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## I Move, Therefore, I Am

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### Abstract

Together with the artwork titled '*No Man's Land*' that was exhibited in the ANTARA exhibition, this paper presents an understanding of properties and attributes of presence and how they manifest through locative media. Building on the ideology of existentialism, the author equates the performativity of locative media with the intentionality to move. The work maps out the multiple ontologies of presence and space conditioned to locative technology usage. The author concludes by highlighting a new mode of existential location consciousness and reflecting upon the potential of this perception for future research in this area.

**Keywords** Locative art; Presence; Consciousness

### I MOVE, THEREFORE, I AM

The evident geographic latitude longitude coordinated point on earth when elevated beyond its instrumental status can be understood as an existential proof – a beautiful evidence of one's existence. The philosophy of existentialism has always been an influential undercurrent in art and human existential anxiety often becomes a recurring subject in art. Arts have been closely intertwined with our everyday existence and through arts artists question and express the meaning, purpose or value of existence. Subjective existence purported by Rene Descartes's 'I think, therefore I am' has dominated our understanding of consciousness for nearly four centuries. However, in this digital era, the omnipresent GPS-based technologies and Internet connectivity in support of the constant communication of location is increasing the fluidity between physical world and virtual world. The result is a seamless experience that requires us to merge the body and mind as one. This extends the linear narratives of individual subject to include the possibility of multidimensional understanding of self

and consciousness. This phenomenon presents to the artist an emerging potential to rethink the mind-body problems and the legacies of earlier existentialists' approaches to mind, body and phenomenon. Together with the artwork titled 'No Man's Land', this paper presents an understanding of properties and attributes of presence and how they manifest through locative media. Building on the ideology of existentialism, the author equates the performativity of locative media with the intentionality to move. The tautology is: we move so that we know we exist, and we know that we exist because we move. Hence a new proposition—I move, therefore I am.

### **The Surge of Existential Attitude in the 21st Century**

The 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch philosopher Rene Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* – 'existence precedes essence', commonly translated as 'I think, therefore I am', is a philosophical proposition that asserts self-consciousness of men or the subject is responsible for the construction of reality set upon him (Heidegger & Lovitt, 1977). His mind-body dichotomy laid the foundation for dualism that engendered many discourses on the relationship between cognition and action. Descartes's metaphysical expression was famously rejected by Heidegger whose phenomenological apprehension of reality transcends a closed system of thinking but extends to a phenomenon being. This set forth a distinction between a pursuit of 'being by thinking' and a pursuit of 'being by doing'. Fundamental to Heidegger's thinking of 'being' speaks simultaneously of the object of consciousness and the consciousness of something.

At the early stage of Cybernetic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Shannon's Information Theory forged the development of the information infrastructure which defined the cyber world. His information theory emphasizes the abstract construction of information and discards the materiality constituting the lifeworld of human beings. This approach to being in the world elaborated a position consistent with the Cartesian viewpoint that equates subjectivity with only the mind and destitute of the corporeal body. Standing in opposition to immateriality and disembodiment purported by the early cyberneticists, Katherine Hayles moved beyond the traditional Cartesian dualism, and contested the material and information separation with her embodied mind thesis. Hayles did not only argue for the importance of embodiment but she advocated the entanglement of embodiment and disembodiment that foregrounded the definition of Virtuality. The following words of Hayles are worth quoting in this connection, 'virtuality is the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns' (Hayles, 1999, p. 13). Hayle's account of Posthumanism provides a more holistic approach towards the information/ matter duality. A posthuman can be said to be 'doubly encoded', defined by Hayles as 'existing both as physical objects and as instantiations of information flows' (Hayles, 1996, p. 5). Hayles's concept surpassed the classical dichotomies of subject-object relations. This phenomenon presents us with an

opportunity to rethink the mind-body problem and legacies of earlier existentialists' approaches to mind, body and phenomenon.

### **Presence: Where Are We?**

The key aspects of navigation are: 1) current position, 2) goal and 3) route to take. To identify the route to take we begin by finding out our current position: what part of the whole are we in? Where am I? We ask this question when we feel lost. A seemingly simple question as such can inspire several others e.g. 'who am I?', 'why am I here?', each one more complicated than the first. In general, the question is relevant to the geographic coordinate system of earth appropriated to find our physical location on Earth. The answers will mostly entail a relation to 'position' or 'location', often translated as a numerical representation. For instance, in a technological world, shall you throw the same question to Google or any other search engine portrayed as intelligent avatar (Microsoft's Cortana, Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa), it will return an answer showing your current geography location on a map interface. Scientific contributions focus primarily on describing related empirical facts revolving around our planet; the humanistic approach poses a rather open ended question, 'how do we come to the doubt of it and what is the meaning of it?' This entails an interrogation of individual's position from its socio-cultural-political ramifications, it will engender different cultural debates and social issues for location can be a man-made construct that brings forth the question of personal identity. Existentialist questions as such do, in sum, add to the human existential anxiety that often becomes a recurring subject in art. The answer to the question "Where am I?" pertains to the question on existence can be answered from many perspectives, of different cultural and ideological background. The search for one's 'location' can be speculated from metaphysical, philosophical, scientific, cognitive, psychological, so on and so forth. Insights into one's existence can not only be derived exclusively from the favoured approach of scholars from an exclusive field. For one cannot prove universal or absolute non-existence of something, the proof of existence must come from the person who makes the claim. For Descartes, as soon as he thinks about his existence, he exists. Heidegger speaks of the time of presence from which we can derive the concept of Being: 'Entities are grasped in their Being as 'presence' (Heidegger, 1996, p. 22); this means that they are understood with regards to a definite mode of time-the 'Present.'

The discourse of dichotomy of mind/ body, absence/ presence, embodied/ disembodied, emplacement/ displacement is the only possibility for making sense of this highly complex issue of existence or presence. In sum, all the discourse revolves around the relationship between the two sides: Here versus There. We create such a division of the world in our own mind and we construe the disparity for our own convenience.

### **Being Here and There in Cybrid: Hybrid Presence**

As the world is generally divided between *Here* and *There*, an individual's presence and action are distributed between the virtual world and real world. (Bassett, 2005) talks of how individual's attention is playing a major role in this competition of presence mode: 'since individual's capacity to pay attention is limited, any selection is made at the expense of other objects/ spaces so that to pay attention is to prioritize: to invest of the disinvest.' Depending on which world is being given more immediate attention, two modes of presence can be delineated: (1) asymmetrical presence, and (2) symmetrical presence. A person will experience asymmetrical presence when either virtual world or real world is given more attention: it can be either *Here* or either *There*. Symmetrical presence refers to the sense of induced when an individual's presence and action are somewhat equally distributed between the virtual world and real world: being *Here* and *There* at the same time. The concept of bi-location, astral projection, bi-presence/ multi-locational is given a new visit in the world where the boundary between virtual and real is blurred. In Turkle's way of looking at this model of presence, 'there is no "me," no "I," no unitary actor (Turkle, 2005, p. 265). There is only a "decentralized" self,' she said. Under such conditions, the virtual world overlaps with the physical world, we have to shift the focus of our consciousness from one space to another as we 'move' from one space to another. Our 'being' becomes fragmented and existence sometimes becomes a doubtful thing. Precisely because our 'being' in cyber world can be challenged by doubt, we can play out different role identity for 'doubt makes everything a potential fiction' (Anders, 2000). I argue that the flux of movement of 'fragmented self' in the media realm resurrects the essential existential attitude that begins with an individual's disorientation in the spatial relationships between the actual and virtual space.

Anders's scale of abstraction (2000, p. 131) for electronic media space compared with traditional narrative space is useful for our analysis of the relationships of electronic space with the physical world (Figure 4-5). This comparison is instrumental for the normalization of electronic spatial simulation on one hand and for the demythologization of the tradition of fictional spaces on the other hand. The 'most concrete' and the 'most abstract' stands at the opposite ends of the continuum in the scale, appealing to our perception and cognition respectively. Anders's re-framing of fictional spaces in traditional narrative to the concept of cyberspace in the contemporary context reflects the eternal function of a 'virtual' space that is always present in our cultural history, only in different form and serves different ideology. Henceforth, we can understand the new *PokemonGO* craze as a rendition of mythical fantasy. At the scale's midrange, there is Legend in the narrative space and its counterpart Cybrids in the digital world, similarly synthesizing the fictional and the factual. This 'in-between space' has always been there in our culture and history of humanity. Legends are stories passed down from one generation to another thus engendering cultural memory in the society but unlike myth legend is anchored to geographical locale; Cybrids is a concept Anders (2000) proposed for the 'hybrids of physical and cyberspaces' and it is at a level of abstraction comparable to Legend. Legend's comparable technologies

are augmented reality, ambient computing and locative media that promotes the ‘values, meaning, and solidarity’ of a society and yet maintains ‘an integral link with the physical world’ (Anders, 2000, p. 133) Most importantly, Ander asserted in his Cybrid concept an exclusivity of physical dimension of cognitive and digital space in which the symbolic or digital entities have physical consequences. In Cybrid, the digital and the physical are influencing each other in a reciprocal way: one’s output will be the input of another entity. Ander’s analysis also suggests an evolutionary trajectory toward the separation of mental intellectuality from physical actuality purported by Plato since 400 B.C. At the extreme of abstract space, digital state space is envisioned to substitute instead of simulate the reality, like state space liken to afterlife where we can obtain immortality.

Writing about virtuality, reality and digitality, Munster (2006) claimed that virtuality does not exist in realm beyond or transcend corporeal experience. Instead, we need to view reality and virtual all as part of a totality. Rather to draw an analogy from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s “alert reverie” as O’Rourke (2013) did, locative media experience in psychogeographical sense is a kind of double presence that is both in the here and now and in the imagination. With locative media, we witness actual movement through real space translated into corresponding movement in the virtual world. Our habituation to corporeality and embodied movement is accountable for this reification. Munster (2006) claimed this form of duplication does not resemble reality, rather it corresponds with the actual sensory world that is subjected to fluctuating degrees of variation, the general mutability and contingencies of sentient life, (which can be captured by various sensors forming a perpetual flow of data) one which does not transgress the geography. Thus we often find geographic data in locative media supplemented by other data captured by gyro sensors and accelerometer leveraging on our proprioception, suggesting the corporeal dimension of virtuality.

<i>Analog Media</i>	<i>Digital Media</i>	<i>Cybrid</i>	<i>Domain</i>	<i>VR</i>	<i>Digital State</i>
<i>History</i>	<i>Speculation</i>	<i>Legend</i>	<i>Fantasy</i>	<i>Myth</i>	<i>State</i>
<i>&lt;Concrete &lt;Perception</i>		<i>Abstract&gt; Cognition&gt;</i>			

Figure 1 Scale of Abstraction for Electronic Media Space Compared with Narrative Space (Source: Anders, 2000)

This metaphysical entity’s niche in post-virtuality is also evident in locative media artworks whose existence in the physical domain originated from the virtual domain. The sense of presence that is elicited from this kind of creative endeavour is only a human perception of place, in both physical and virtual domains. For instance, when we are navigating or finding our way in physical reality with the assistance of locative media, we are encountering an interlocking of virtual position and physical position, with which we manoeuvre in space, by

calibrating both of them. The result is a seamless experience that requires us to merge the virtual and physical as one.

### **Being Here and There and Everywhere: The Distributed Mind**

Driven by intentionality, we define our trajectories through movement in space (physical and virtual) and we embody our body as a moving instance. Butnaru (2012) emphasizes the spatial aspect of reality: 'Space is also the milieu in which we define ourselves as trajectories and therefore as and through movement, a quality which recalls the intentional drive and the manifestation of the body as a directing instance.' Building on the ideology of existentialism, we can equate performativity of locative media with the intentionality to move. Cybernetics constitutes a space organization complex. Instead of only looking the delineation of space we must also at the dissemination of consciousness. The drawback of the dichotomous view of space (physical versus Virtual) resides in the divide between the physical realm (Here) and symbolic realm (There). Post-structuralist philosophers rejected structuralist's idea that knowledge could be centered on the human knower (egocentric), and sought diverse versions of consciousness and abilities beyond an egocentric one in perceiving this world. Heidegger's existential philosophy offers a plausible integration of the mind-body dichotomy, thinking-doing dichotomy, and objectsubject distinction. This approach reminds us that our egocentric way of understanding the world is not the only way. Human's consciousness is tuned to integrate new perception into a single coherent perception and consciousness. Ascott (2000) called this 'technoetic' dimension of the mind when our consciousness, intelligence, senses embody other entities in the environment resulted in a mind that is 'telebiotic, neuro-constructive, nano-robotic' (2000, p. 3). The unfolding of the Earth into a 'planetary thinking network' is perpetuated by the technoetic effects of human connectivity, ubiquitous computing and creative use of moistmedia<sup>1</sup> that constitute a singular whole cosmo. Rethinking the senses in contemporary media, the notion of media as 'extensions of sense' is brought up to date by Clark (1998, p. 47)'s 'extension of mind' which posits mind as a 'controller of embodied action'. Taking GPS as an example, we take for granted this ubiquitous device in our cognitive processes augmented by technology. In this respect, Clark (1998, p. 104) draw attention to his affinity with instrument or tools by emphasizing control of them as an emergent property of a self-organizing system made up of modular units that comprise the brain, body and the environments. Likewise, consciousness 'being a macro-level coherence formed from the micro-interactions between firing synapses within our brains' (Pearson, 2011, p. 111). This indicate the extent to which the emergence brings about the concept of being: an unified whole experience made up of, in Zeki's word, microconscious events; each one tied to the activity of different neurons/ nodes at different times and locations, in the processing system of brain (Broadhurst, 2007, p. 50). This hybridity of perception is very important to understand our identity in a time as such and subsequently allows us to develop a sense of empathy with the ecology and other agency.

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