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PSYCHO-ACADEMIC DÉRIVE – A PROPOSAL

Psycho-Academic *Dérive* (P.A.D.) is a post-digital humanities project about the interrelations between art, academy and the corporate world.
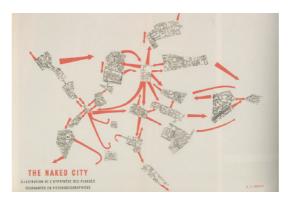
After shifting from materiality towards immateriality at the end of the twentieth century, we have recently been experiencing opposite shifts. Whatever we may call these trends — "re-materialization", "vintage media", "neo-analog", "post internet", "post-digital", etc. — they all deal with the inverse paths starting from the immaterial or conceptual and heading towards material or physical space. The low-tech aspect of the net.art movement in the mid-1990s was probably among the first signs of the post-digital era.

As we shall see, P.A.D. establishes a correspondence between *dérive* in physical space and *dérive* in conceptual space, which, I believe, blurs the border between digital and post-digital — if ever it is possible to blur it more. My opinion about how to handle post-digital is as follows: imagine somebody creates an artwork that uses a digital tool; once the work is set up, remove the digital tool and observe what remains afterwards; if the work still holds, one may say it is a post-digital project. In the *Google Adwords Happening* [1] for instance, I point towards a strange and explicit relation between two very old media, language and money. Without Google the project couldn't have been done. However, forgetting about Google and the Web, this relation may still hold and thus it might qualify as a post-digital project.
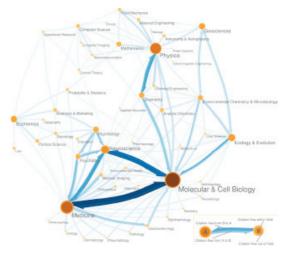
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Psycho-geographic *dérive* invites us to browse the urban space by listening to our emotions. As Guy Debord wrote in *Theory of the Dérive* (1956):

One of the basic situationist practices is the dérive [literally: 'drifting'], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Dérives *involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.* [2]

THE NAKED CITY
ILLUSTRATION DE L'HYPOTHÈSE DES PLAQUES TOURNANTES EN PSYCHOGÉOGRAPHIE

Instead of dérive in geographic space, let us now consider dérive in conceptual space. Actually, nobody really knows what conceptual space is! So, to make things more practical, let us replace conceptual space by one of its possible representations, for instance, by the following map of the 2008 academic space by Rosvall and Bergstrom.[3]

Rosvall and Bergstrom 2008. A map of science based on citation patterns. Analysis of 6,128 journals connected by 6,434,916 citations were clustered into 88 modules and 3,024 directed and weighted links.

In a psycho-geographic *dérive*, you don't just browse the city in a passive way, instead you produce new paths, one step after the other. Each step may lead to a new world… or not. In the same way, P.A.D. is not about reading or watching the conceptual landscape but about writing or producing new elementary steps. A series of steps is a link between nodes of the network, i.e. between different knowledge communities. Those called "weak ties", which provide improbable short-cuts, turn out to be essential to the large scale structure of scale-free modular networks such as the academic network.[4]

P.A.D.'s strategy will consist of writing new academic articles that will produce weak ties between very distant knowledge communities through their citation network, and then observing and measuring how the flow of knowledge is disrupted by these short-cuts. Of course, these academic articles will have to have some peculiar aspects and will be written following some specific rules, which I don't describe here.

In 1994, physicist Alan Sokal submitted a completely nonsensical paper entitled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" to the postmodern cultural studies journal *Social Text* (published by Duke University Press). After it was published, Sokal revealed that the article was a hoax in the journal *Lingua Franca*.[5] The articles I am writing, and that are going to be disseminated in the academic space, have a different status than Sokal's paper though. They could be mistaken as fake articles, but they are actually "fake fakes".

In order not to reveal too much of the project, I will mention only one article as an example. It links art history, media archaeology and microbiology, and is untitled "A case of self-preservation of a parasitic artwork with saprotrophic nutrition". Many others are in preparation, relating for instance:

linguistics, performance studies, complex networks, or cosmology, media archaeology and computer science; media studies, quantitative linguistics, and political economy; ornithology, alchemy, literature, aesthetics and complex networks; media archaeology, quantum field theory and psychoanalysis; and many more.

Sequel of former projects such as the *Dadameter* or *ArtWar(e)*,[6] P.A.D. will be implemented thanks to concepts and tools that witness the deep recent changes that occur at the border between the art world, academic space and networked capitalism, such as: Web 3.0, phase transitions and scale-free modular networks, bow tie topology, low materialism, amateur leeching, phenomenology of the formless, bursts, alluvial diagrams, scrums, rewiring of conceptual and affective information networks, re-branding of space-time, etc.

[… to be continued]

Notes

[1] Christophe Bruno, *Google Adwords Happening*, 2002. http://www.iterature.com/adwords.

[2] Guy Debord (1956) *Theory of the Dérive*. Les Lèvres Nues #9 (Paris, November 1956). Reprinted in *Internationale Situationniste #2* (Paris, December 1958). Translated by Ken Knabb.

[3] Martin Rosvall, Carl T. Bergstrom, *Mapping Change in Large Networks*, 2010, Plos One. http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0008694.

[4] We assume the reader to be aware of the contemporary theory of complex networks. See e.g. Barabási, Albert-László, *Linked: How everything is connected to everything else and what it means for business, science, and everyday life*. New York: Penguin, 2002.

[5] http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/transgress_v2/transgress_v2_singlefile.html http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/lingua_franca_v4/lingua_franca_v4.html.

[6] http://www.iterature.com/dadameter & http://www.artwar-e.biz.