

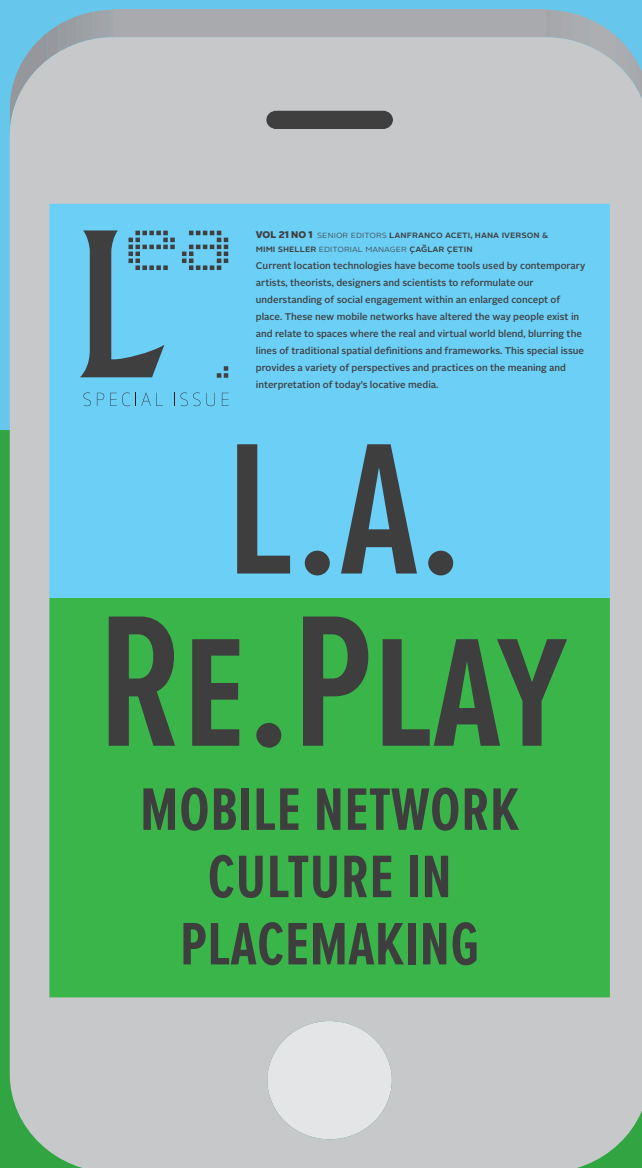
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SPECIAL ISSUE

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Current location technologies have become tools used by contemporary artists, theorists, designers and scientists to reformulate our understanding of social engagement within an enlarged concept of place. These new mobile networks have altered the way people exist in and relate to spaces where the real and virtual world blend, blurring the lines of traditional spatial definitions and frameworks. This special issue provides a variety of perspectives and practices on the meaning and interpretation of today's locative media.



City... Creativity... and Measure...

by

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City. Metropolis. So many associations come in a blizzard of iterations, details, context and history.

Los Angeles is to some akin to a James Dean poster, a Marilyn Monroe stamp, a short hand for some lost beauty held like the clichéd insect in amber. This city is of its past, of the resonance from the Hollywood of lore, of the stars having meals at the long literally beheaded Brown derby, of this semiotic ghost song. This Los Angeles is skinned with black and white photos, pockmarked with shots of Bunker Hill, as well as groomed with long past film shoots and the early 20th century's utopic notion of future and freeway along with the wrinkles and wear of what long has become. This city wears its glittering past like a mask.

There is another Los Angeles, let us pull this one from the barrel of variations now. This is a city of burning hillsides that shower embers in Santa Ana winds and may race to the ocean and scorch all in its path. It is of earthquakes twisting and bending buildings in some violent revision by brute force and it is the great looming spectre of the "big one" on the San Andreas fault. This place with its sunny days is even of mudslides and weak tornadoes; this is the dystopic punished

ABSTRACT

This essay was the intro speech for the panel talk "The City / Space and Creative Measure" at Art Center, Los Angeles on February 24, 2012.

schadenfreude scape that some see riddled with porn shoots, dull traffic snarls, sky painted with smog.

This bundle of miles and city planning and years surely must be the punished city, the flaky shallow photo image of a random eccentric at Venice beach laid alongside a brutal high speed car wreck on the 101. This is the semiotic of some Dionysian history that has led to the El Niño storm that floods the landscape and blows lattes from the hands of Angelyne in her pink corvette and Keanu Reeves on a shoot. This city reeks of land grabs and busted dams, of water rights disputes and Rampart scandals.

Another Los Angeles is a hundred towns humming along with great rich diversity under some invisible umbrella construct of a big city. This iteration lives under the notion of freeway's vein: a great cold unfeeling megalopolis, the modern city as some great steam punk beast running on gasoline and arcs of cement and rebar for miles. The notion rides the same odd ballast as freeway shooting, pit bull attacks and other media darlings plucked from a million things like some lottery winner of chaos. Meanwhile all these small towns run across these miles, alive with local culture and geography and instead really islands to reach by those wicked freeways, that stink of exhaust and miles and modernity.

City. Place. Measure. A map may have guided you here in your car. A map may have guided you here online. A map may have guided you here from a piece of pa-

per or even, gasp, your human memory. A map also holds history and what led to those lines, names, restructuring, even erasures. A city of course is also a beast made of streets, scale, logistics and navigation; but lest we forget, the flaneur was not just a dandy. There is that poetry in walking around this place, any place. Locative media art has not only deep connections to folks like Robert Smithson and land art, but to getting lost, to wandering, and maybe more so to moving with some conviction, some moxie made of eyes open, aesthetics riding along that cold pragmatic measure. Maps also can have venom in those lines: war, "conquest," hoarding of resources, exclusion. As a kid I marveled in a small dirty pool on a family trip at the line that said Nevada/California somewhere almost in the middle. My brother and I swam back and forth and it viscerally felt different depending on which end you bobbed up at, next to a pile of leaves and some grimy tile. Of course this was an artifice, a tourist gimmick, maybe even a gag, but hey, as a kid it was fascinating. That line was so much more. Such can be those seemingly simple map lines. So the city is a hundred things, a thousand, throw in any place holder number.

Context. Prism. Archaeology. Some say cities wear their past like the character of faces, San Francisco proud of every line, some would say a little too proud, while L.A. is a perpetual botox customer. Of course any such statement is a bit broad, but there is something in this subjective stance and the one that would shout it down. Doesn't a place look different upon

arriving, upon leaving? Cities are archives as well as erasure; cities are accumulations, aggregates.

Cities are a basic primer on introductory semiotics. You have the connotative and denotative, you have spaces of multiple purposes and personalities.

We are gathered here to discuss miles and measure, we are here to discuss the fangs in such measure as much as the possibilities of de-fanging the map with art, technology and research. We are here to talk of erased places and illusory assumptions of present as well as to talk of the very narrative a place exudes and elicits. There is the narrative of the past and the narrative of those buildings and streets and layers and what resonates so deeply beyond their simply base function and measure. Tonight will be of space and information and it will be of so much more, of the kaleidoscope of seeing and what may not be initially visible.

GPS is in cars and on phones in this odd, possibly unprecedented, moment of cartographic awareness. This sea change at first of course was written about by some with the well worn verbiage of fad, of avant garde and of the shock of the new. What had been hand held Garmin for hikers and fishermen (and smart bombs of course...hence the old GPS grid...) is now pretty much folded into the cultural lexicon, tidy and familiar.

Avant Garde in military lexicon long ago meant "the front or advance guard", which is interesting in the context of GPS-related art and locative media in our daily lives. This crazy new beast came along and was a subject of fascination and derision, so much like the long progression of avant play with new tools (net, computer, video, camera, etc...) and then began to find more employment, inclusion in festivals and a growing range of works and forms. Is it no longer Avant Garde? Does this matter? Every few months

someone declares new media alive! Or dead! The small flags again in some map, that of academia en masse and the desire for some ripple into critical mass (again an ancient concept of course). Many essays have also trumpeted a new twist in locative media art as the breakthrough, just as many have declared it dead by the same measure or context. And so it goes.

And we come back to location, to maps, and to the past. Over ten years of location aware art and now we have some sort of archive, or do we? We see a clear cooling of that initial lava of earliest experiments into some kind of lexicon, of the dialects within a vocabulary, within a frame, within a confined sense of ...no ... it is not that simple, nor should it be. Smithsonian took art to rocks and soil and form. Yet the Spiral Jetty to some should be left to deteriorate as an organic form, while to others it must be retrofitted to be preserved as it was first seen in physical tribute and semiotic hold. And De Maria's lightning field wasn't only for the rare days a bolt hit just right. It also was to simply wander through, yet must be seen by appointment due to preservation concerns. Context again.

There are to always be archaeological digs, but not just in the soil; conversations and debates and sifting data, be it live or of the past, this is an archaeology, and this is now often of maps, of GPS, of GIS, and of perspectives and voices reflected here. ■

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