Chapter 17
Mobile and Locative Media:
In between Thanatos and Eros

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ABSTRACT

Mobile and locative media are, inescapably, surveillance media. Surveillance is a feature which has not been decreasing by the use of these media, but instead it has been increasing with ever growing levels of subtlety. These media are introducing a new regime of surveillance, one which I have been calling tracking surveillance, a regime that is distinct from panoptic and scopic surveillance. Tracking surveillance's omnipresence should not mislead us to assume that these other two modes of surveillance have disappeared. Much on the contrary, these three regimes operate simultaneously, since the appearance of a new mode of surveillance does not lead to the demise of another. Due to the capillarity which characterizes surveillance in this era of connectedness and mobility, surveillance as an issue stands as a privileged standpoint for examining the ambivalent character, in between Thanatos and Eros, with which mobile and locative media have been operating in societies nowadays.

INTRODUCTION

The acceleration in the development of new digital technologies and the expansion of its apparatus are disconcerting to say the least, and these are showing no signs of reduction or of stoppage. At the current state of the art, there are many fronts: Web 3.0, the era of terabytes and petabytes, cloud computing, the era of omnipresent connection and continued mobility, of pervasive, sentient and ubiquitous computing, of augmented and mixed reality.

Amongst all these fronts, this work gives special attention to mobile media and the complex structure of its implications: connection, mobility, ubiquity and sentience. Our goal is, however, to go beyond a mere presentation of such structure. At a previous work (Santaella, 2008), I affirmed that the extensive and intense operational field of mobile and locative media works as a kind of liv-

ing map of the paradoxes and contradictions that plague turbo capitalist societies. At one extreme, they are technologies utilized for tracking and for military and governmental control, opening doors to an era of ubiquitous, incredibly subtle, invisible forms of monitoring and surveillance. That is why there is, in such technologies, a latent potential for evil, even sinister, purposes. At another extreme, these same technologies are being appropriated by art practices, in the field of locative media, which counterbalance any evil tendencies, by pressing hard on the keys of freedom, playfulness, joy and pleasure as intrinsic aspirations of human condition.

These two extremes appear in the title of this paper: mobile and locative media in between Thanatos, the tendency towards destruction, and Eros, the affirming strength of the power of life. Mobile media have turned Thanatos even more powerful. These apparatuses have brought ammunition to the malign side of human beings and social forces which are now always lying in wait for potential menaces ranging from fraud and terrorism to organized crime. Eros, on the opposite side, gains energy in artistic practices with locative media to which more attention will be given at the end of this article.

However, in the majority of cases, the uses allowed by mobile media are ambivalent and range among gradations between those two extremes. In this paper I will explore these ambivalences to avoid a dichotomist view of the two opposing poles. The aim is to highlight the complexities and subtleties of what happens in between them. Surveillance's capillarity in this era of connection and mobility makes it a privileged standpoint for the examining of the ambivalent character of mobile and locative media operating in societies nowadays. Lyon's works on the subject, which will be cited extensively in this paper, in particular the one where he discusses "mundane mobilities, transparent technologies, and digital discrimination" (Lyon, 2010), have been very useful in the task of avoiding the dangers of falling into Manichaeism. But let us begin the discussion by the complex structure of mobile media implications.

MOBILE AND LOCATIVE MEDIA: IMPLICATIONS

Clark (2003) gives four distinct meanings to mobile technologies:

a. devices may be, at any given time, at different locations "from that in which they were at one or more previous times" (§ 3);
b. devices are mobile in the sense that they are at any location that allows transmission for another device;
c. they are mobile in relation to the surface of the Earth, for example, when a user is on a plane;
d. lastly, devices are designed to be easily and conveniently portable and independent from wire transmission.

Mobile media and locative media are terms that have been used widely as synonyms. Therefore, it might sound redundant to use them juxtaposed. I have made this decision deliberately in order to make explicit that, when talking about locative media, we are necessarily talking about mobile media with geographical positioning and context sensitivity. They are, therefore, mobile and locative at the same time, despite the fact that this may seem a paradox.

In this manner, mobile media and locative media refer to a group of technologies that constitute open and dynamic systems portraying all the characteristics of complex systems: chaotic flux, turbulence, instability, but also emergence, adaptation and self-organization. These media are palmtops and third generation multifunctional cell phones which, according to Lemos (2004), have become a *mobile everything* allowing daily life's

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