

Foreword

Only birds up here to share the view with. I'm looking out across the city from the top floor of the district's tallest building. Perched up here, tiny cars and people move around below like the view in *Sim City 4000*. I could draw a box around the buildings; well positioned for making grand sweeping gestures that capture whole neighbourhoods in their arc. I've been experimenting with this view through surveying the world. Pulling it into an ubiquitous space.

Only the most lofty observation point will do for this, elevated high above all else. The Empire State Building is no good. It shares the clouds with a forest of other skyscrapers. A view from there is smog-washed into black-and-white, spun with the slinking clarinet phrases of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, and with Woody Allen's voice echoing in your ears you've been teleported back down to the streets of Manhattan. Instead, the lookout I've chosen is the Oriental Pearl Tower, Shanghai¹. The "space module", the upper-most spherical structure on the tower, being true to its name: we are conceptually extraterrestrial up here, isolated and freed from the city's grasp, untethered from the streets.

Before me, the city stretches out to the horizon. Roads become lines, buildings reduced to two-dimensional blocks. Everything important is legible from up here, and with the right kind of eyes – or the help of the

1 Visited on the outbound leg of my 2011 installation tour of Beijing, Berlin, London, and New York.

Layar App running on the phone in my pocket – I can make out the location of friends, the hottest nightspots, tourist traps, and 5-star boutique hotels.

I'm here as field-work for my research: exploring both theoretically and viscerally the articulation of two different accounts of the experience of space; *Strategies and Tactics*. I'm trying to answer questions of **the ways space can be inhabited, how emerging technologies are changing these spaces, and why poetic accounts of the city are still so important.**

Strategies and *tactics* are the basis of Michel de Certeau's description of our perception of space, giving consideration to social and psychological aspects of our engagement with it². The *strategic* describes a privileged position of control, which demarcates territory and surveys it, while the *tactical* is everyone else's inhabitation of space.

De Certeau argues that while most people's engagement with the built environment is that of user/consumer, seemingly disenfranchised from the possibility of modifying the fabric of the city, our experience of space is not simply one of passivity. We inhabit space by investing it with our own set of associations and feelings, and can temporarily poach spaces for our own use.

De Certeau likens the *strategic* to a language (and its rules and syntax), and the *tactical* to an enunciation of that language. The formulation of rules of grammar and the cataloguing of definitions of words does not stop the use of slang or the creation of poetry: just as a conversation is the performance of language, space is the gestalt of vernacular spatial practices. "Space is a practised place"³.

I'm not an architect or urban planner, yet somehow I've managed to arrive at this *strategic* lookout. While I'm up here I want to be philanthropic, making use of a set of skills that can help digest and rationalise the world. The "big-picture" lets me coordinate information and strategise. The light-bringer in me – computer scientist, cartographer, disambiguator – wants to make tools to optimise and improve

2 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002). xix.

3 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.

dissemination of information. In my journey up here I saw the treasures of graffiti and ephemeral art and imagine vast archives and maps to share it, make it legible; I passed pot-holes and broken water-mains that could be reported and fixed; witnessed local communities using twitter to coordinate peer-to-peer, spatiality-specific emergency responses⁴; moved through an unique and varied architectural space. Now as an overseer I pick what seem the most appropriate technology platforms – a shareable, collaborative, real-time, media-embedded online map, and a tool-set for reconstructing 3D models from images – and start categorising and adding elements within a digital representation of the world. Far below in the streets, tremors are being felt. My cartography is having consequences I would never have imagined, and by the drafting of a map the living city sits poised to be turned to stone...

But how did I get up here?

Friends and authorities paying attention to my Google Latitude account could tell you in precise detail, facilitated by my lack of privacy qualms and the GPS and sundry other locating apparatus built into my mobile phone. A little line zig-zagging through a map of the city from hotel to restaurant to bar – becoming progressively more co-incident with *Instagram* and *Facebook* posts.

For me though, it felt like emerging from a subterranean journey; a trip through a digestive system of internal cavities formed out of the facades of buildings and strangers' faces. As I moved through my world day-to-day, technology advanced to slowly build the tower and hoist me to the top: the World Wide Web, embedded GPS devices and the widespread use of smart-phones, Google, Geo-tagging, and the collaborative data-sharing platforms of Web 2.0...

Finally arriving at the airport-style security, the high-tech elevator, and the appropriately state-endorsed attendant, I paid my way in with my own contribution to the body of facilitating technologies: a set of tools that simplified and refined the process of constructing 3D models of the world using photographs. I stepped out of the elevator to take in the city and begin plotting my own points.

4 K. Starbird, L. Palen, A.L. Hughes, and S. Vieweg. "Chatter on the Red: What Hazards Threat Reveals About the Social Life of Microblogged Information." 2010. 1

This wasn't the first time I'd had such a view. I remember the time years ago that I bungee-jumped from a crane 100m above Amsterdam: I see the city in miniature foregrounded by my own feet, toes out into the void, extending beyond the industrial non-slip patterning of the metal platform, experiencing a conflict between my rational mind and a very impassioned sense of self-preservation. Jumping into the thick of it the tiny ant-people become flashes of expression, the snaking path of the river becomes a sudden wet kiss (I've just had an intimate experience with whatever unthinkable micro-organisms call the Amstel their home). I get bungeed back to a more reserved distance, then involuntarily drawn in again... Back on the ground the sheer adrenaline lasts for hours and colours my walk through the cobbled streets of people. Everything seems more alive, solid, visceral.

Recently I seem to be up that crane a lot, figuratively speaking. Enjoying de Certeau's voyeuristic "god's-eye-view", and surveying a *strategic* model where, like my first experience, the rational mind prevails. I share the crane with urban planners, strategicians, and proponents of "pedestal architecture". The *Sim City 4000* view all over again, foregrounded this time by the mouse pointer that wheels and dives like a crow, bending the world below in *AutoCAD* or *3D Studio Max*. Someone realises I'm an artist, and the crowd of tyrants surges forward and pushes me from the platform; I hurtle towards the ground, only saved by my bungee attachment to a major academic institution. I slow, and am suspended for a second at street level...

I'm submerged momentarily in the bustle of busy streets, lost in the smells and sounds, and labyrinthine alleys. Each passer-by inhabiting their own poetic river-flow improvised out of the structured language of the city:

The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it

remains daily and indefinitely other.⁵

There are some theorists down here in the thick of it, shouting obscenities at those above, trying to provoke them into jumping down themselves: Juhani Pallasmaa derides them for their delusion – maintained through the history of Western Philosophy – that they are observing from outside of the system⁶; Henri Lefebvre calls them down to take stock of the psychological needs of city inhabitants for mystery and play⁷; Gaston Bachelard reminds them of the power of the oneiric image of the home, utterly ignored from their position⁸; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari take turns calling them fascists⁹...

Then I am yanked back into the sky by the requirement of theoretical critique.

I'm back above the city, unwittingly threatening to kill it through vivisection. I want to contribute my own account, stake my own claims about the meaning and meaningful of the city. Up here those with the right tools have a chance to draw on the same map, happy to be adding their voice to the authoritative account. But this map isn't neutral or disinterested. The Euclidean systems we use to represent geometry are subjective too; invested in a reduction and effacement of real details of the world,¹⁰ even while they "[try] desperately to suppose that the utilitarian and functionalist law of [their] own mechanism is 'natural'".¹¹

This documentation and digitisation of elements of the world is a form of voluntary self-surveillance. Codification using tags, categories, and

5 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

6 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin : Architecture and the Senses*. (Chichester Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008) 15.

7 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. (Oxford, OX, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991) 147.

8 Gaston Bachelard and M. Jolas. *The Poetics of Space*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.) 1.

9 Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. by Brian Massumi (Continuum, 2009) 10.

10 Bruno Latour and A. Yaneva. "'Give Me a Gun and I Will Make All Buildings Move': An Ant's View of Architecture." *Explorations in architecture: Teaching, design, research* (2008): 80-89. 84.

11 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 199.

ratings neatly *enframes*¹² the city into a *strategic* territory that now spans the entire surface of the Earth (referenced through GPS coordinates) which begs the question of the city as something that facilitates optimised, directed engagement – a city demystified, rationalised, and understood through productive logic.

I have come to call this monolithic, homogeneous representation “ubiquitous space”, in reference to its emergence from Ubiquitous Computing¹³ as an ever-present augmentation to our perception of space, its removal of the significance of physical distance to our ability to interrogate points, and its transparency and legibility. Just as de Certeau anticipated in 1980, the use of “rational *technics*” has produced a territory of abstracted data-points “analytically distributed over a space whose essence (even inside the computer) is to be a readable artifact, an object open from end to end to the survey of an immobile eye.”¹⁴

My quotidian spatial practice, the *tactical*, phenomenological inhabitation of space, is being colonised by thinking in ubiquitous space. With the prevalence of GPS, those on the ground are finding it useful to turn their binoculars around and see everything from a distance, isolating themselves from their intimate surroundings: my first few hours as a new arrival to Newcastle, NSW experienced through a calculated route on a map displayed by my phone, as I rushed to arrive at an appointment on time. As Chris Chesher puts it: “Real time information infrastructures such as GPS bring ‘conceived’ spaces into direct real time connection with the ‘perceived’ spaces of everyday life.”¹⁵

The visible consequences can be humorous or tragic. At the whim of GPS systems, drivers barrel through rivers that were once fords, drive the wrong way down one-way streets, plant their 18-wheelers into the arches of low-clearance bridges. The phenomenological differences are more subtle; the rationalisation of the world, fuelled by the seductive promise of getting more from it, or the requirement that we do everything as

12 Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. (New York, Harper & Row, 1977). 19.

13 A. Galloway, "Intimations of everyday life: Ubiquitous computing and the city." *Cultural Studies* 18(2):(2004). 384-408

14 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 199.

15 Chris Chesher, "Converging Mediations of Space in Computer Games and Spatial Navigation Systems." (Paper presented at the The Sixth Australasian Conference on Interactive Entertainment 2009). 1.

efficiently as possible:

The frank abolition of all distances brings no nearness...
Everything gets lumped together into uniform
distancelessness.¹⁶

In consequence, graffiti maps such as mine are sought out by council clean-up crews and used to coordinate the removal of new work, effectively outsourcing (and crowd-sourcing) their logistical work. The folkonomies and peer-to-peer networks formed in emergencies are effective only because they don't rely on cemented hierarchy: their responsiveness and flexibility doesn't survive the translation into militaristic command-control ideologies.¹⁷ Favourite spots and uniquely atmospheric nooks become homogenised commodities in an economy of experience.

The birds sharing my view have fled, scared off by a new arrival. A drone¹⁸ has appeared, to observe me and observe with me. Then another... and another. The authorities have become savvy to this particular vantage point (one in which the self-surveying populous has been filling in gaps in their surveillance). Not just the EICU, but the CIA, the Iranian government... In response, the beginnings of barricades are being constructed in the streets of *ubiquitous space* ("La barricade ferme la rue mais ouvre la voie"), but the worms are out of the can. Will they go back in? Probably not.

So I tie my bungee to the guard-rail, wave the drones goodbye, and take a leap...

In both Deleuze and Guattari's, and de Certeau's account, the *strategic*, arboreal view is associated with the scientific approach; reducing and isolating variables – and the observational perspective itself – to form a

16 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (Perennial Classics, 2001)165.

17 L. Palen and S.B. Liu. "Citizen Communications in Crisis: Anticipating a Future of ICT-Supported Public Participation.", (Proceedings of the conference Emergency Action: 2007) 733

18 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle. See Wall, T., and T. Monahan. "Surveillance and Violence from Afar: The Politics of Drones and Liminal Security-Scapes." *Theoretical Criminology* 15, no. 3 (2011): 239-54.

linear relationship of cause and effect. The *strategic* view of space similarly produces propositions, such as the City, which "like a proper name, thus provides a way of conceiving and constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties".¹⁹

These isolatable, interconnected properties are the concern of Bureaucratisation and Rationalisation, identified in Max Weber's analysis of modern capitalism as the process of tracking and recording progressively smaller details of the world, to allow calculations and optimisation of the efficiency of tasks.²⁰

In the late 1950s the Situationists International formed and began challenging the "capitalist degradation of the life of people" exercised through a mechanistic *strategic* account of life. They encouraged "play, freedom and critical thinking"²¹ that created alternative accounts of space, such as Psycho-geography, described as:

A whole toy box full of playful, inventive [tactics] for exploring cities...just about anything that takes pedestrians off their predictable paths and jolts them into a new awareness of the urban landscape.²²

Down from the totalising view of the world, a multiplicity of spatial stories are told as annotated tours rather than as a unified map. The map is a static representation of space, but the tour is full of timely encounters, and temporary "poaching" of territory. For a brief moment, a corner of *ubiquitous space* was used by protesters to track police movements²³, and twitter allowed the coordination of Iranian protests and the Arab Spring²⁴ (an example of the "temporary" in action within Hakim Bey's description of *Temporary Autonomous Zones*²⁵). For

19 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 94.

20 M. Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (Routledge, 2001). 223.

21 Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA, Mit Press, 1999) 5.

22 J Hart, "A New Way of Walking." *Utne Reader*: (2004)1.

23 For Example "LIVE Protest Map", <http://goo.gl/maps/vNx1D> and "Sukey - Keeping Demonstrators Safe, Mobile, and Informed". <http://www.opensukey.org/>

24 Alex Comminos, "Twitter Revolutions and Cyber Crackdowns: User-Generated Content and Social Networking in the Arab Spring and Beyond." *Association for Progressive Communications* (APC) (2011): 1-18.

25 Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, (Autonomeia, 2003) 100.

Deleuze, the May 1968 Paris protests, heavily influenced by the Situationists, were a wake-up call to the weakness of such static maps of political territory: Marxist philosophy failed to explain the diverse make-up of the protesters, or the operation of politics beyond class structures.²⁶

As I reach the perigee of my bungee, coming closest to the ground, Deleuze and Guattari rally me to cut the cord. De Certeau describes the operation of *tactics*, but Deleuze and Guattari provide a manifesto for *tactical* critique: Write rhizomatically. Have short-term ideas. Form new assemblages of concepts that can become deterritorialised and transformed through lines-of-flight into other ideas²⁷. Perform schizoanalysis rather than psychoanalysis: not a reduction to the single semiotic system, but a splitting into a multiplicity of accounts that brings out new "assemblages of enunciation"²⁸, like Italo Calvino's Marco Polo exploding Venice into a hundred parallel stories²⁹.

A masked philosopher approaches to convince me of the place of generative critique, as I'm suspended, captivated at the end of my cord:

I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgements but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes— all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms.³⁰

De Certeau speaks of the deterritorialising power of spatial practice: how a simple act like walking can shake the *strategic* narrative of the city. The potential for change comes from *tactical* spatial practices that jolt

26 C. Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze* (Allen & Unwin, 2002) xxxiii.

27 Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy? European Perspectives*. (New York: Verso, 1994) 16.

28 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. 19.

29 I. Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (Vintage, 1997)

30 Michel Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher." *Ethics. The essential works 1* (1997) 323.

and seduce: "Like a peddler, carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice." At any moment the walker can break from convention, can (for example) become a *traceur* taking a parkour line-of-flight across buildings that is "neither foreign nor in conformity" with the "proper" meaning of the city.³¹

With Deleuze and Guattari's '*schizzors*' I cut myself from my attachment to the tower, and commit to being a provocative *tactical* storyteller; an artist taking my own turns of phrase through the city.

31 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 101.