

Locative Media Guest Editorial

LEA Locative Media Special issue
Guest edited by Drew Hemment
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This is collection of essays in the Locative Media special issue of *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, also features an associated curriculum section, bibliography and online gallery.

Since 'locative media' first came to prominence during a series of workshops and online discussions in 2003, this technological, social and artistic meme has circulated across different contexts and disciplines [1]. A 'test category' for the convergence of geographical and data space, it has offered a prescient metaphor for the latest technological zeitgeist, one that looks beyond computing in its current form, developed around the needs of the office, and challenges the trend towards digital content being viewed as placeless, or only encountered in the amorphous space of the Internet. The result has been a rich space where many thoughts and interests intersect, one often characterized by an emphasis on the social and user led, a site where technological utopianism rubs up against a critical understanding of locative media's place within the society of control. After Borges, what *other spaces* do we encounter when the map first equals, and ultimately becomes greater than the territory? [2]. And following Russell, how does time pass when we are able to search for sadness in New York? [3].

Locative media in the broader sense is understood to include bodily, technological and cultural components, combining cultural practices and the embodiment of the user, with various 'media' and location sensing technologies such as GPS [4]. A field of creative practice has coalesced around artists and technologists who are exploring the use of portable, networked, location-aware computing devices for social interfaces to places and artistic interventions in which geographical space becomes a canvas. Artists have long been concerned with place and location, but the combination of mobile devices with positioning technologies is opening up a manifold of different ways in which geographical space can be encountered and drawn, and presenting a frame through which a wide range of spatial practices may be looked at anew. Locative media as a creative field resonates beyond the contexts of mapping and cartography where it was engendered, as well as beyond any particular set of technological artefacts, and segues with artistic traditions such as site-specific art, or the walk-acts of artists such as Vito Acconci, Hamish Fulton and Richard Long, as well as more immediate precursors such as Masaki Fujihata, Teri Rueb, Stefan Schemat and Iain Mott.

As an emerging field, locative media is simultaneously opening up new ways of engaging in the world and mapping its own domain. The aim of this special issue of *LEA* is to contribute to the emergence of a coherent discourse around locative media, but without restricting too soon the possibilities for what it might yet be [5]. Submissions were sought that place the exploratory movements of locative media in historical context

alongside others that offer a snapshot or polaroid of its current state of emergence. Contributors were asked to consider metaphors for these new kinds of spatial experience other than mapping and navigation, or to look beyond the reductive understanding of location that comes from Geographic Information Systems - in which place is considered as a set of geographic coordinates or a wireless cell - to explore, for example, context, co-location and material embodiment. The issue has not attempted to resolve tensions that exist between competing definitions of the term, or the many different views on what the field and the term might signify. For Teri Rueb, for example, locative media is centrally to do with how practices such as mapping and spatial representation have been inflected by electronic technologies (radar, sonar, GPS, WiFi, Bluetooth, cellular, etc.) traditionally used in mapping, navigation, wayfinding, or location and proximity sensing [6]. Some contributions that have been included fall on the fringe even of this broad understanding, one addressing not location-aware media as such at all, and the hope is that by presenting them alongside what might be viewed as canonical cases of locative media it is possible to hold of plural understandings of the field, and to thereby broaden the focus with which it is viewed.

This special issue of *LEA* was proposed by me to *LEA* editor-in-chief Nisar Keshvani. The form of the final issue arose through discussion between us, the format for the gallery - involving invited guest curators - proposed as a way of bringing a wider range of independent voices to the issue. With much of the early discourse around Locative Media emerging in Europe and North America it was welcome to find strong contributions to the gallery from other regions with a strong and distinctive mobile media culture.

The Locative Media special issue features a collection of papers and a collection of curriculum statements edited by myself, a collaborative bibliography coordinated by *LEA* editor-in-chief Nisar Keshvani, and an online gallery curated by Suhjung Hur, Andrew Paterson and Annie On Ni Wan.

NOTES

1. Initially proposed by Karlis Kalnins, it was the focus of a number of events in this period, the most influential being the Locative Media Workshop organized by RIXC in an abandoned military installation in Karosta, Latvia during 16-26 July 2003.
2. 'Of Exactitude in Science', from *Travels of Praiseworthy Men (1658)* by J. A. Suarez Miranda, pseudonym of Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, in J. L. Borges, *A Universal History of Infamy*, Penguin Books, London, 1975.
3. Ben Russell, *Headmap Manifesto*, 1999 - available online at <http://www.headmap.org/headmap.pdf> (accessed October 2005).
4. In the call for proposals for this issue *Locative Media* was capitalized to distinguish the broader, more hybrid field from a narrower sense of the term, *locative media*, commonly used to refer to a set of location-sensing technologies such as GPS. The term remains a contested one, however, and it is left an open question when and where the use of the proper name may be appropriate.

5. At the PLAN workshop in October 2005, Ben Russell noted, with only a little irony, that it is sometimes possible to detect something approaching a formula for devising a locative media project, a set of components that any project is perceived to need.

6. A view outlined in email correspondence with the guest editor, 5 July 2005.