on screen, the effect is one of transition from a private unconsciousness (of how we look, how we walk) into spectacle by a magical act in which our private selves evaporate in the reproduction of the camera and the screen, even at the moment at which self most seems to be affirmed by its public election. This new consciousness brings with it a new mode of unconsciousness: one that is proper not to the individual and her desire, but to the crowd and its behaviours.

Truth and Place

The event beckons: the possibility of an outrageous change; the potential for an entirely memorable moment; the capacity to begin a dialogue in the crowd; or a dialogue between crowds. Badiou imagines truth as what emerges suddenly from a situation, more specifically from the void at the heart of an existing situation. The event that beckons is the possibility of such an event: revolution, love, a new mode of art or thought. And yet what has emerged is a half-conscious inhabitation of places which do not quite exist, except as statistical likelihoods that they will be inhabited according to broadly predictable patterns. And yet, always, even in this situation where an aggregate of behaviours constitutes the effect, the event beckons. Can the transitions that accumulate around large screens have anything to contribute to such a truth?

Badiou's theses, even as they refuse the individualism of dominant discourse, still respond to Romantic concepts of art. Artistic or scientific truths are events that open up new vistas, like Schönberg's twelve-tone row. They radicalise the moment of their arrival, demanding extreme commitment and often bitter struggles. Such an imagination of the situation is Romantic in the sense that it recognises as event only what changes the world around it, as Yeats had it, utterly. There seems to be a strong possibility in the case of public screens that such *Sturm und Drang* is no longer a defining characteristic of culture, creativity or perhaps even politics. In its place we find what Scott McQuire calls 'relational space', which 'can only be defined by the temporary position occupied by each subject in relation to numerous others, which suggests that relational space is not easily unified since every subject belongs to multiple matrices or networks that overlap and interpenetrate' (McQuire 2006).

The change involves what Stiegler calls mnemotechnics (Steigler 2003). Globalisation has integrated the technologisation of memory – whose roots extend back to the invention of writing – into the technologies of production and reproduction to such an extent that personal memory is now evanescent. Global databanks are more than prosthetic memory: they are replacing memory, and with it the grounds on which genuine experience can occur. Without memory, experience is robbed of its basis in the actions of recognising the familiar and discovering the new. Likewise, without memory, experience no longer has a basis on which to project the likely outcomes of what it experiences or what it might do in action. The global database, which in the current context can be identified as the technological realisation of control in the statistical management of populations, robs those populations of experience. This vast human memory, once technologised, is the instrument of rule. Indeed, it stands where once the sovereign stood, the derivative of humanity excluding an actual living human or even an elite from standing in the position of rule.

What Stiegler does not observe is that this vast human memory has also its own unconscious, and that that unconscious takes the form of what it excludes, that is the mass of living, breathing human *bodies*. Databases are not only storehouses of past events: they are predictive, extrapolating from past behaviours the likely trends of the nearer or further future. Mnemotechnic control is premised on such projections derived from past behaviours: exactly those past behaviours which it has removed from its human subjects. These statistical likelihoods are its processes and methods, but also its goals, for this is the exclusive language in which it operates. It might appear that terrorism, or shock in more aesthetic forms, would be guaranteed to disrupt the machinery of mnemotechnics. Not so: indeed, such irruptions are not only planned for: they accelerate the pace at which people are ready to sacrifice decision-making to automation, for example automated surveillance systems. If on the one hand this denotes the colonisation of the future by the past (and incidentally erases the possibility of ethics by ensuring that any probable action is already accounted for); on the other it erases the present, as the scene of action. Such is database consciousness, but what is its unconscious like? Structured by its exclusions, the database unconscious is shaped in the material micro-realities of physical sensory existence, in actions where ethical decisions can be performed, and in the present.

What makes this significant is that in the societies of control, we no longer inhabit worlds premised on individuality. Biopower describes “the endeavour, begun in the eighteenth century, to rationalise the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, race.”. Biopolitics “tends to treat the population as a mass of living and coexisting beings who present particular biological and pathological traits and who thus come under specific knowledge and technologies” (Michel Foucault, ‘Security, Population and Territory’ and ‘The Birth of Biopolitics’ in *Ethics*, 67-71 and 73-9). The realities excluded structurally from the database unconscious are no longer those of individuals (a category constructed in a very different media formation to the network world). As the apotheosis of bureaucracacy, the database merely regulates without will or desire. Thus will and desire are also components of its unconsciousness. But such will and desire are no longer individual. Will and desire have already been mapped into public behaviours of voting and shopping, and ascribed to the vestigial individual as beliefs and choices, identities and lifestyles. Here the inner life addressed by auratic art has revealed itself a sham, albeit one still vital in the reproduction of control and capital. The logic of control has at last cured humanity of personal unconsciousness (perhaps at the cost of rational consciousness, a category itself deeply stained with its

history of exo- and endo-colonial genocide). The database unconscious is external, not internal: the microscopic reality and macroscopic unrationality of crowds.

The concept of transient media is intended to help foster a different approach, one which is grounded neither in individualistic acts nor in the sudden event but in subtle changes in the milling of crowds.

Quite what this change of direction might be is hard to imagine. Perhaps it will take the form of Ben Hagger's proposal for slowmodernity; perhaps a ecologically-informed reduction in consumption; maybe a drift out of electronic media or away from automobiles, however unlikely such things might appear to us. The future is the future precisely because it cannot be predicted. The prediction of the future based on statistical modelling drives the actuarial realisation of control as control over time to come. The project of transient media does not resist this control: it proposes alternatives.

Such as locative media. Described by the blog for the 2006 Networked Publics event as "A form of media art that has emerged in the past several years referring to mixed reality projects, often done with more lo-fi technologies, locative media generally tends to converge wireless and mapping technologies such as cell phones and GPS"

(http://networkedpublics.org/locative_media/about_locative_media), locative media at its best offers platforms for the reinhabiting of localities through the use of common devices like mobile phones. In projects like Proboscis' *Urban tapestries* (<http://urbantapestries.net/>), users embed machine-readable memories around where they live. As a team member writes,

The context Urban Tapestries aims for is one in which a community organically records layers of histories, experiences and events that are linked to familiar locations and accessible to everyone. As the name suggests, it aims to knit together many layers of narrative and discourse over the topography of the city. Urban Tapestries seeks to provide a forum for ordinary people to write and remember their stories and share them with others, enabling an alternative to the single authored storytelling in our museums, history books and media. By collecting these stories a community's memory may grow on many levels with a hierarchy defined only by a user accessing what is of interest to them. (Jungnickel 2004)

This is a call for the elimination of unconsciousness in its old, personalised meaning, through a class action of public remembering, of publicising intimacies, of invisibly grafting the walls and pavements with memories of pain and joy, excess and abjection, tenderness and rage. At its most utopian, for example in Ben Russell's *Headmap Manifesto*, the locative media movement sees wireless, nomadic

but place-sensitive media as an alternative to the state, capital and repression of every kind. As the internet leaks into reality, it will transform it. The problem with this utopianism is that the leakage has already taken place, not at the level of users, the imaginary community of network societies, but in the extension of bureaucratic control from the state apparatus to commerce, in the context of the neo-liberal commercialisation of everything. *Urban Tapestries* and similar projects, such as those interfacing big screens with SMS text messaging, are a populist sublation of bureaucratic mnemotechnics, not because they personalise but quite the opposite: because they evacuate the self of all its secrecy, in order to create living, embodied, experienced, public and definitively present scenes, scenes where, at least in imagination, it is still possible to decide and to act, that is to become, once again, but in a newly socialised and externalised form, political, a polis.

Towards a conclusion

The problem with the locative project is neither its utopianism nor its frequent (and possibly deliberately provocative) political naivety (for example Mark Tutters Blimp project for isea07 which deployed surveillance techniques otherwise used by the US right-wing border militia Minutemen). It is rather that it exhibits a certain nostalgia for a local place which in many respects not only no longer exists but in all likelihood never existed in the terms envisaged. Like Peter Ackroyd's book *London: A Biography*, some projects try too hard to embed memories in places which, like the central trope of St Giles in Ackroyd's book, have been all but obliterated by processes of urban blight.

Transient media, the arts of place, have yet to achieve the goal of unpicking the threads of power because they have, to date, for the most part responded to control: most of all by erupting at the strategic place of the present, so unavailable to database consciousness. But to create the present as a site for action, it is not enough to provide the shadow in the projection. Actions which are genuinely so named must be consequential: habitual, predictable, unthought, and most of all regulated behaviours, such as the application of a rule, are not actions at all, because their consequences are entirely known, within the degree of probability projected in digital simulations. But if it is the case that we inhabit or are invited to inhabit a newly public polis in interactions with transient media, a post-individual scene, then action is no longer the outcome of individual will and desire but of what must properly be described as an ecological will and desire.

Mary-Anne Doane proffers an alternative, one that was especially significant in the emergence of cinema. "Contingency", she writes

emerges as a form of resistance to rationalization which is saturated with ambivalence. Its lure is that of resistance itself – resistance to system, to structure, to meaning. Contingency proffers to the subject the appearance of absolute freedom, immediacy, directness. Time becomes heterogeneous and unpredictable and harbors the possibility of perpetual newness, difference, the marks of modernity itself. Accident and chance become productive. Nevertheless, these same attributes are also potentially threatening. Their danger resides in their alliance with meaninglessness, even nonsense (Doane 2002: 11)

The observation is significant, but things have changed. Resistance is now accommodated into control. Productivity – in the form of mass participatory creativity – is the dynamo of Web 2.0's commercial come-back from the dot bomb of the early years of this century. Meaninglessness is no longer the fiefdom of the avant garde, but lies at the heart of contemporary consumerism. Nonetheless, a minor adjustment makes the statement immensely important for transient media. Where Doane takes the contingent as equivalent to randomness, we need to redefine it as contingent upon – the result of past ecologies, to be sure, but implying that future states of the human ecology are in turn contingent upon what we do now.

In an ecology, the consequences of an action are not predictable. That is why we can be responsible for actions: because they have consequences, and those consequences escape prediction and projection. As the unconscious of mnemotechnic machines, the crowd is still structured by what excludes it. In the art of the future, it will be vital to restructure that relationship by assuming the crowd as the unit of consciousness. As we know, however, there is no 'unit' of consciousness: consciousness is not thinkable in less than the face-to-face relation (Levinas), and more properly still in less than social relations. The art of the immediate future, the transient media that are most fascinating in their ambitions, are those that create the grounds not for web 2.0 social networking of vestigial individuals, but for the dialogue between crowds.

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