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 Jeremy Hight

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 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 a piece of paper 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. That line was so much more. Such a place looks different upon shouting it down. Doesn’t a place look different upon its past like the character of faces, San Francisco proud of every line, some would say a little too proud, and some grimy tile. Of course this was an artifice, a context. Prism. Archaeology. Some say cities wear 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 blizzard of iterations, details, context and history. This 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 wears its glittering past like a mask.

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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. Smithson 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.
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.