Moving in Place: The Question of Distributed Social Cinema

Adriene Jenik and Sarah Lewison

SPECFLIC is an ongoing creative research project in performative and "playable" media. It proposes a new form of storytelling: distributed social cinema. This form seeks to integrate our mobile communication gadgets (cell phones, laptops, pagers, mp3 players, etc.)—normally thought of as distractions from the story—into the story itself, thereby creating "layers" and "zones" through which the audience experiences a multimodal story event.

Each event is formed from a template of the following elements: an iconic public building or space, a research-based narrative vision of that place in 2030, an ensemble of talented performers, prerecorded and live aural and visual media, and assorted experimental communications applications. SPECFLIC events combine high- and low-tech elements and devices, making it clear that neither the "future" nor the "past" are unique periods of time, but instead are constructed through both history and imagination. Rather than offering this story to a hushed audience in a darkened room, the project casts the story on to its public—implicating each audience member within a shared future.

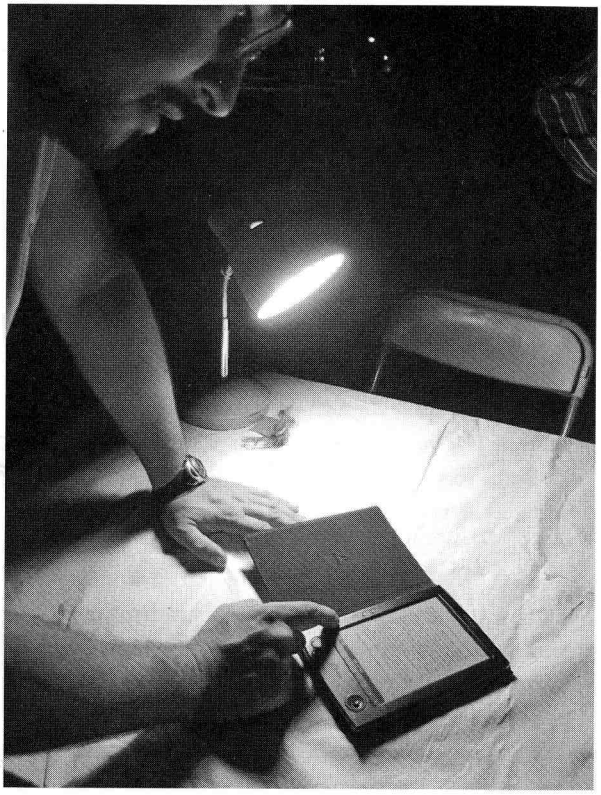
As of this writing, two versions of the project have been realized. SPECFLIC 1.0 was presented at the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology on the University of California at San Diego campus in October 2005. Its story focused on the near future of the public educational and research institution. SPECFLIC 2.0 took place in August 2006 at the Martin Luther King Jr. branch of the San Jose Public Library.[1] Its story was centered on the near future of books, the written word, and the public library.

The exchange below, between the director, Adriene Jenik, and critical observer/participant Sarah Lewison, was conducted shortly after SPECFLIC 2.0, and focuses primarily on this event.

Lewison: I think the events demonstrated unique possibilities for encounters in a crowd. SPECFLIC occupies an interesting ground in that the event is orchestrated to acknowledge and accommodate prior conditions in the urban landscape. These have to do with the mediation of the space itself through spatial and urban planning, and the placement of media displays within these spaces in forms characteristic of advertising. They also have to include the personal media devices people carry for entertainment and communication that effect an alienation of individuals from their physical environment and each other. The SPECFLIC events gather these factors together within a common story to produce new vectors of exchange and feedback. The project nods to the distribution of electronic media throughout the landscape and elicits participation from the spectator, which is more than symbolic, but is essential to its content.

Jenik: The layers of SPECFLIC 2.0 extended in concentric circles beyond a large dual projection of a live "gateway" character, the InfoSpherian, whose presence dominated the space most proximal to both entrances to the library building. As the audience moved away from her spectral voice-image and around the building, they encountered the elevated rear-projected "library story" with its related sound track. Live performers moved about, some in relation to a grid of images and text that formed a flashing visual border, and some seeming to emerge from the audience itself. Piles of books formed convenient stools, an incognito Sony engineer solicited comments on a future book form, and portions of text were served straight into patrons' pockets.[2]

Lewison: You sometimes describe this as a "cinema of distraction." By incorporating the media devices and data



17.1 SPECFLIC 2.0 audience members peruse Sony e-Book Readers featuring texts related to the project. (Chris O'Neal)

of spectators into the performance, you demonstrate how these gadgets, often experienced as intrusive, can bear on the proceedings as a redistribution of speech. This proposes a social media environment with political potential, where people hold the means to question and even reconceptualize their own institutions. This is a welcome alternative to the proliferation of an individually tailored personal media that reinforce perceptions of individual control of a personalized environment. To what degree do these mediations reinforce and police some social behaviors over others? How do we even define or evaluate social interaction in a society that is so designed and mediated by technological interventions?

Jenik: We, as a species, have developed in relationship to the technologies we create. Each added technology extends our understanding of our humanness. Our memories, our voices and visions, our productive capacities, are extended beyond their previous limits, and this, of course, creates a greater sense of both agency and control. I am driven to create work that enacts these dual tensions. It is the urgency of this historical moment and my own awareness of my position as a woman in a "bleeding-edge" technology research institution that give rise to this work, which "holds up a mirror" to our culture as well as the ways contemporary society is transformed by our use of these new, mobile, and distributed technologies.[3]

Lewison: I think the media that extends our capacities to communicate and preserve information also becomes a substitute for memory itself, at least short-term visual memory—allowing it to atrophy while the transitory, habitual experience of the built environment becomes amplified. As people travel rapidly through an environment, they retreat somewhat by using devices that ameliorate the boredom of the landscape speeding by. In public conveyances, individuals also use electronics to avoid the anxiety of social contact. In both cases, one could suggest that people go somewhere else. This isn't a new phenomenon; in *The Railway Journey*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1977) cites how the 1830s saw a massive increase in the publication of materials for train consumption by particularly the middle classes. Watching movies on the plane, or talking on the cell while driving, is certainly analogous. What I think has changed is that the practice of using media to retreat from or augment the immediate environment has extended into new situations, into public spaces that are in fact quite stimulating, such as plazas, malls, and the like. The tendency is to individually modulate privacy and distance in the most public spaces. Everyone is a little bit of the flaneur.

It is this play-off between different kinds of mobility and identity—real, imagined, and illusory—that seems pertinent in the formulations you bring together in SPECFLIC. There's a certain optimism embedded in art projects that endeavor to mediate the urban landscape with communicative technologies. It is hoped that people

will recognize their own concerns within the project, and that they will take advantage of their access to some kind of exchange. By inviting the intervention of these gadgets, one complicates the dynamics of spectatorship and also storytelling. Spectators are brought into active roles as interpreters of the messages producing the story. With SPECFLIC, the metaphor of social agency and mobility in relation to access to information is literally situated to highlight the intersections of public and private interests as well as technologies that control both information and physical space.

The InfoSpherian has three InfoFaces, which she alternates throughout her performance: Flo, Core, and Hypertia. Each subcharacter is represented through changes in voice and screenic image triggered through a performer-controlled Max MSP/Jitter interface. Transitions between subcharacters are marked through a combination of the interface program, and simple gesture and costume elements assigned to each subcharacter (i.e., Flo wears opaque glasses, while Hypertia dons a translucent veil, and Core's raw image exists in greater proximity to the audience).

The InfoSpherian enters the frame, puts on her glasses, and settles in as Flo.

Flo

Wednesday, August 9, 2030

Bienvenidos, senyores y senyoras.
Yo soy el InfoSpherian.

You are here at the gateway to the Universal Knowledge Repository known as the InfoSphere.

This is the story of a future library where books as we now know them have been all but abolished by a benevolent technocracy that has rationalized them as an inefficient means of disseminating information. The book is too static a form. The new time demands the dynamism of easily replaceable code. The book object itself has been relegated to the status of artifactual curiosity, accessible and of interest only to a few. This is not an entirely cheerful prognosis and not a generous one toward "old" technologies. The scenarios of the future you call up are ones where techno-determinism challenges our contemporary sense of civil liberties, privacy, and also tactility. But then these same media are used within the performance as tools for the production of resistant speech.

Jenik: As a creative researcher, I am daily confronted with the exciting openness and expansive potentials of these new network communications tools, and in equal measures made anxious by the degree of control they afford. Regarding the "old" and "new" media, works of literature often inspire my creative projects. In 1998, I began reading a significant amount of speculative fiction. A subset of the science fiction genre, speculative fiction is commonly understood to include works that take place in a near future (e.g., a human lifetime), and focus their speculations on sociocultural shifts, rather than fantastic world visions. *Dhalgren* (Delany 1974), *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Hopkinson 1998), *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (Dick 1965), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood 1985), and *Boxy an Star* (King 1999), though vastly different in voice and tone, would all be included in my speculative fiction reader. In particular, the novel *The Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler (1993) had a profound effect on my adopted Southern California consciousness.

A poetic diary entry begins this story of a teenage empath, Lauren Olamina, as she survives a horrible yet recognizable 2025. Pulling the threads of her story line from contemporary lifestyle configurations, Butler gradually reveals a postapocalyptic scenario that emerges over time, via the daily corrosion of future creep. To create Lauren's Los Angeles, Butler combines her visions of the future of gated communities, pharmaceutical abuse, globalized capital, private utilities, miscegenation, and immersive screen entertainment, alongside the shifting dynamic of family and community loyalties. Butler's book suggested that I, too, might be able to pull on the threads of the life I lead, and play out the possibilities inherent in its values and structures.

Lewison: There is a lot of significance to the locations in which you situate projects: the research institution and the library, so far. These were, in both cases, mammoth-scaled publicly funded buildings that symbolically represent pressing, even dire questions about the destiny of public information and public space in an era of increasing privatization. Please explain how these spaces are factored intentionally into the narrative.

Jenik: SPECFLIC presents a new use or a reactivation of a familiar public space. The library presents a unique opportunity in this regard because of its rich social history, resonance within individual personal memories, and generally being identified as undergoing a transformation largely brought on by its encounter with "the digital."

In California, the Martin Luther King Jr. branch of the San Jose Public Library is the result of a partnership between the local public library system and the research library of San Jose State University. Its new building is centrally located at an important intersection of downtown, providing a public gateway to the university. Eight stories high, with extensive special collections and a wonderful children's reading room, exhibit space and an extensive integration of information technology resources, the library is a library of the future already in its "look and feel" as well as its usage patterns. In developing SPECFLIC 2.0, I leaned on the library's strengths: a centrally located public building, identifiable from afar, and perceived as open to the public.

For SPECFLIC 2.0, I projected a huge (forty by fifty feet) dynamic grid on the towering cement facade of the building visible to the casual viewer from a half mile down San Fernando Road. Meanwhile, on the street level, the giant floating head of the InfoSpherian addressed passersby. As city-goers streamed by, and noticed the crowd and light, they were transformed into audience members, and led by a series of book arrows around the building to the inner courtyard, where additional elements are accessed. Ringed with benches and bounded by grass, it was a safe space to wander around and consider the story away from the noise and danger of vehicular traffic.

Lewison: Large-scale projections facing urban streets are usually intended to mobilize consumer subjectivities. In this case, projections on the street fronting the library mobilized people to bodily move into the main space for the event. The San Jose Martin Luther King Jr. Library is an architectural gem on a scale that suggests the financial heyday of a century ago, when robber barons built civic monuments in their names. As an event, SPECFLIC's spatial mappings dissipate this sense of the monumental and turn it toward the civic. The use of the building and its plazas for a range of interactions produced an immersive and permeable space that was not only about the scale or meaning of the building, or the spectacle of the projections or sound, but about the assembly of elements for a discursive arena.

If the spatiality constructs this possibility, the notion of "distribution" you cite to describe the use of personal media devices is also operative here in the sense of space and cognition within an environment. The carnivalesque atmosphere of multiple attractions physically and cognitively broke the large site up into more discrete parts, to be explored and comprehended incrementally in semi-personalized narratives. Pathways are about attention as well as the movement of the body. The mobility of the spectator means that the comprehension is uneven too, so it is inevitable that the story will be understood variably, which seems like part of the charm; you might need to ask someone else what they experienced. Everyone has a somewhat individual experience, but there still is the physical reality of people being together, comparing, checking each other out, a theater for a multitude, and an idealized space for a projection into a future.

Like a two-way mirror formulation, the projections and performances held on both faces of the Martin Luther King Jr. Library suggestively interpolated additional points of narrative contact between the building and its aspirations, and the city's history. San Jose was renovated over the last thirty years at great expense, mostly through private investment. Although it is the oldest established city in California, San Jose shows no signs of age. The historic district is a reconstruction; distinctive activity zones define the downtown, such as

corporate, recreation, government, entertainment, transportation, and education. In this downtown there are no wild lots, unfenced spatial mysteries, cacophonies of signage, or confusion about where a pedestrian should walk. The library, with its repository of resources and adjacency to San Jose State University, however, is probably one of the richest sites in the city for lines of flight and escape, or deep burrowing into a past. With the library as a centerpiece and subject, SPECFLIC emphasizes the library as a portal, or as an ideal democratic object rather than as the triumph of civic rationality.

As a meditation on technocracies, the story of the future at the core of SPECFLIC becomes extended here as it passes beyond the urban divisions: street, avenue, zone classification, and neighborhood. The layout and demographics of the city is part of the story of who habituates the library, and who paid for it. In the crowd at the event, too, there were people entering from different milieus; the locals you refer to, who habitually cut around the library and through the campus to reach the outlying working-class neighborhoods, mingled with the festivalgoers who flew in from around the world. One wonders how these differentials played out. By incorporating the interactive performative elements, you invite strangers in a crowd to see and hear each other, and to question: *Where are you coming from? Where are they going? Are they carrying books?* You constructed an alternate world, a plausible future, and placed characters within it who perform the roles of implementing and policing this world with consistent rules that people found they had to respond to.

Jenik: With each SPECFLIC, what I call the "base story" emerges from my initial research. At times, this is combined with what I know of the limitations of the site (i.e., the audience must remain outside the building for the event). As I continue to develop the base story, characters appear—sometimes in relationship to a particular visual or performative gesture, in response to the space, or as I imagine a particular performer's talents, or the affordances of a particular media form.

SPECFLIC 2.0's base story reads as follows:

2030. The public library has been incrementally transformed into the universal knowledge repository known as the InfoSphere. The InfoSphere is a generally accessible, multilingual digital archive that expands exponentially on an hourly basis. The public accesses the InfoSphere independently of the library building, and the role of the library and librarians has shifted to accommodate these changes: local public libraries now assist people in locating the bits they need in this overwhelming data flow. InfoSpherians also issue the reading licenses necessary to access various tiers of knowledge and enforce information access filters.

Now that book objects are commonly understood as an inefficient way to access, store, distribute, and further utilize knowledge, they have fallen out of daily use by the public. With the advent of e-books, books themselves became more a state of mind, and since the Great Silverfish Attack of 2012, book objects have become relics of history needing preservation for the ages.

In 2030, there still exist people who have passionate memories of "book culture" and argue its importance even in its increasingly anachronistic state, so even as the library functions are no longer localized, the library building still exists. But instead of the bustling lending library and information technology access site we know today, it has been transformed into a museum for book objects. The entirety of the libraries book holdings have been designated a "special collection," which can only be accessed via an on-site InfoSpherian.

The InfoSpherian is the 2030 equivalent to the information or reference desk librarian. She is stationed within the library building, which is now closed to the public, and is accessible as a video projection. If one wants to see a book in its object form, one can request it from the InfoSpherian. You must be patient. It may take some time. (Jenik 2006)

It was important that the InfoSpherian character inhabit the functions of the library that emerge as relevant in 2030. I was considering, in the age of the Internet as well as increasingly available and distributed information access, what is the role of the librarian? My

answer took into account both what librarians themselves are proposing (as information exponentially increases, so too do the needs of the public to organize and navigate through this data terrain), but other roles that might be foisted on them, or that they might begrudgingly take on as they strive for continued relevance. So the InfoSpherian oversees the issuing and enforcement of reading licenses to the reading public. Here, I've envisioned the regularization of digital rights management and the movement of public libraries away from their historical role in defending "free open access to knowledge." The realities of current and future digital publishing access means that many libraries are in the process of instituting tiered access: some library patrons will pay higher access fees to access certain types of journals. Playing out these scenarios within the atmosphere of Homeland Security concerns and changes in intellectual property law resulted in the Infospherian's admonitions from the Software Protection Authority.[4]

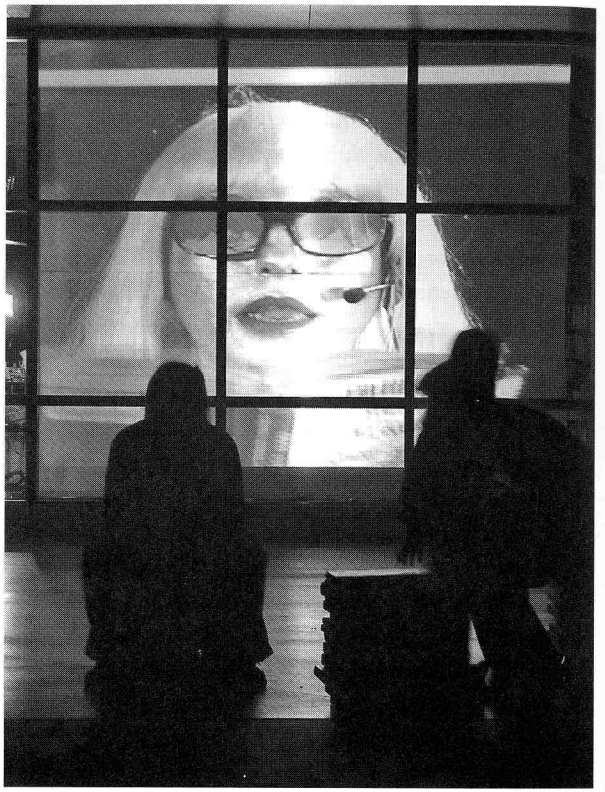
A MESSAGE FROM THE Software Protection Authority:
Intellectual works are property.
This property is protected with the full force of civil and criminal law.

A MESSAGE FROM THE Software Protection Authority:
Prevent reading piracy, control access to your reading material at all times.

A MESSAGE FROM THE Software Protection Authority:
Friends do not ask friends to access their reading material.

A MESSAGE FROM THE Software Protection Authority:
Check your lending rights before you loan. Don't Pass the Book! (Jenik and Pilar 2006)

In between her exchanges with the public, the InfoSpherian takes breaks (during which she plays clips from the selected media archive). She periodically exhibits a library museum "artifact" (like bookmarks and reading glasses), explaining its use in the past. The InfoSpherian announces "It's story time" and proceeds to read a Vietnamese children's text to her assembled audience. The InfoSpherian was developed with performance artist Praba Pilar, who so deftly inhabited her role that audience members asked me how long I took to program her.[5]



17.2 Praba Pilar as the InfoSpherian in SPECFLIC 2.0. (Chris O'Neal)

The only other people who inhabit the library building are library functionaries known as the Searcher and the Stacker. They are the workers who retrieve and replace the books that the public requests. Since there are not many requests, they are not busy, but gracefully and purposefully "perform" their activities. Their exaggerated gestures make us feel as if what they are doing is important, but their languid movement tells a story of an-

other time, when people wandered haphazardly through the library stacks looking for a book.

Lewison: These were films depicting a man and woman working, separately, inside the library. They could be seen selecting and flipping through books, moving through the stacks, and up and down the staircases. They were rarely in the same frame or on the same floor. I read them through a lens of romantic suspense, as if they knew that what they were seeking in the library and books was, in fact, each other. The warmly colored wooden interior features of the library contrasted against the steel and glass of the exterior, creating an illusion that the library had turned inside out and was revealing its innards on the surface of its architectural skin. One spectator said it was like the building was a container of its own memories, collecting the data of life by day and recapitulating the drama by night.[6]

Jenik: These characters were inspired by another text: the short story "The Library of Babel" by Jorge Luis Borges (1962). Here, among the description of the library as labyrinth, he writes, "There are official searchers, inquisitors. I have seen them in the performance of their function: they always arrive extremely tired from their journeys; they speak of a broken stairway which almost killed them; they talk with the librarian of galleries and stairs; sometimes they pick up the nearest volume and leaf through it, looking for infamous words. Obviously, no one expects to discover anything."

These characters could be seen enacting their cryptic yet familiar movements from rear projections that emanated from the third and fourth floors of the library. As one moved away from the building toward the edges of the courtyard, the projections revealed the interior life of the library. Though prerecorded, the ambient story was structured and finally edited in full knowledge of its spatial placement: one could follow both characters in their movements from one floor to another, from one area of the library to another, with the Stacker subtly following the Searcher. Their occasional encounters formed the dramatic tension within this silent twenty-five-minute cinematic loop.

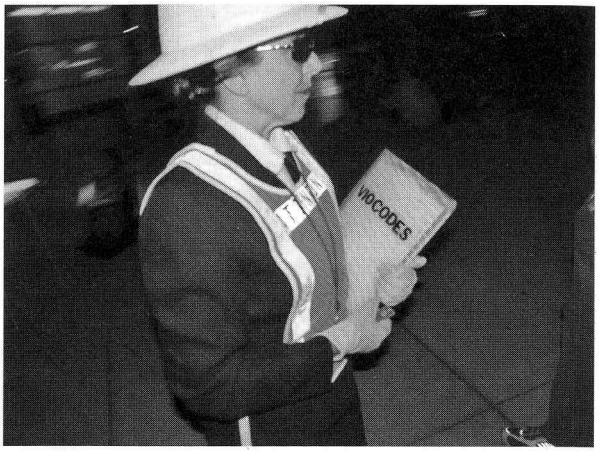
The Searcher and the Stacker were played by actors Allison Janney and Richard Jenik, respectively, who also appeared in SPECFLIC 1.0. Shot on location with a high-resolution camera that enabled the audience to read the titles on the spines of the shelved books, the projections transform the library itself into a character in the story.[7] This spatialized film loop exists as a kind of elegy to the libraries' past, remembered for its beauty and expansiveness; it is a reliquary of knowledge within which one could (and still can!) be absorbed, which one can physically inhabit, where one can find sanctuary.

Other peripheral characters were created in collaboration with the participating performers, who are artists and writers in their own right. On meeting talented young poet-performer Melissa Lozano, I proposed that she work with me to develop and perform the FoolBook, a character who exists in the periphery of the spectacle, wandering the library grounds. Dressed as a distressed temp worker, she represents, through voice and gesture, those library patrons who view the library not just as a place to gather knowledge but also as a public place of dignity in which they are welcome. The distributed knowledge economy literally casts out such a figure. A cross between a raven, a Mayan curandera, and a homeless person, The FoolBook hovers over this future, distributing wordless books and mumbling her incantation.

I've been here before
I have lived here before
I have prayed in circles around legends crafted
I have lived here
I have eaten here
I have loved here
I have broken sanity here
I have erased here
I have had my back towards here
I sexed here
I prayed here
I ate here
I laughed here
I battled here

17.3 Melissa Lozano performs as the FoolBook in SPECFLIC 2.0. (Chris O'Neal)

I worried here
I stared off here
I sang here
Everything unfinished here
I borrowed here
I forgot here
Here I recall here
I burnt here
I shed here
I flew here
I walked here
I listened here
I delivered here
I came back here
I've been here before. (Lozano 2006)



17.4 The Chief Attention Authority makes note of reading violations in SPECFLIC 2.0. (Chris O'Neal)

Palettes of decommissioned library books were transformed into functional stools and tables by San Jose–based sculptor Gustavo Rodriguez. Arranged around the InfoSpherian in a "storytelling" half circle, the furniture framed the audience members as future library patrons, and added a layer of contemplation and reflection on the future of these book objects.

SPECFLIC 2.0 also featured several projections of an experimental public display form created specifically for use in SPECFLIC by information technology developer Andrew Collins. The Sousveillance Grid allowed audience members equipped with cell phone cameras to capture a picture at the live event and send it to a server that immediately displays these pictures in a dynamic, constantly updating 3 × 2-foot grid projection. Posting instructions occasionally flash across the display, and audience members help each other post their photos. The grid also has a limited short message service character caption area that can be annotated by assigned SPECFLIC crew members. In SPECFLIC 2.0, the Sousveillance Grid served as a dynamic "most wanted" poster, with the uniformed Attention Authorities and audience members alike using their cell phones to "snapCapture" the likeness of those suspected of reading license violations. Elaborate code violations were assigned by the

17.5 Media and performance artist Nao Bustamante (as La Curandera) and two student Remotes perform a technical check of their "reality fly-through" GPS video stream in SPECFLIC 1.0. (Mulloy Morrow)

17.6 The Remotes and La Curandera surveil the audience in SPECFLIC 1.0. (Mulloy Morrow)

Chief Attention Authority Officer and then posted to the Sousveillance Grid picture by the chief's deputies.[8]

The Poetxt Team was formed to serve up more poetic fragments, creating an enigmatic reflection on the themes of the event through word-image associations.[9]

Lewison: Like the exemplary play of children, this ironic enforcement of your bureaucratic regime through the detection of "reading license violations" was done with the utmost seriousness. This made a game out of the LED flashing "orange alert" signs that serve darker purposes—to notify drivers of emergencies or enlist them in the apprehension of suspected criminals.

Like these grim fixtures on the interstate, the Sousveillance Grid directly addressed viewers, and situated them in a locative closed circuit where safety is hypothetically predicated on observing and reporting on the other. The locative specificity is important: the figure of the spectator is digitally captured and transmitted only to appear as an image in the absolute space of the library grounds again, exactly where the figure is. The line between privacy and publicity is certainly muddled, but in this formulation the dispersed subject is fixed in situ, their "crime of possession" is erased and their reputation comically salvaged by poetry. One is ultimately enlisted in a dialogue about proprietary boundaries, or is it a new form of gossip?

Jenik: The collective surveillance here disguised as a playful game within the SPECFLIC story world came to life as other peripheral characters like the BlackMarket Bookseller, instigating microexchange encounters: opening a trench coat to flash layers of anarchist texts offered to the audience in trade. Because of the size of the audience (more than six hundred over the course of the evening) and the diversity (children, grandparents, library patrons, and digerati mingled together), some characters seemed to arise from within the crowd. This was the case with a phalanx of bicycle-riding demonstrators who shouted "Technology ruins our soil!" and "Technology causes birth defects" while circling the building and the assembled crowd. During both versions of SPECFLIC, the boundaries between the audience and the performer blurred and shifted throughout the course of the evening, creating a disquieting space in which one could imagine existing alongside others within this future, with its residue lingering beyond the event.

Additionally, for SPECFLIC 2.0, I invited local science fiction author Rudy Rucker (2006) to develop a short message service–generated story that could be delivered directly to audience members via their mobile phones. Rucker responded by writing a twenty-five message "koan" that echoed and punctuated the event, provoking the audience members to notice the unfolding particulars of their surrounding environment (see sidebar).

SPECFLIC Messages Show Version

August 9, 2030
First thot best thot.

Where r u?

Woman books on ground.
Big face on wall. Shhh!

Seek n stack.

I see green man?
Where r u?

Marry me. I have read license.

Stack words in phone.
Library hush.

I seek u.

Hear my voice.
Words suck.

Saucer wisdom.
Book road to past.

Where r u?

In the saucer.
In the words.

Who talking?

Is my baby?
Pregnant with book.

Big face little face.

Where r u?

On the wall.
In the book.
Loud library.
Key me.

License to read.
Word talking.

Bark bite word.
B'ware police dog.

Where r u?

Behind u.
In ur phone.

Who r u?

Read my book.
Numbers suck.
Dark to see.

Where r u?

On fone.
In the word.

Kiss me by book.
Give me word.
Write smile on face.

See u on wall?
Hear u on speaker?

I m pregnant too.

Work sucks.
Party yes.

You stack, I seek.
Stomach of words.

Remember me?

Where r u?

MATHEMATICIANS IN LOVE

In order to collect the cell phone numbers of the audience, I developed the idea of the "reading license" station. Encountered at the entrance to the courtyard, this station initiates the audience into the intellectual property themes and parameters invoked in the story. To gain a reading license, the audience members provided us with "digital IDs" (in the form of their cell phone numbers), which we input temporarily into our system in order to serve up Rucker's poem. The process allowed for a performance of future bureaucracies, including a cryptic access-level assessment, even as it provided the audience members with a small material souvenir of the event.

17.7 Members of grassroots radio collective Radioactive Radio transmitting a live audio stream of SPECFLIC 1.0. (Mulloy Morrow)

Additional media and performance layers were created through live "sound track" mixing and the use of spatialized audio. The sound artist collective Neighborhood Public Radio recorded interviews with digital luminaries and others assembled for the ISEA 2006 symposium.[10] The collective asked a variety of people to speculate about the future of the book, the public library, and the written form, and compiled the responses on a compact disc. The compact disc and selected music were then mixed, live, by a local disc jockey, forming a sound track for the outer edges of the event.[11] As one moved closer to the building and the glowing image of the InfoSpherian, one became enveloped in her atmosphere and voice; as one moved further away, ones attention shifted: to the library story emanating from the third and fourth floors, the background music and interviews, and more peripherally the additional event performers and modules.

Lewison: This description suggests a return to the theme of distraction. Rather than reinforcing a mediated totality, SPECFLIC problematizes the integration of attention and explores its inversion. The plethora of elements brought to bear on this story capitalizes on the narrative productivity of this contemporary condition. You implicitly point to a circuit of attention that moves between the embodied locus of an individual and the messages, desires, needs, and connections that pass through the portable communication devices that an individual carries along. In SPECFLIC, you call attention to how these devices remove the person from full presence in a situation. But you incorporate these same devices to produce new attention to the circumstance—a kind of counterattention.

Distraction was a notable condition for Walter Benjamin (1968) and Siegfried Kracauer (1995), who both perceived, in the competition of spectacle for the popular imagination, the possibility of ruptures from which clear-sightedness and dissent might emerge. Distraction is about differentials of attention and circuits of cognition, and the gaps in circuits of attention where there is the potential for something else.

In this era, we find that the messages of mass culture these earlier writers described are often filtered and tailored for, and by, the individual recipient. While these appear to be distractions, the experience from the subject position is carefully orchestrated to enable a seamless experience as a discrete consumer of all good things that the world has to offer. The implications raised are familiar: people are oblivious of their surroundings, and yet they are centered and individuated—shall we say calmed—through the cultivation of these familiar remote connections.

This self-centeredness colludes with Freud's observations about our narcissistic tendency to decipher personal messages from the random signs we see. One wonders if the problem with mediascapes modeled for a neoliberal constitution is not that they are distracting but as buffers against the violence of the moment and integrators of consumerist subjectivities, they don't allow for distraction.

In exploring the definitions for a cinema that examines the processes inherent in late capitalism, Sharon Bhagwan (2003) describes distraction etymologically, as a "pulling away" from an ideal, but with no particular direction. She finds, in maneuvers that split and otherwise divert or trick attention, "a filmic logic of distraction . . . that is linked to the dispersed spectator in a globalized mediatized landscape." Distraction is a splitting of attention between physical location and the

imperatives of the communicating device. In SPECFLIC, the aim is to see how diverse communications can spin their contingencies into a story line further extended through public encounters.

The many elements enlisted recall the "cinema of attractions" that Tom Gunning (1990) portrays as characteristic of film's first ten years. Screenings were uniquely accompanied by voice-over, live music, outspoken audiences, and technical transparency, all contributing to a temporal and sensory experience that Gunning depicts as exceeding the narrative content of the film. As a contemporary experiment in a cinema of excess, SPECFLIC conjures additional repositories of information through the incorporation of connected devices, personal information acquisition, and human interactivity. This excessive quality points backward at the way economies, bodies, and networks of information are concealed by the way contemporary connectivity organizes a flow between radically discontinuous spatial activities. SPECFLIC offers an interruption analogous to bumping into someone on the street.

At this cinema, you will not only *not* be quiet, you will have to talk. This leads to another criteria outlined by Gunning for a cinema of attractions, which is the direct gaze of the performer at the spectator. In film it is only illusory, as the actor gazes at the camera, not the spectator. But this eye-line acknowledgment disappears in narrative film, along with the presence of the spectator. In SPECFLIC 2.0, the InfoSpherian engaged with viewers in a way that compelled the spectators' presence. People lined up to ask her questions of the library.[12] On the projection screen they saw her attentively listening to their requests. While her answers varied, they were clearly responses to the individual queries. The maneuver is slyly political and extremely social, through the presence of the witnessing third parties—other spectators who participate in the exchange. In these forms of direct address, the presence and position of the spectator is acknowledged and grounded on the site and within the narrative. The spectator, sited and cited as a consumer of the spectacle, is also recognized, grounded, and implicated as a part of a network of transmissions that add up to a story.

(Infospherian)

Mercoledì il 9 agosto. 2030

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END. (Jenik and Pilar 2006)

Notes

1. Presented as part of the ISEA 2006/San Jose ZeroOne Festival of Art and Technology.

2. A prerelease prototype of the Sony e-book reader was demonstrated at SPECFLIC 2.0 through placing project-related texts and visuals on its crisp small screen. In terms of placing text into pockets, repurposing information technology developer Ganapathy Chockalingam's mass text distribution application "Call 2 Communicate" was originally developed as an emergency notification system.

3. In the case of SPECFLIC, it is a fun-house mirror.

4. A number of articles proved invaluable as starting points for research into these key areas. Most helpful were Bailey (2006) and Sandler (2005).

5. This query assumed that she was an artificially intelligent response system. To me, this response revealed the ways in which we already live in the future.

6. Thanks to new media artist Paula Levine, who shared this observation with me in conversation.

7. Cinematographer John Pirozzi shot on location at the San Jose Public Library.

8. Public media advocate Martha Wallner played the chief—with great zeal.

9. The Poetxt Team was composed of a group of local English honors high school students, led by ZeroOne education fellow Gina Campanella. Perhaps more successful was the University of California at San Diego upper-division speculative fiction class members who, under the tutelage of writer Anna Joy Springer, contributed to SPECFLIC 1.0's cell phone photo grid.

10. For more information on Neighborhood Public Radio, see 〈http://www.conceptualart.org/npr/〉. Special Thanks to Michael Trigilio and Lee Montgomery for their contributions.

11. The disc jockey was Basura, aka Michael Boada.

12. Some of the questions included: "Where do humans come from?" "What is the state of censorship in the United States in the early twenty-first century?" "Will there be a fourth Iraq war?" "What are the borders of Lebanon?" "What is a clitoris?" and "When will machines overpower humans?"

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