

# #DMI12 Week 2 Intro

## Politics of Objects & Publics

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Monday, July 2, 2012

At precisely 3 p.m., on March 16, 1972, modernism was supposed to have come to an end (according to Jenks) w/ the unceremonious end with the destruction of Yamasaki's Pruitt Igoe housing complex in St. Louis. It's end was supposed, of course, to signify the end of meta-narratives, of technological progress, of political utopias, of the ambitions that design might reinvent a better, more equitable world.

But nowadays it seems again that everywhere you look design is being proposed as the solution to intractable global-scale problems. For instance, practically every other TED talk seems to be about how design thinking can save the world given a chance.

As Bruno Latour, in his recent climate alarmist mode puts it, as a planet, we're collectively confronted with "the necessity of redoing everything once again in a strange combination of conservation and innovation". So (w/ geoengineering, for example) we find ourselves once again in a relationship to "design" that finds its precursors in some of the extreme forms of modernism (Bucky Fuller, megastructural architecture of the 1960's, etc). With the lessons of modernism in mind, the question Latour ask us is "Will Prometheus ever be cautious enough to redesign the planet?"

I's suggest that its through his engagement w/ new media art and design that Latour sketches his idea of how to compose this "cautious prometheus"



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- One of Latour's site of investigation in recent years has been media art and design as exemplified by the Making Things Public
- sought to develop a concept of 'representation' that connected politics, science and aesthetics.
- In curating the exhibition Latour applied Heidegger's notion of das Ding as 'a gathering' to the objects of science and technology which the philosopher of science traces: things-as-gatherings.



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- Latour's interpretation of new media, could be understood as an attempt to ground the non-foundational concerns of post-structuralist philosophy in the pragma (thing in its Greek etymology) of pragmatist philosophy (Marres).
- In MTP he envisions the 'design of politics' in pragmatist terms of 'collective experiments'
- media arts play an important role in how scientific matters-of-fact are rhetorically constructed (in terms of matters-of-concern) that they may be debated and decided upon for entry into a collective which he refers to a parliament of things.
- (Noortje criticizes this concept for failing to acknowledge the divergence between abstract theories of the common good and the contingent entities that science and technology studies has worked to deconstruct)

- ‘[h]alf of public life is found in laboratories’
- ‘[t]he more instruments proliferate, the more the arrangements become artificial, the more capable we become of registering worlds.’

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For Latour objects are judged for entry into Latour’s collective based on how well or how poorly they have been articulated

– (as Tristan pointed out, he embraces mediation. This as opposed for example to the a thinker like Guy Debord for whom mediation leads away from authentic experience).

# Public Science

- As science & tech introduce new entities, art & design have been used to domesticate or “contextualize” them. (Born & Barry)
- From discourse of public understanding towards public experiment.
- as media artists are themselves used to dealing with complex technical instruments many are increasingly coming to frame their work in a Latourian manner as public or “citizen scientists” (da Costa, 2008: 365–386).

# The Two Cultures

- “It is bizarre how very little of twentieth-century science has been assimilated into twentieth-century art” (C.P. Snow ‘59)
- Leavis viewed Snow (who became minister in Wilson’s gov’n’t) as technocrat, a 'spokesman for the "technologico-Benthamite" reduction of human experience to the quantifiable'
- In turn Williams considered problem in terms of general distain, by both literary and scientific intellectuals for vernacular forms of practice.

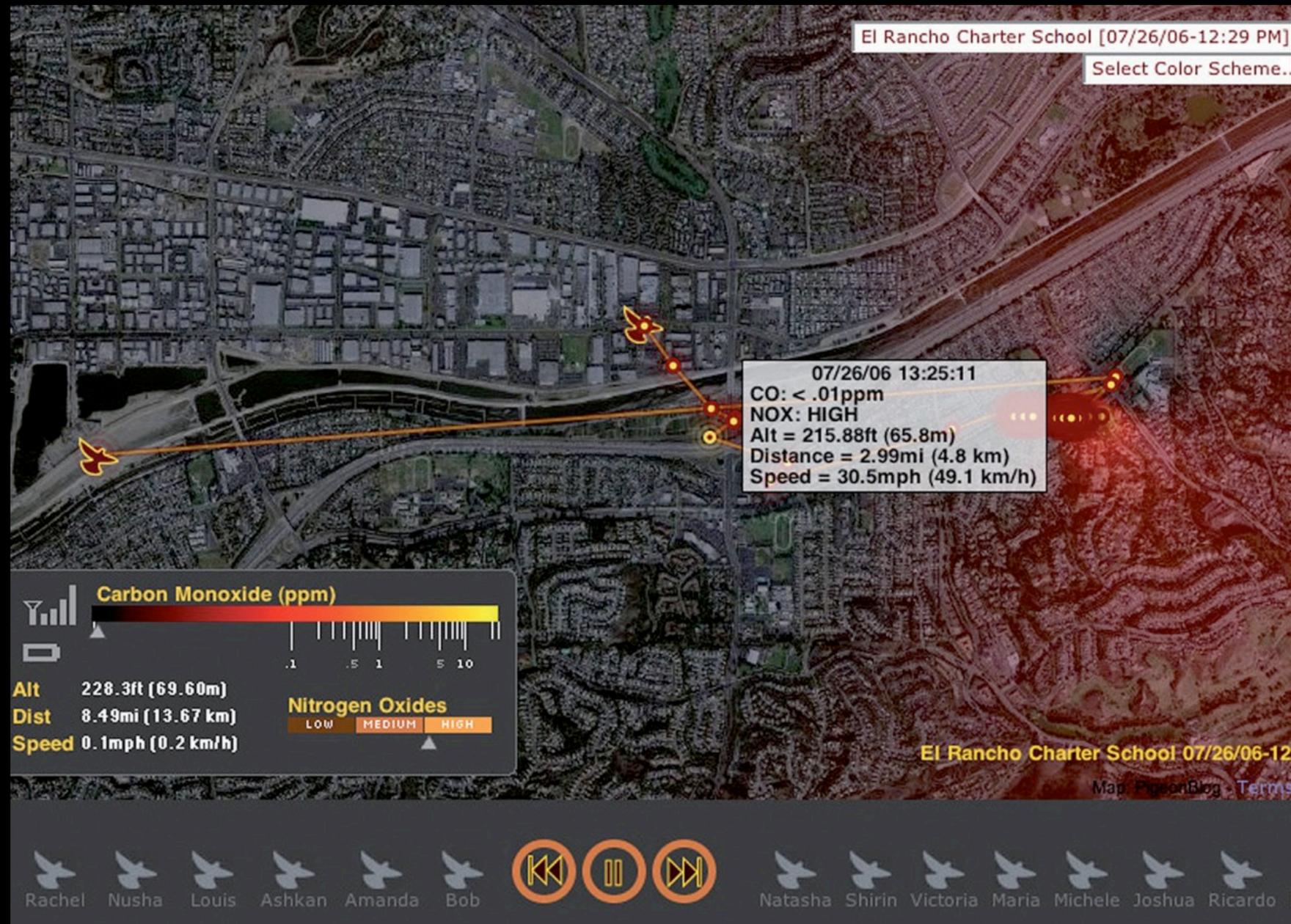
# 3 Logics of Art/Science

- Interdisciplinarity b/w arts & science, as represented by MTP, concerned w/ rethinking relations b/w scientific experts & public.
- Art/science understood as evidencing logics of: 1.) accountability, 2.) innovation and 3.) ontology
- 1 & 2 help art/science become “next big thing” (see locative media), 3 operationalizes many philosophical debates w/in STS re: multiple ontologies, etc.



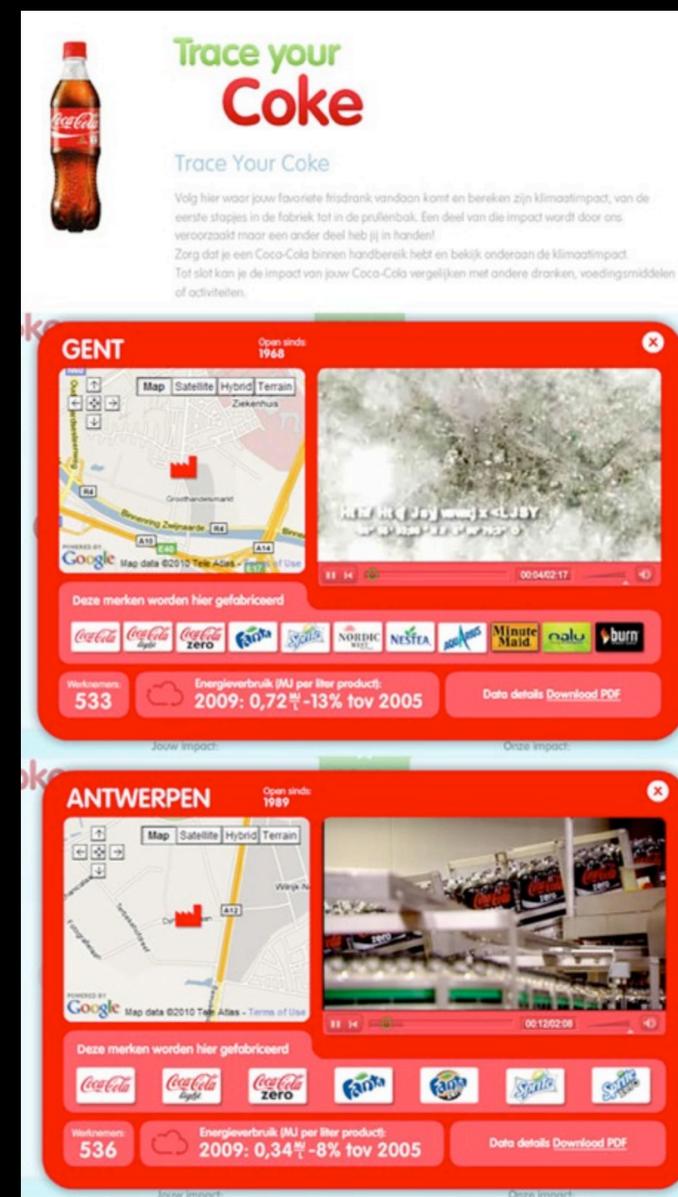
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- For Latour, concepts like 'Nature' or 'the public' do not exist a priori, he thus criticizes any theory which takes 'nature' for granted as the backdrop upon which politics takes place.
- there can be no settlements based on a notion of 'common nature,' in which the full range of ontological antagonisms are not acknowledged.
- He thus criticizes the 'Green' ideology of mainstream ecology as using a romantic vision of "Nature" apart from technology to, in fact, 'abort politics'.
- So, how do the new entities of sci&tech change how we might think these old ideas?



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- The Internet of Things has allowed citizen scientists to develop prototypes for speculating on the Latourian idea of non-human things acquiring the ability to comment on their own environment, thereby affecting human behaviour and gaining a degree of agency eg: Beatriz da Costa's PigeonBlog & Joshua Klein's Crow Box
  - (for Born & Barry PigeonBlog challenges disciplinary authority by reconceptualizing the practice of measurement [of air quality] as a dynamic, distributed and unfinished system of public knowledge.)
- When we consider John Berger's (2003) claim that modernity begins when people no longer directly depend on animals and they become symbolic we can appreciate these projects in light of Latour's claim that we have, in fact, never been modern



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- New traceability genre: Trash Track -> SourceMap
- (also teardown as form of traceability: PIG,
- Sterling's Spime ecosystem metrics associated w/ everything, making the invisible hand visible, reversing Read's claim in iPencil Toaster)
- emergence of ethical traceability as a discourse of consumer empowerment in re: IoT
- The rise of collaborative consumption (AirB&B, turns your stuff into a standing reserve)
- In spite of the "world changing" rhetoric of green consumerism, according to Paul Dourish, new media tends to take "the environment" and "the market" as natural facts framing the the individual "user" as the ultimate arbiter of social change.
- He proposes an agonistic model for cosmopolitical collaborative consumption: imagine if "Trace Your Coke" told you that "the action you are about to take aligns you with X but against Y". Fat Chance of That!



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- Latour envisions a world of protheses which give voice to things, thereby enhancing our sensorium (he gives the example of the perfumer's "nose")
- Though left-wing "post-politics" tends to be weary of the technological fix,
- Everywhere one can see evidence of the ethico-political engagement things,
- The traceability of the natively digital IoT object suggests a new kind of appetite for data
- Data regarding the provenance and logistical trace-route of things is no longer only of interest to regulatory bodies and to trainspotters



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– we nevertheless see that the notion of object-oriented politics can be notoriously apolitical (in this case fetishizing a preposterous idea of “local”)

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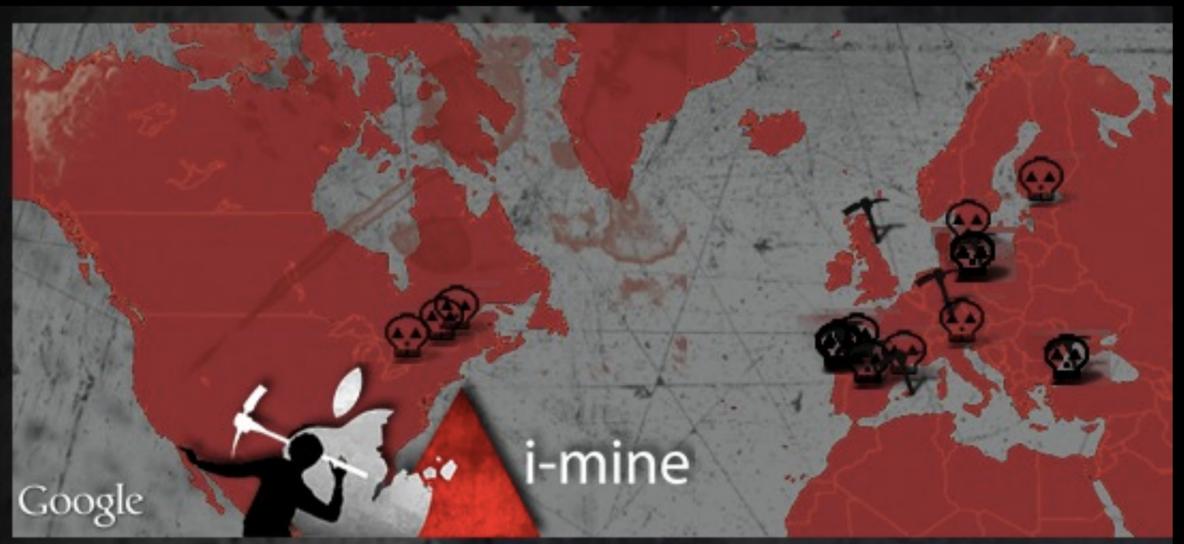
– and a fetish for transparency can correspond to the logic of neoliberal governmentality in which the citizen-consumer remodels herself-as-enterprise

– Wilde: “the truth is rarely simple and never pure”

# CLOUD COINS



## About FairPhone



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- so, while the solutions offered by the design revolutionaries at TED tend to leave the structuring absences of neo-liberalism unaddressed, critical design practices take these intractable problems as starting points
- in order, for example, to envision the world's ethical phone (working w/ rare mineral miners)
- or to attempt at mapping a labour model of an existing smartphone working backwards from the product teardown
- the latter suggests the ultimate Benthamite-utilitarian technology in which ones actions could be calculated based on minimizing suffering

# Designing *Agencement*

- Callon rejects the notion of a prosthesis as assuming “a common anthropological base” to which “appropriately equipped individuals” might aspire.
- instead he "takes these maladjustments as the starting point to argue for an adaptation of the world and particular situations... produc[ing] socio-technical *agencements* that are flexible, adjustable, and robust and that allow different individuals to fit into the interactive rationale”

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- but while HCI may frame action in terms of what M. Callon calls homo economicus 2.0, these art–science projects seem to be less about making cyborg prostheses than imagining a more habitable and flexible world (this what Callon refers to as a “habilitation policy” for interaction design)
- By engaging w/ new media Latour & Callon have moved STS from description towards intervention.
- Limited by an anthropocentric conception of agency, design benefits from this perspective.
- What can applied–STS researchers in–turn learn from art/science & design practice?
- Design serves to enable experiments. To bring about surprising data (rather than just data)
- If, as sociologists, we want to be more than merely envious of the natural science then we too need to construct the experiments
- As Pickering discusses in work of 2nd wave UK cyberneticians, such “nomad science” even challenge the authority of “royal science”, by developing performative non–modern ontologies.

# Strange Agencies

- questions (speculations) on:
  - STS' multiple ontology world (Woolgar, Thift)
  - analysis of distributed agency, and design policy recommendations for "info intensive enviro"(Callon)
  - how to re-think human subjectivity w/o capitulating to its coercive and exploitive aspects of RFID (Hayles)

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#### NEWEST DATASETS



#### Potential Open Data Sources

##### open government

- [United States Government open data](#)
- [UK government open data](#)
- [European public data](#)
- [European Public Sector Information \(PSI\) Platform](#)
- [France gov open data](#)
- [Paris open data](#)
- [New York City open data](#)
- [Dutch national government open data portal](#)
- [Rotterdam Open Data](#)
- [Apps for Amsterdam](#)
- [Open Data Eindhoven](#)
- [Amsterdam realtime air quality measurements](#)

##### open climate change adaptation

- [European Clearing House on Adaptation \(data from european researches\)](#)
- [Adaptation Atlas \(selected data on adaptation\)](#)
- [CI - Grasp \(selected data on adaptation\)](#)
- <http://climatechange.worldbank.org/content/economics-adaptation-climate-change-study-homepage>
- <http://sdwebx.worldbank.org/climateportal/index.cfm>

# Ethical Objects

- questions (speculations) on:
  - doing cosmopolitics through things, teapots, smartphones (Marres, Gottlieb)
  - ethical economy of social production & IoT (Arvidsson)
  - practical models for ethical traceability (Beekman et al)
  - “ethical anarchist metapolitics” (Critchley)

# Data Publics

- questions (speculations) on:
  - device-centered publics (Frie, Marres & Lezaun)
  - problem of transparency for left politics (Ruppert, Barry, Birchall & Lovink)
  - via Open Government & Wikileaks data sets
  - ALSO please listen to Ruppert's podcast, available at:
    - <https://wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/Summerschool2012ReadingDataPublics>