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UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE – EXPLORING THE DIGITAL CITY – TAPE 2 1-2

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LORENS: An hour or?

Man: About an hour and three minutes.

LORENS : An hour and three minutes okay. Okay it's precisely the question of how the digital is changing our understanding of space, our use of it to create our public culture and public politics that's what this workshop is concerned with. We should perhaps simply speak of urban environments and recognise that they're heterogeneous and that a number of factors including material space and digital information go into the making of them okay, I'm going to repeat something on Ventury here. In this regard their Architect Robert Ventury has played an important role that one that's not perhaps sufficiently acknowledged outside of architecture in his book from the early 70's, the learning, learning from Las Vegas he argued that urban space is organised by information in the case of Las Vegas almost exclusively so and other cities to greater and lesser extent. Although he was arguing against the kind of urbanism put forth in the book [inaudible] City also by Architects in which urban form is understood primarily as a composition of special figures it is easy to see how his argument, Ventury's argument could be lifted out of this context and brought to bear on the question of media environments so somehow making the link between space and media, the speciality of media is essential to this workshop because without it the topics of the other seminars which look at globalisation, surveillance, the use of media to galvanise the body politic and the like are accidental and their study is simply entirely empirical. These are obviously looking at the body politic, globalisation, surveillance etc, these are obviously also empirical studies but this link between media and space I don't think is empirical at all and there's a sense in which it, it could not have been otherwise. So I'd like to peruse the link between space and media and thereby give you one of my take on this conference as the organiser that I guess I feel that I'm in the privileged position of giving you my, my version of it first. So I'd like to peruse the link between media and space by discussing the interlinked ideas of freedom space and identity. Our freedom from state control to publicly peruse our own politics and identity or maybe the function of public space in the shape of our identity, these thoughts have been prodded by the Government's intentions to introduce identity cards which I consider to be the single most nauseating threat actually to our personal freedom by a Government that seems kind of like governed to totalitarian it's kind of big brother I think, but these comments are not intended to be political nor is this a rant against identity cards, I don't think that's what we're here for and nor it's just not the agenda of the workshop. These comments are merely made I think, the comments the, the sort of link between public space and identity are just made more relevant by the recent Government initiative and it was sort of what kind of got me thinking about it and to, to make the link between freedom, space, identity it, it goes, I, I was trying to think of some examples and it goes something like this, I have

just a bunch of examples here, Zeno and the Stoics. Zeno arguably the political philosophy of world citizenship as opposed to state, city state citizenship the historicists argued this they had to argue in the agora because as foreigners with no rights to Athenian property the Stoa in the public market place was the only place where they could be heard and only much later did they gain rights to the academy when they gained rights to private property. The fifteenth century French Huguenots escaped persecution by leaving France for England, seventeenth century English Anabaptists escaped persecution by leaving England for America. In nineteenth century America if you ran into legal, financial or domestic difficulties in the east coast cities it was always possible to disappear from the law, from spouse or creditors and refashion your identity on the western frontier. Now even though this is no longer possible because America doesn't have a frontier they have high suicide rate on the west coast of America confirms or it's usually taken to confirm that the fantasy of go west young man to find fortune and redemption still operate okay. In fact now one's very trapped in America but it used to be possible to find freedom. In Joseph Conrad's, another example when Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent*, a conspiracy of anarchists attempt to ignite a bomb at Greenwich and to thereby symbolically undermine the temporal order of the world they conspire in a Soho tobacconists, I think it was Water Street, a place of high and the tobacconist was a place of high anxiety because it was lit and public and as they were sort of having their powwows people keep coming in off the street and they suddenly have to stop looking suspicious and pretend to be you know buying tobacco or stamps or whatever, so they conspire in a Soho tobacconists and then slip back into the inky blackness of a lamp's Water Street, nineteenth century Water Street, no, no street lights, no street signs, no nothing they'd disappear. They could quite literally then disappear between the murky, beneath the murky surface of London okay. So nineteenth century London functions sort of the way I guess film *Noir* cities have always functioned and I don't really know what nineteenth century London was like but I think maybe, you can kind of imagine it from film *Noir*. It's never a space of visibility where all things are seen, where there's clarity but always a space for hiding kind of murky space where nothing is as it seems and everything can shift and become hidden and identities can start shifting, shifting around. So one more example and then I'm done with examples, one of the few places it's possible to escape straight, state scrutiny is the Afghan highlands on the boarder with Pakistan, these aren't urban, this one isn't an urban space but I think the space of London was in *Secret Agent* is very, very good, the, the Afghan highlands on the boarder with Pakistan, Bush said President Bush said that there's nowhere to run and nowhere to hide respectively Taliban, to the Al Qaeda, there was nowhere in other words that American surveillance could not reach for this, and for a short while I laboured under the rather distressing and claustrophobic thought that the world had finely become a closed shop. There was finally nowhere left to go, no although I disagree with his modus operandi I'm relieved that Bin Laden has been successful in using the media to control his appearance and disappearance from state scrutiny okay he's demonstrated several times now that he can switch the hegemonic gaze of

state power on and off at his own will. Despite the extension of American ears and eyes by modern intelligence systems like satellites and drones and kind of remote listening or whatever they can do they're still places where transparency and instantaneity have not, not penetrated and I guess just to jump to the other side of the surveillance fence I think the, the satisfaction and attraction of the Google Earth project is kind of the ability to sort of drop in and, and find everywhere even though actually you can't really get, get close enough okay. So anyway freedom then has a spatial form, it's absolutely ineluctably spatial. The emergence of powerful data basis is changing our relationship to space. What happens and, data basis and surveillance, what happens to freedom when there's no longer anywhere to go to escape scrutiny. What happens to freedom when digital technologies have made data basis so comprehensive and so centralised that it's no longer possible to slip beneath the surface. If space is no longer the locus for freedom we do not necessarily lose our freedom it just means that it needs to seek other forms and has to shift so other modes, that might be where the digital comes in I don't know. Identity is increasingly becoming a digital infrastructure. It is becoming similar to other infrastructures like the highway, the gas pipeline or the water main, the Architect, Will Allsop, he had like a TV show where he toured Britain, I can't remember what it's called, the Architect Will Allsop said on his TV tour of Britain that even the countryside is plumbed in now, by that he meant that the line between countryside and urban side had become almost completely erased in the new economy both as a material fact i.e. pipelines and highways, roads everywhere but also I think he meant in terms of live or relationships and lifestyles you can live in the country and do city work okay. If there's nowhere in Britain that is not fully plumbed in with water, sewers, electrics okay, there's nowhere in Britain that's not fully plumbed in with water, sewers, electrics and other services. The identity infrastructure is equally plumbed in, it's not just in cities it's plumbed in at every cash mach, at every swipe card strip and pinpoint at every university (unclear 9.36). It will become even more so when the IT card system becomes the mode of access for all modes of participation in public space okay and by that I mean whether it's the electro system, the library system, the healthcare system or the money system. Our identities will be fixed in the co-ordinates of the 47, 49 dimensional identity space, I think there are 49 bits of information they collate. It may be regulated, we may need to pay for it, I think the Architect William Mitchell, Bill Mitchell said that our identity will be metered I don't really know what that means but I thought I'd through that in. It may be regulated, we may need to pay for it, we may need to take out insurance on it and although it may seem today like the most frightening extension of state power into big brother totalitarianism it will eventually seem completely normal because if it's an environment or it will become one and as McLuhan, if it isn't already and as McLuhan has already said repeatedly environments are largely invisible to their inhabitants he said don't ask a fish, oh no, don't ask a fish what water is or something like that. When identity becomes digital infrastructure, space ceases to be the host for freedom and becomes instead party to a fantasy of freedom. By fantasy I do not mean that space is a fantasy but that the

freedom it offers is chimeric so long as you can disappear in the western frontier in the Afghan highlands in a surrealist rev in the Montmartre crowds the freedom that space affords is not a fantasy but as soon as space become transparent everywhere transparent to the scrutiny of the state either through mechanisms of surveillance or the storage and retrieval of data space offers only the fantasy of freedom. A good example of space functioning as a fantasy as opposed to the reality of freedom are adverts for four wheel drive cars. The car's inevitably perched on a precipice in the wet mountain wilderness of New Zealand which I think where pre war Britain is now located as if anything as dependent upon roads, fuel distribution, road tax, licensing, three year financing and warranties, legal instruments like title and insurance certificates all of it supported by a credit rating based on your mortgage with council tax, house insurance, life assurance policy and final, finding a job with pension add on as if anything that's tied so with all of these instruments could ever be part of an escape okay so that's what I mean by you know how, how could a car that's so, that nails you down so completely ever be part of a fantasy of escape but it is and it continues to be and so perhaps I think space will only ever offer the fantasy with space. I'm finishing now. When identity becomes a digital infrastructure public space is changed. To appreciate how this shift would change urban discourse and I can't develop this maybe, maybe if we're all interested we'll develop this but if we don't then we don't have to but to appreciate, this is just an indication, to appreciate how this shift will change urban discourse consider how the shift, when identity becomes a digital infrastructure, to appreciate how it will change urban discourse continue how, consider how this changes such cherished stock and trade figures of twentieth critical urban culture as the flaneur. The flaneur is the figure of public urban men or at least one of them. His home is the street, indeed he is only a flaneur on the street, he's not flaneur in his sitting room or he doesn't flaneur around the bedroom he only flaneurs in, in the city street. He is apart from the crowd because he observes it, but invisible to the crowd because he flows with it. His (unclear 13.26) movement is an indicator of an unconscious road of desire, it may not be really relevant, the flaneur, no it is relevant sorry, the flaneur is always visible but always dropping out of sight both to himself and to others okay. This is a word where, whose possibility in other words depends upon a continual exchange between appearance and disappearance an exchange not possible to sustain. If we imagine that as he wanders from Montmartre to Rive Gauche to wherever he's never outside of CCTV cameras, now this would not be such a big deal except that, I mean maybe, this would not be such a big deal this sort of reduction of the flaneur to kind of nothing except that from this surrealists can see a whole series of, of ideas about urban culture are predicated on okay what it means to be part of a crowd, the relationship between individual identity and collective identity etc, I mean people have been writing about the flaneur from senate to senate okay, so I'm stopping here but we're not losing our freedom due to increasing state scrutiny, due to the conversion of, the transformation of identity into a digital infrastructure I just think it will be shifting to other areas, to other modes and other forms of congregation and spatial warrants and, or rather in order, and along with that

other modes and forms and spaces of congregation for the expression of public politics in the modern, modulation of identities. So, now I, I, I've given you this kind of it's a sort of a lecture by Stelth, maybe that was wrong I don't know but I, I just, to me this is, it's, it's ephemeral this kind of link you know politics and space but I just think you know we, we have to keep it in our mind because otherwise like there's no relevance to everyone being here from all these different disciplines and there's no relevance for stringing together kind of like all of these seminars so this is kind of my kind of attempt, it's probably just my anxiety kind of to keep it together. Thank you for kind of you know putting up with that. I think the, the agenda, I think, I think lunch is organised for one which is in an hour and I was thinking that maybe well first maybe everyone wants to have some cold coffee and, and then I, I think we should like in the next ten minutes or so go down to, to look at laser net cos actually it wasn't this, this was a kind of by way of prefatory remarks it was really what was on show was really something that Paul Guzzardo and I had a hand in along with these two other chaps John and Adam who aren't here and, and I think what we wanted to do was kind of take us all down there, explain it, allow you to sort of comment on it and then come up and kind of after watching and, and make that the focus of the afternoon. So I'm going to have a cold coffee and I invite everybody else to do so. Lunch will probably be cold too but it's probably meant to be cold.

(Group break for coffee)

30 minutes