

Utopian Bodies and Media



Image: N. Coleman, 2014

Imagineries of the Future

Leverhulme International Research Network

Montreal, 21-22 October 2014

Monday 20 October

7pm: Meet in the Delta Hotel lobby for informal drinks
and dinner in downtown Montreal

Tuesday 21 October

From 8.30am breakfast served in the Vivaldi room

9.55am	Welcome by organisers
10.00am	Panel 1
11.30am	Break
11.45am	Workshop 1
12.30pm	Lunch
1.30pm	Panel 2
3.00pm	Break
3.15pm	Workshop 2
4.15pm	Coffee break
4.30pm	Panel 3
6.00pm	END
8.00pm	Dinner at Robin des Bois restaurant (TBC)

Wednesday 22 October

From 8.30am breakfast served in the Vivaldi room

9.30am	Workshop 3
10.30am	Break
10.45am	Panel 4
12.15pm	Lunch
1.15pm	Panel 5
2.45pm	Break
2.55pm	Workshop 4
3.55pm	Coffee break
4.10pm	Panel 6
5.40pm	Concluding discussion
6.00pm	END
	Informal dinner

PANEL 1:

Model(ling) bodies

Dr Nathaniel Coleman

Dr Adam Stock

Workshops

WORKSHOP 1:

Dr Jakub Zdebik

PANEL 2:

Bodies of Data

Delfina Fantini van Ditmar

Dr Jill Belli

WORKSHOP2:

Dr Jill Belli

WORKSHOP 3:

Dr Stefan Koller

PANEL 3:

Prosthetic values

Dr Isabel Pedersen

Prof Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor

WORKSHOP 4:

Tim Waterman

PANEL 4:

Mediating the city

Dr Ufuk Ersoy

Dr Jill Didur

PANEL 5:

Digital Imaginaries

Prof Brian Greenspan

Prof Christina Contandriopoulos

PANEL 6:

Future bodies, future values

Dr Kenneth Hanshew

Prof Claire Curtis

Papers

Dr Jill Belli

CUNY

“Happy Data, Happy Bodies” (presentation)

This presentation builds on my recent work on utopian studies in conversation with what I term “digital happiness”: attempts to assess and maximize well-being using the theories of positive psychology and the methods of big data, sentiment analysis, crowdsourcing, social networking, the quantified self, and biometrics. Over the past year I have presented these efforts to track and triangulate individual internal emotional states, networked virtual data and connections, and real social relations and policies, and critically interrogated these projects’ utopian aspirations, analyzing their aims and methods for instantiating different ways of being and living, of creating both the happy person and the good society in the image of (and from the) raw data of individuals’ emotions. This presentation will extend this research through particular attention to the mediated nature of “digital happiness.” Happy apps and wearable biometric devices, part of the quantified self craze, augment the human body and mediate its experience, knowledge, and potential through both technology and utopian desire. Using a critical digital humanities approach, I will explore digital happiness concretely on technical and methodological levels, interrogating happiness/well-being apps’ use of both active and passive

data to fuel their algorithms; the methods of quantification, semantic analysis, and natural language processing in studies using social media to assess/analyze/improve happiness, well-being, and life satisfaction; how people interact with the technology that is tracking their happiness, and how these users often skew their responses in public, networked settings in order to present versions of their best selves to others. In addition to the bias and problems associated with self-reporting of emotion, already embedded within the positive psychology methodology, digital happiness assumes the transparency and translatability of language/texts and affect/emotions, and undertheorizes how the dynamics of a digital networked space change the way we communicate and connect with others in face-to-face and virtual spaces.

Dr Nathaniel Coleman

Newcastle University

Abstract: The Mediated Utopian Bodies of Vitruvius, Leonardo and Le Corbusier

Standing, as it were, at the intersection of media and the body are two curious representations of the human figure: Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) Vitruvian Man (*Le proporzioni del corpo umano secondo Vitruvio*), 1490 and Le Corbusier's (1887-1965) Modulor Man (c. 1945). Although over 450 years separate the two images, their origins go back even further to the first century BC

Roman architect and theorist Vitruvius (b. c. 80–70 BC, d. after c. 15 BC), most famous for his *On Architecture* in 10 books. In the spirit of Vitruvius, both Leonardo's and Le Corbusier's studies of proportion synthesise the artistic and scientific objectives of the two men, leaning more toward natural science in Leonardo's case and more toward technology in Le Corbusier's. Equally both images are laden with spiritual associations, in particular the degree to which man (the human body) persists as "the measure of all things" (Protagoras), or as Leonardo put it: "the model of the world." These mediated figures (the illustrations introduced above and the artists who made them) offer us a mode for re-thinking the future through the past. For example, if Vitruvius's perfect body was pagan, and Leonardo's was only imaginable as reflecting a divine or cosmic order given by God, Le Corbusier's figure of perfection was as much agnostic as Enlightenment and informed by popular culture: 6 foot tall heroes of detectives novels for example (though Le Corbusier himself was shorter), and a desire to humanize technological production. This paper will consider the generative potential of these figures in imagining utopian bodies into the future.

Professor Christina Contandriopoulos

Université de Québec à Montreal (UQAM).

Interpretation of a corpus of digital architectural renderings from 2001 to 2014: a methodological essay in utopian studies

In the first decade of the new millennium, utopia has once again resurfaced, repositioning itself as a vital

concept within the architectural culture of the 21st Century. In order to reflect upon this “return of utopia,” my presentation proposes to analyse a selected corpus of digital architectural renderings from the last 15 years (2001-2014).

Many leading architectural firms have participated in this new wave of utopian projects with proposals for artificial islands, mountain skyscrapers, urban farms, pig-cities, eco tourist resorts, waste and energy treatment plants, inhabited ruins, off-grid infrastructures, self regulated virtual realities, climatic clouds, new domesticities, and entirely new cities. These projects draw on strong speculative forces that seek to reinvent our lives and environments. Naively or not, they engage the big issues of our time: the dizzying growth of cities and social division, the limitation of resources and land, global contamination and depletion of our ecosystems, as well as the impact of new virtual technologies. Of these recent projects, most are unbuilt - existing as careful digital models and renderings which have been highly mediated in journals and on architecture and design websites. Still, these visions require our consideration. They project images of the future but they also tell us a great deal about our present and ourselves. Just as the “paper architecture” of the past has been both influential and worthy of study, so too are these new digital proposals. They radicalize the hopes and tensions which characterize our relation to the world - perhaps even more so than any of our built architecture.

If we consider these images from an artistic standpoint, like a corpus of images, they open a real methodological

challenge. In the context of the *Inaugural symposium of the Leverhulme International Research Network*, I will present a methodological approach to analyse a selected corpus of recent architectural renderings that flirt with the utopian tradition.

Professor Claire P. Curtis

College of Charleston

Standards of Justice for Human Being and Doing in Kim Stanley Robinson's 2312 and C.S. Friedman's This Alien Shore

To create societies and communities in which bodies live and thrive we need richly detailed accounts of imagined societies and flexible theories of justice with which to evaluate them.

Both Kim Stanley Robinson 2312 and C.S. Friedman's This Alien Shore attempt to rethink what bodies can do and be, by exploring ways of living together among those in different and differently compatible bodies. The novels take place in future spacefaring societies, away from the Earth, and yet struggling with the fact of Earth. Each novel describes radical cognitive and bodily change, primarily chosen alteration in 2312 and primarily environmental in This Alien Shore. In both novels the body, and what bodies can do and be, is a central issue. But how can we evaluate the societies these novels describe?

In this paper I employ Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach (the capabilities are: life, bodily health, bodily

integrity, senses, emotions, reason, affiliation, play, other species, control over environment) to thinking about justice to provide such an evaluative standard. In so doing the analysis addresses some key questions raised by these novels. Whose body will matter? Will there be bodily norms? How will communities confront different bodily abilities? How can we enhance our own thinking about how to live in and among bodies? How does (and should) the idea of the body politic change when our expectations about bodies changes?

Dr Jill Didur

Concordia University

Walk This Way: Curating Botanical Gardens with Mobile Media

This presentation will consider the role mobile media can play in unearthing the complexities of garden design, plant collections, archives, biodiversity, and environmental history associated with botanical gardens. Typically, visitors to public gardens are given maps and guidebooks to help them navigate their way through the various botanical displays. More recently, institutions like Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and the New York Botanic Garden, have replaced these paper based guidebooks with locative media applications such as *NYBG in Bloom* and *Kew Gardens: The Official App*. My paper will discuss the role mobile media can play in recasting garden visitors' relationship to botanic gardens

and their cultural, scientific, and historical legacies. I will present the locative media application I have conceptualized and developed for curating the Alpine Garden at the Montreal Botanical Garden. Entitled *A (Mis)Guide to Alpine Plants*, my mobile media application links features in the garden with a series of faux botanical expedition drawings of plants and alpine scenes, sound files and archival images reflecting on colonial plant hunting memoirs in Asia, and the history of rock and alpine gardening. Rather than provide didactic information about the types of plants contained in the garden, the operation and content of the *(Mis)Guide* places the garden setting in tension with an archive of visual, written, and recorded material related to the history of colonial gardening and botanical exploration in the South and Central Asia. This tension is meant to disrupt the “smooth optics of tourism” (Nixon) associated with gardens, parks and nature preserves, and makes visible the ‘absent-presence’ of an archive associated with botanical exploration and garden history. Through a discussion of the structure and implementation of *A (Mis)Guide to Alpine Plants*, I will consider how mobile media platforms can be implemented in gardens to alter relations between the garden visitor, the botanical archive, landscape, and the environment. SUS Conference participants will be invited to register for the opportunity to test the *(Mis)Guide* in the Alpine Garden at MBG in the afternoon, on Friday, Oct. 24th.

Dr Ufuk Ersoy

Clemson University

The Problem of Metaphor in the Architecture of the Information Age

Much ink has been spilled on the representational quality of architecture. In the early Nineteenth Century, Victor Hugo maintained that once stones used to speak better than texts, but no longer since Guttenberg's invention killed architecture. Hugo's longing for a storytelling building inspired the architect Henri Labrouste to treat solid surface as a blank page and to build a historical fiction. In the information age, a similar representation problem has come to surface. This time, the murderer seems to be digital media, and the desire is for virtual reality. Unsurprisingly, since the turn of the millennium, a rising dream of making buildings in the shape of visual media tools has impelled countless architects to treat the outer surface of their buildings as a flat screen. In many places, flashing, constantly changing electronic walls convert the city into a techno fantasy to be watched at nights. At first sight, this approach may seem to achieve Aristotle's account of mimesis as an "act of creating one thing to be another thing." But, in a closer look, it is possible to see that screen-like buildings manifest an ontological problem by relegating "being" to "looking like." This essay aims to question what architecture can represent in the age of information with reference to

Paul Ricœur's "Architecture et Narrativité" (2002). Two other subsidiary but equally important questions around which the essay will revolve are: Can architects devise buildings as prostheses that expand their inhabitants' way of seeing the world? If they can; then, can these prostheses associate "the micro-scale of the body" with the "macro-scale" of a global world view and transform the built environment into a space of hope that David Harvey imagined at the dawn of the information age?

Delfina Fantini van Ditmar

Royal College of Art, London

Observers in Smart Cities, a Cybernetic Entrance.

In the era of *smart* cities and The Internet of Things, much is said of an *intelligent* infrastructure. In this context, the paper aims to highlight the relevance of considering the human beings in the design of the technological systems by bringing cybernetics into the subject as an alternative of a consumer-passive perspective. Cybernetics in contrast of an AI approach, evolved from a "constructivist" view of the world (von Glasersfeld 1987) where objectivity derives from shared agreement about meaning, and where information (or intelligence for that matter) is an attribute of an interaction rather than a commodity stored in a computer (Pangaro, 2004).

In relation to the potential of urban technologies, the paper proposes a cybernetic approach beyond automatised and efficiency, where the observer is taken into account (second order cybernetics). Based in human-centred design and the idea of dwelling in this new era of connectivity, the paper will have a focus in questioning the space for our points of view in the field of future technological innovations.

Professor Brian Greenspan

Carleton University

Utopia is Elsewhere: Just Follow the Crowd

No figure has been more central in recent years to mainstream social media and critical social theory alike than that of the crowd. Often thought of as a modern trope belonging to the dark past of *fin-de-siècle* social theory, the crowd, mob or Multitude remains the primary articulation between bodies and media in our digitally networked society. Yet, neither classic crowd theory nor recent post-Autonomist thought offers much understanding of the role of technology in forming crowds and mediating ideas, trends and affects. Whether explained as a spreading contagion or meme, or by reference to an equally suspect “immanence” that simply “emerges” through biopower, the crowd remains a mystified and im-mediate presence in most accounts.

Even the utopian tradition, with its communal and collective orientation, offers surprisingly few compelling images of crowds. After all, crowds are unruly, while the

classical utopian citizen conforms to the utopian social type as described to a lone traveller by an individual guide, which is why most utopian cities, from Bacon's Bensalem to Bellamy's future Boston, appear so empty. Fredric Jameson writes that "[t]raditional narratives have never been much good at conveying the collective (save in explosive punctual moments of war or revolution)." It's only in these rare explosive moments that the crowd asserts its transformative presence in utopian (or dystopian) literature, often alongside images of new media or speculative technologies.

Part of the problem in representing the utopian dimension of crowds involves the medium of print narrative, which is unsuited to the representation of large collectivities, utopian or otherwise. Cinema does better at rendering crowds in many respects, as Walter Benjamin observed. Yet, even he anticipated a future narrative technology more suited to the task, a medium capable of rendering the embodied experience of crowded urban life in all of its aleatory shocks, passions, and *mésalliances*.

My talk will explore the potential for site-specific "locative" media to mobilize bodies and galvanize crowds--if not to represent them--in ways that are hopeful and progressive. More than just a tool for wayfinding or generating flash mobs, locative media have the utopian potential to lead users into enervating distractions and temporary affinities with other embodied subjects that other networked technologies deny. I will explore several applications that explore the potential of locative and augmented reality media for

enabling collectivities, and situate them in relation to various attempts at crowdsourcing within social activism and digital humanities scholarship.

Of course, if media archaeology teaches us anything, it's that the most radical and promising social technologies are often quickly forgotten. I will argue that locative media, far from representing the future of crowd technologies, are destined for obsolescence. Moreover, I will suggest that their transformative power rests precisely in our ability to see these technologies as the soon-to-be forgotten pre-history of a communal future that's yet to come.

Dr Kenneth Hanshaw

Regensburg University

Being Human in Czech Fictional Futures

Virtual reality and cyberspace have become common place notions of alternative spaces which free humans from the confines of their physical bodies to finally overcome the dichotomy of body versus mind. While anglophone explorations of these technological advances in science fiction literature and films, which often see possible futures in alternative space as dystopian enslavement rather than eutopian emancipation, for example in *Matrix*, are well-researched, this paper shifts the focus to untranslated and unstudied Czech science fiction texts to glean how the potential for cyberspace may possibly be envisioned differently. Long before the

Energiewende and the German party *Die Piraten* promised to transform the political process with liquid democracy, Vlastimil Podracký's *The Last Man and his Friends [Poslední člověk a jeho přátelé]* (2008) explored how virtual reality could contribute to solving these same problems of dwindling resources and greater democracy in a 32nd century Earth and speculated on the step into cyberspace's negative side-effects on humankind. By viewing *The Last Man* against the backdrop of other Czech science fiction texts that also deal with humankind's possible futures, it shall be argued that the dystopian fears are not particular to virtual reality, but repeat many of the same arguments against artificial beings and express a desire for a new spirituality to confront the worlds of material and technological wonders.

Dr Isabel Pedersen

University of Ontario Institute of Technology

**"Someday We May Be Surfing With Our Eyes Closed":
Bionic Contacts, Transhumanism, and Myth**

Amid fifty celebrated innovations – such as invisibility cloaks, smog-eating cement, and sunscreen for plants – *Time* magazine named "Bionic Contacts" one of the best inventions of 2008. *Time* sums up the ingenuity of the invention in the brief caption that follows: "The University of Washington's Babak Parviz has created a prototype 'bionic' contact lens that creates a display over

the wearer's visual field, so images, maps, data, etc., appear to float in midair. The lens works using tiny LEDs, which are powered by solar cells, and a radio-frequency receiver." Instead of using smartphones or tablets, the public was wooed by the idea that everyday digital communication might be performed using a contact lens. Images of superhuman abilities were evoked. *The Terminator (Terminator)*, *Geordi La Forge (Star Trek: The Next Generation)*, and *Steve Austin (The Six Million Dollar Man)* all came to mind in an instant, each with his own unique version of augmented vision. Six years later, as Google acquired the technology and began to secure patents in 2014, popular news surrounding the bionic contact lens peaked again. On April 22, 2014, *Vanity Fair* published an article called "Move Over, Google Glass; Here Come Google Contact Lenses," launching a frenzy of popular interest. Today, the bionic contact remains an imagined future; it still only exists as an inventor's prototype and is not available to the public in any capacity. In the eyes of the popular press, however, the graphic depiction of the lens is mobilized as a tangible reality – that our imagined future is imminent.

Little or no critical dialogue surrounds the emergence of bionic contact lenses and the social, medial, and cultural issues it raises. Responding to this absence of critical engagement, we have launched a case study that explores and interrogates the rhetorical and discursive means through which the imagined future of the bionic contact lens has been rationalized and celebrated. In this work, we take as our premise the notion that rhetoric functions in current mainstream digital discourses to support transhumanist ideology in subtle but meaningful

ways. The theoretical model that we employ combines the conceptual perspectives of Michael Hyde, Roland Barthes, and Mackenzie Wark, whose influences intersect in effective and revealing ways. First, we extend Michael Hyde's notion of "perfection" to define transhumanist ideology in rhetorical terms as the zeal "for scientific and technological progress as the ultimate means for perfecting humankind". Second, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of "myth" has served as the model to explain how discourses instantiate a latent transhumanist ideology. And finally, we draw on MacKenzie Wark's "disintegrating spectacle" to explain participation in the era of network culture. We propose to extend our research to interrogate the notion of the bionic contact lens, not only through critical interrogation of the discourse, but also through exploration of fictional allusions, specifically questioning the notion of "bionic" for its liberatory potential to counterbalance the celebratory.

[NB: *This is a collaborative project with Kirsten Ellison, University of Calgary*]

Dr Adam Stock

Newcastle University

Disciplining the body? Imagining futures in the humanities

The accepted narrative of the advent of interdisciplinarity is that the solidification of disciplinary boundaries during the late Enlightenment led to the development of discrete bodies of knowledge. These disciplines were

jealously guarded for the next two centuries and policed by such means as discipline-specific terminology. In the heady days of postmodern theory in the late 1980s, 'interdisciplinary' was coined but not taken seriously until a decade or more of its practice led to it becoming a 'buzzword' that is now *de rigueur* for any funding application. But can 'interdisciplinarity' be rescued from this instrumentalised use, and how can we within the *Imagaries of the Future* network integrate our understandings of our various discipline-informed objects of knowledge? Here, I challenge some of the assumptions about the history of working between and across disciplines, and I then propose to lead a discussion around the concept of the social body as a means by which we may begin to think about how we interact from various disciplinary and geographical backgrounds in order to develop our scholarship.

Professor Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor

Penn State University

"Becoming Plastic: "Impregnated by Wonder" and Other Science Fictions

The history of plastic in modern culture is receiving increasingly frequent and sophisticated critique, as we come to realize the extent to which we are in the grips of a petrocultural hegemony. In the first part of this talk I revisit a little noticed essay dating from beginning of what many now call "the Plasticene Age": Roland Barthes's

"Plastic," included in his classic *Mythologies* (1957). Barthes drills down to the myth of power and ingenious invention, in the creation of wholly artificial material designed to "replace nature." The essay's surprising and disturbing tropes of birth, reproduction and replication point toward the ages-long aspiration of man-kind: to achieve a second nature literally, through technology, and in "his" image. Incorporating concepts of neuroscience unknown to Barthes, Malabou sees the *concept* of plasticity as embracing the work of *making meaning* (in the process of taking form) and of *resisting meaning* (in the potentiality for deforming, reforming). These are the "virtues" of plastic: that is, creativity, repair, and resilience. Malabou can claim without irony, which Barthes could not, that plasticity *is life*. Life as becoming. Furthermore, plasticity "embodies" a principle of temporality, such that new forms, new meanings, new concepts, even new bodies, can emerge along with new, or at least possible, futures. The talk closes by considering these philosophers' exploration of the plasticity's entangled nature as both conceptual and material with notions of freedom, futurity -- and utopia.

Workshops

Dr Jill Belli

CUNY

Moving Beyond Happy Data: Building Radically Transformative “Apps” for a More Utopian Future

Martin Seligman briefly outlines “positive computing” as using technological means and methods to “go beyond the slow progress in positive education to disseminate flourishing massively” (*Flourish* 94), and positive psychologists, data analysts, coders, and policy makers regularly invoke the utopian possibilities of both technology and happiness as they collaborate for salvation on a grand scale: the H(app)athon Project hacks happiness in order to “save the world”; video gamers and virtual reality developers (in Jane McGonigal’s words) create their products to “change the world”; computer scientists offer their “Hedonometer” to measure, and therefore “improve or understand” well-being more completely; and the newly launched social network “Happier” will help “you feel freaking awesome.” However, as I argue, digital happiness can function conservatively, teaching us to be certain types of people in pursuit of the good life without consideration that its notions of the “good” are not morally universal but inextricably bound to particular ideological assumptions, cultural contexts, and interpretations of what is positive, valuable, and desirable. How might we radicalize these apps’ efforts, unmask their roles in maintaining structural inequality, and design “apps” aligned more squarely within the utopian impulse? What if we shift our gaze from a “happy” app, to a “utopian” app? What would this

app measure? What would it promote? What would its users (the utopian, rather than happy, bodies) do? How could we teach and disseminate utopian flourishing by technological means? Following the presentation I will give at this symposium (which will ground “digital happiness” theoretically), this workshop will be an interactive, experimental session in which participants creatively, collaboratively, and actively reimagine what happiness “apps” are, by 1) generating common values and desires to measure/promote; 2) brainstorming how we might track and educate these utopian desires; 3) designing blueprint/prototype for “utopian apps” that reflect these values and desires.

NB: if you have an internet-enabled laptop, tablet or smartphone please bring it with you for this workshop.

Stefan Koller

Technical University of Delft/3.TU.Centre for Ethics & Technology The Hague, Netherlands

Utopias of the Immediate Present: Architecture, Realizability and Epistemic Frailty

This workshop seeks to introduce participants to distinctly ancient forms of utopian thinking made prominent in and by Plato’s *Republic*. After post-war distrust of and disillusionment over Plato’s societal blueprints (Popper, Strauss, Bloom), Plato’s text currently enjoys reinterpretations of a more hopeful if also less ambitious nature. Those reinterpretations form the workshop’s starting point, to launch discussion about *what shape(s) utopian practice could take in architecture* if architecture were to adopt the recommendations

behind these reinterpretations.

Plato's current re-interpreters suggest the following. Utopian reflection, for Plato, is grounded in rather than removed from the present; its emphasis is on the pondering of obstacles to realization rather than dogmatic adherence to an implementation no matter the cost. Utopia thereby becomes less an exercise in knowledge (prediction and control of the future) than a pensive, imaginative journey to reflect on present obstacles towards its own realization. Utopian thinking requires, then, both imaginative rethinking of present possibilities, and concrete engagement of what precisely lies between the present and the realization of those possibilities. As a result, utopia is an engagement with present conditions from a point of view not conditioned by them. Being, then, neither a confident endorsement of a made-up future nor an ideologically motivated rejection of a specific past, Plato's form of utopianism, it is argued, may escape yet Aristophanes' satires of aloof utopianism and Thucydides' impatience for narratives unconstrained by an understanding of *realpolitik*.

After introducing these proposals to rethink utopian forms of reflection, and according special weight to the contrast of imagination vs. knowledge, the workshop queries the ramifications of such forms for contemporary architectural practice. If Plato assumes the body of writing as the test site for his utopian imaginings, the workshop queries if the body of buildings, drawn and built, could similarly become sites of such imaginings. Of special significance here is what Kendra McEwen calls 'the body of writing' in classical architecture. Architects

beginning with Vitruvius began to construe the *corpus* of their writing analogous to how they would conceive the body of their buildings – as requiring foundation, coherence, ornamentation, distinct authorial voice, and much else besides. This workshop, however, will focus less on such compositional *elements* (bodily components and ‘compartition’) than the manner of composition – that is, its attitude and tone, construed as an epistemic practice. Architects’ utopian texts and buildings (historic, present, and imagined) are proposed as forms of utopian practice, where that practice is conducted under epistemic frailty and imaginative freedom.

Tim Waterman

Writtle School of Design

Making Meaning: Minds, Bodies, and Media in Situated and Embodied Education

An ideal education is a practice of futurity. It seeks to prepare the minds and bodies that will construct and inhabit the future rather than merely preparing students for existing roles. Creativity, criticality, and imagination are crucial not just to students of art, design, and the humanities, but to all students in all disciplines.

Design processes are currently being re-envisioned in ways that are analogous to natural processes and ecologies. Envisioning design as a conversation with sites, materials, processes, habitats and habits, and so on engenders the according of agency to places and all they are made of. The increasing interpenetration of social, cultural, and physical worlds with new media ecologies

further underscores the importance of envisioning these processes differently.

Design involves drawing, making, modelling, and simulating. Simulation takes place in the brain (and the mind) during the design process, and the designer rehearses movements and activities in space during simulations using the same neural pathways that they would if they were physically negotiating and interacting with an actual site. In this way we use the 'mind's body' rather than the 'mind's eye'. These simulations needfully mimic not just spaces, forms, objects, and buildings, but situations, emotions, and interactions.

In this workshop, I propose that methods in studio education for design might provide models for teaching in all disciplines to encourage collaboration and co-creation in embodied and emplaced ways, an extension of the do-it-with-others ethic that Brian Eno has called 'scenius'; situated, mediate, and intercorporeal social connectedness.

Dr Jakub Zdebik

Ohio State University

Swarms: Virtual Environments and Theoretical Bodies in John F. Simon Jr. through Deleuze, Simondon and Parisi.

Presentation:

John F. Simon's Jr software art animates virtual environments that seem to exclude the body as we know it. *Swarms*, 2002 are metaphorically visualizations of the movement of thought modelled on herding, flocking and

swarming patterns; *alife*, 2003 consists of diagrammatic models of ever changing virtual environments; or *ComplexCity*, 2000, where Manhattan's cityscape is digitally merged with a Mondrian-like map, articulating an impossible space: flat, illusionistic, schematic. These environments are not meant to be experienced by an upright, gravity bound body that has dictated the orientation of representational art since the perfection of perspective in the Renaissance, but rather these are environments made of patterns, schemas and stylized data that require Deleuze's Body without Organs, Simondon's biologically determined non-visual notions of the image and Parisi's notion of contagious architecture to fully inhabit. These three authors, each in their own way, advance a theory of the body beyond representation. Deleuze's BwO is an abstract network of rhizomatic connectivity, Simondon postulates non-visual images independent of representation that are based on pre-perceptive patterns and biological mechanism of a schematic body; finally, Parisi looks towards algorithms and enactivism to theorize a collective body. With this paper, I propose to open a discussion about mapping of abstract spaces and their representation in digital art.

Workshop:

The workshop that follows the presentation will revisit Deleuze and Guattari's familiar introductory chapter of *1000 Plateaus* about the rhizome as a way of searching for images of spaces proposed by the philosophers and connecting them to works by various digital artists. By focusing on "Rhizome: Introduction" in the context of digital art, the workshop will seek to determine if and how Deleuze and Guattari's influential concepts can be

applied to artworks dealing with space in relation to networks, algorithms, connectivity and virtuality. Apart from the concept of the rhizome, we will explore how notions such as maps, assemblages, swarms, environments, multiplicities and abstraction, among others, can be considered in the light of artists such as Kerbel (utopian/dystopian gardens); Josh On (interactive corporate networks); Arcangel (nostalgic utopian environments); Klima (bio modelling of markets); Fry (algorithmic aesthetics); Bartholl (internet mapping); and, of course, Simon. This workshop will allow us to reexamine an influential, oft used, oft misused, text in detail in the context of space in contemporary art; to think about the changing nature of images; to visualize different types of maps; and to explore different manifestations of spatial representations. The main workshop activity will be textual analysis and visual analysis, attribution of textual material to visual material and discussion.



The Leverhulme Trust
