Move photons not people

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A Beginning
This presentation begins with the idea of international exchange without journeys, residency without residence, studio spaces within studio spaces, work happening on and through the screen, and moving photons not people as part of a planetary strategy for a sustainable and survivable future.

Critiques
The discourses concerning "the establishment of the space of virtual reality", and that "are engaging, *a contrario*, in the eclipsing of the real" (Virilio 2005, p.3,), are made possible by what Virilio calls electro-optics, that have contributed to this speeding up of "the various means for the representation of the world". However, at the level of our experiments and practice this technoculture is actually running at the speeds of everyday life, the speed of cognitive activities, nervous systems, the speed of making something, organizing a conference, writing a paper even, where the richness of texture is experienced best when everything slows down to an extended time in multiple spaces. Perhaps this proposal is counter-intuitive to the time space compression Virilio is so anxious to critique, but it is where this paper chooses to begin.

Detours
European travel writers, such as Théophile Gautier, who reacted against the cult of speed, are found in a context of resistance. "The flaneurs languid gait on the boulevards was an attempt to decelerate the modern world, by reducing quick walking to a slow crawl." (Kiberd 2009, p.75) This paper proposes using the growing everyday stuff called video streaming to shape new types of travel and engagement with local realities in this virtual space that is an actual experience. These "journeys" are made of "steps" that go forward and backward in the exchange of questions. Questions that are formulated take time and questions that are seemingly spontaneous "happen" out of curiosity, but require other times, sometimes longer, sometimes instantaneous, in the formation of responses that drive the process. The texture of the particular consciousness that happens in this e-dialogue is soaked in low-definition information. Screens are formed from pixels, chunks, lumps of colour, texture, that are more sculptural than filmic, multi-sensory, where the sound space becomes the warp and the weft that holds it all through the breaks, holds attention amongst the fuzzy images, and as we strain to listen, de-code etc, we become profoundly engaged.

Example Foregrounding Guest/Host Interactive Joint/Knowledge/Learning Methods
The example presented took place on 18 March 2010 at the Art & Design Academy Liverpool John Moores University and the am space gallery Shanghai (Courtenay, 2010). It was called Your Morning My Evening/Your Evening My Morning in Shanghai and presented in Liverpool as a Liverpool – Shanghai cultural exchange boot fair. This was a public happening using skype, a meeting of strangers, with participants instinctively behaving in ways that correspond to protocols of conduct that preclude a sense of vulnerability, of exposure. In occupying this shared space we depend on the kindness of strangers. The mutually experienced x-ray revelations generated require a large measure of hospitality, and, as that measure is given, it creates a space of engagement, listening, and above all a climate of tolerance and civility.

Negotiations
When exchanges are interrupted by flow of information and data fluctuations, grief comes with anxiety, so effective behaviours are ones that roll with the rhythms of the flow, accommodate breaks as breathing spaces, chats between participants that can update input. This international dimension provides a crucial spur to waking up and discovering an anti-environment because translation is a gift that has its own time/space effects, a fertile ground for generating new ideas. Umberto Eco's book Mouse or Rat? (2003) is subtitled "translation as negotiation". Building up a sense of contexts, local to local, involves sharing, file sharing, collaborative editing, two different posters advertising the same event with two different styles and messages that are then also shared. So, slow communication generates phatic gestures, looking after each other as guest/hosts, valuing this alternative pace. Gifting is performance,

a dramatized exchange, usually signifying the arrival at a nodal point in the duration of an activity where the spectre of social obligation begins to take shape, and actions are necessary to equalize the field of relations between host/guests and guest/hosts. Part of this "gifting" behaviour includes the co-opting of objects, presented, displayed and offered, without strings attached, part of the "tracking" of a new pathway in the network, through the passing along of goods as well as images and evocations.

Observing

Consciousness is embodied, and the dance of thought itself cannot be separated from the whirlygig of perceptions of the place you are in, or move through, or scan, or touch and smell. The pace of e-dialogue between artist and artist, or artist and audience, or artist and participant observer, or actor and observant participant (Thrift, 1996), is necessarily slow in this pixellated space, this space of translation, and of endless coding, de-coding and en-coding, as rhythmic in its way as the "in" and "out" of breathing.

Publication

The public dimension present is important to emphasize, as it drives the reflective struggle, knowing what we know and what we don't know, about ourselves, others, the other places, and in the end, where we are situated. Thinking about spaces and the "publicness" we are seeking to instigate, helps explain the kinds of place the e-dialogues have occupied, or the opportunities and logistics that determine where they have taken place. These include defunct retail premises functioning as temporary venues, side rooms of museums, a conference room, gallery spaces, with or without exhibition, lobby spaces, street café, street kiosk, and expo pavilion. Using the available technology is part of the determinate context, but there is also a sense in which these places are locations that have a quality of being on the street, in-between the street and some other connected space that is more formally identified as a place of cultural meaning, for instance; a performance space, a cinema, a gallery, a theatre or concert hall. Where WIFI operates creates a pool of communication potentials.

Questioning Representations

In terms of the key differentiation for this kind of e-space from the web based social networks, is that social networking sites are all about securing domains of profiles, representations and mis-representations, securely and not so securely bound to the personal and private. This is a galaxy of in-crowds. We are usually "at home", in a private sphere, as users of social networking sites, which play on the narcissism of in-crowd dynamics, so, perhaps it is in the contrasting scope of other possibilities, operating in real places, actual and virtual geographies, opens up into the dynamics of making an out-crowd. This project is about using the same technology to get out more, get out of our skins, burst the bubbles of our assumptions and pre-conceptions.

Street Talk

Our experience tends to indicate that the relations in connecting people and places tend to remain flat whenever we connect (Latour, 2005 pp 179 -180). There has always been a sense of curiosity about the other place that is perhaps connected to the equal relationship that is present in this shifting connectivity between cafe and museum, street corner and studio, pub and apartment, small gallery space and lobby. This wonder leads to mapping, file sharing, moving a laptop into adjacent spaces inside and outside to show what's round the corner. Sometimes it leads to work, a collective activity, interactive work between people based on questions that come out of the imaginings about the other locality, whilst the side by side 'thereness' and 'hereness' of these spaces already suggests a two way traffic, a dialogue. Links can also involve actors who in the one local context are figures of national or international repute, power or influence, and hobnobbing with actors with a non-institutional and quasi-anonymous grounding in the other locality.

Users Views

The point of connection, in our case the video link, produces a heightened sense of the specific locality in which it takes place, e.g. the new campus for art and design at John Moores University, Liverpool, where the proximity to the Metropolitan Cathedral connects the

space to a landmark in the city, a point of orientation for the project, a point of reference that is included, and shared in the e-dialogue. Mapping these points of reference contributes to the formation of a shared cognitive map. The "magic" of this type of locale is that for those who are in the "other place", seeing on their screen(s) what is, and what is going on behind us, like the weather, changing light and so on, adds a huge amount of context and presence, qualities of a "happening". Skyping to Shanghai in our morning means we see their evening. Looking beyond the space to a window that shows the spaces of the city we see their evening fall.

Wandering
Actors and activities go together, and consciousness and thinking is probably more like a mental dance, where breathing and movement are in tune with the flux of performance. Meeting, wondering, listening to voices, reading tonalities, inter-acting, translating, looking and reading faces, is like dancing around and between things, adapting to the spaces, avoiding bumps, and reaching out to make contact, and, maybe to hold on to something for support in what feels like a balancing act. This way of actually exploring what process and activity are, including the idea of completion with the effort of holding on as a movement could be a way to develop new mapping techniques in this kind of spatial situation.

X-position
"Travel not books" says Foucault (2004) and this is the point of international exchange during study of art and design. The phase of "coming home" in the transformative experience of travel is perhaps the most poignant and potentially productive aspect of the process. If so, then the ultimate value of the travel experience is coming home, or, not just returning to the familiar environment, but having something to say about the familiar, transformed by the prismatic experience of other situations, anti-environments, like-but-not-like home, full of edge, frisson, a process of re-finding as well as re-searching. This shared space of exploration in e-space places a certain responsive responsibility to investigate where in particular the participants in the activity are situated. So, mapping this "home" territory becomes a journey of "self" discovery, generated from the input coming from the other place. This is a reciprocal process where resonance occurs emerging out of difference rather than through similarities.

Yes!
Among the blessings of e-dialogue are bursts of laughter marking moments of realization that an understanding has not been exchanged, but that a mis-understanding has. In the "internationalizing" of fine art, it is increasingly the case that assumptions about how we are reading, interpreting and seeing art from somewhere else is just about OK, and that we might even form judgements about what it is we are looking at and its place in a global context. This is a pity, because we are missing out. Local-local relations create anti-environments to the local-global internationalization of art as a set of ideas and objects that are exchangeable commodities. There is potential to shift the dialogue and the exploration back to the roots and origins of artistic practices, to look at art as a regional phenomenon, with regional dimensions in respect of language, culture, history and social formation. What is it like to be an English artist? What is English about making art in England? How does tradition operate? Does it exist? Do practices themselves have regional characteristics? What do we share with our Shanghai based colleagues? Metropolitan cultural contexts? But what about the situation of being a contemporary artist in a learning context where traditional methods inscribe particular conceptual approaches, or include aspects of cultural identity that is regional? Exploration of differences becomes the artwork, a space for testing out how new ideas may become the basis for new work. It is equivalent to looking at a studio space as a work in its own right, a space shaping activities!

Zero-position
When dialogue begins, propaganda ends!

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