

Locative Media, Pervasive Computing, Walking, and the Built Environment

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Walking is not a “dying everyday practice,” to quote the call for papers for the Locative Media Summer Conference. Rather, walking—upright moving around—is a fundamental human activity: it is the basis for human concept making ability and rational thought. Walking is also inherently territorial and tactical; it arises along with a range of points of view. Walking will always be with us, the only question is in what forms. Pervasive computing and locative media projects pose new questions about the purpose and power of walking in the built environment.

This paper explores how, by juxtaposing physical space as we presently use it with the abstraction and immediate usefulness of digital technologies, we begin to understand the features common to both manual and digital modes—we better understand the human attachment to space and place. By examining particular places in which people walk, such as shopping malls, golf courses, and airports, I consider possible futures for walking and digital technologies related to place. I describe the relationship between manual and digital spatial practices and performances.

Artists and citizens working with digital media in the pedestrian and public spaces of the city value the juxtaposition of *maneuvers*—of *hand labor*—and the potentially faceless power and sublime promise of technology. Many locative media artists refer to Situationist ideas, and Michel de Certeau’s pleasant variations on them, as inspirations for their work. At heart, many such practitioners are concerned with authenticity. Whether the content is about technology or the everyday, locative media artists often work along the seam between the fear of an abstract, alienating, hegemonic dominance, and the humanistic appeal of a phenomenological, inspired, subversive counter-dominance. This duality and interplay parallels the very idea of local/global and, significantly, the recent trend in practices of environmental design to reconcile manual and digital modes of being, understanding, and representation. At its core, locative media as performance art involves an effort to humanize technology and render it more useful.

This study extends my recently published research on intentional walking projects undertaken on the island of Manhattan ([Walking the City: Manhattan Projects](#), *Places*, Spring 2006, and “City Walking: Laying Claim to Manhattan,” in Proceedings of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture Annual Meeting, 2006). In this research, each intentional walking project illuminates how we might understand territorial practices and local negotiations with place. Walking around the shore re-consecrates the city and reestablishes human connection with the environment; walking every street in the grid unearths memory; walking to take stock of the urban forest claims to make the city a paradise; walking to witness surveillance cameras protests their proliferation; walking a psychogeographical drift, or *détourning* a city map makes a surprising poetic experience out of the raw material of the city. In light of the categories local/ global, tactical/ strategic, quotidian/ territorial, the intentional walks, some of which are mediated through digital technologies, have significant implications for building radical communities united by what Edward Soja refers to as a “shared spatial consciousness.”

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Ben Jacks, Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture and Interior Design, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA, teaches Design and Human Behavior, Research Methods, and studio design. He earned a BA from the University of Chicago in 1983, and a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1986. A licensed architect, he practiced for fifteen years prior to beginning an academic career. Selected publications include: "City Walking: Laying Claim to Manhattan," in Doug Kelbaugh and Kit McCullough, editors, *Writing Urbanism: a City Reader*, (London, UK: Routledge Press, 2008, in press); "Walking and Reading in Landscape," *Landscape Journal*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, Fall, 2007, in press); "Walking the City: Manhattan Projects," *Places: A Forum of Environmental Design*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 18:2, June 2006; "Motion, Stillness, Architecture, & Poetry," in proceedings, Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) Central Fall Conference, Detroit Mercy School of Architecture, October, 2005; "The Walker in the Work: Corporeality and Celebrated Contemporary Architectures," in proceedings, ACSA East Fall Conference, Syracuse University, October, 2004; "Reimagining Walking: Four Practices," *Journal of Architectural Education*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press) 57:3, February, 2004. He is currently writing a book about walking and the built environment.