Prototyping the Idiotic City

WORKSHOP

Goldsmiths — RHB 137
Tues 5 June 2018 @ 9:30AM –> 4:30PM

Event is free, please register here: https://idiotic-cities.eventbrite.co.uk

Participants
Alison Powell, London School of Economics
Gyorgyi Galik, Royal College of Art, London/Umbrellium)
Jennifer Gabrys, University of Goldsmiths
Mike Michael, University of Exeter
Noortje Marres, CIM, University of Warwik
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The idiot "is the one who always slows the others down, who resists the consensual way in which the situation is presented and in which emergencies mobilize thought or action. This is not because the presentation would be false or because emergencies are believed to be lies, but because "there is something more important". (Stengers, 2005)

This one-day research/making workshop invites contributions that critically challenge the notion of 'smartness' in contemporary societies. In recent years, the notion of smartness has gained pervasive prominence in various spheres of social life, in particular, the ways that cities can be known, planned and governed. As Simon Marvin, Andrés Luque-Ayala and Collin McFarlane (2015) have suggested: "A new language of 'smartness' is reshaping debates about contemporary cities". Data collection is now enabled through embedded sensors and devices in urban space, particularly in the development of the Internet of Things. Autonomous mobility and other smart city initiatives make cities appear to be manageable and controllable in (near) real-time through smart analytics and dashboards. In developing these innovations, new modes of laboratorization and experimentation are deployed in order to test technological 'solutions', what Marres calls the proliferation of semi-fields. In these processes, the notion of smartness is usually associated with optimization and efficiency in economic terms, making things more sensitive, able to learn and predictive as well as more autonomous from human-user actions, while often camouflaging political, cultural, ethical and ecological implications.

Only a few studies have seriously questioned the socio-technical and performative implications of *making smarter* urban life (Gabrys, 2016). Against the grain of a sterile technotopia proposed by the smart city, we want to problematize the various kinds of smartness that are programmed and inscribed into this debate as well as question the newness of it. How does the ultimate imperative to 'be smart' permeate things, people and cities? Which actors are being specified as 'not-so-smart' and what are the consequences

of such delineations? Similarly, we want to speculate which *other modes* of smartness remain undervalued or can be enacted through practice beyond modernist, anthropocentric or western epistemologies. What are the failures and breakdowns that *slow down* and counteract the supposed smoothness of the smart city? How to consider, visualize and interact with the excesses (De la Cadena, 2015) of the everyday urban life? How to comprehend and care the ways of life that overflow the technological and conceptual frame of the Smart? In this regard, characters like the "idiot" or the "dumb" - inherent in social life but mostly invisibilized or neglected - could be mobilized to destabilize and interfere with the politics of smartness.

Through a one-day workshop we invite researchers to creatively incorporate the "murmur of the idiot" (Stengers 2005) into situations in which new relationships with our surroundings can be built. Our intention is not to reduce urban problems to a problem-solving logic strongly rooted in today's smart culture, but to open up our thinking to the dynamics of problem-making. The idiot, forces us to *slow down* the course of things*,* and reminds us that there might be something more important than to be smart. Much more, "the idiotic" shows unanticipated directions, rejecting forms of linear thinking that pre-configure solutions prior to understanding how the problems that are presented.

In sum, the purpose of this workshop is to engage the idiot so that we might complicate the cosmos convened by smart city initiatives, prototyping new ways of intelligence (Michael, 2012). We believe that it is necessary to consider the discrepancies or idiotic manifestations that emerge in and exceed the Smart City paradigm. We do this exploring how "idiotic data", breakdowns and situations of recalcitrance and overspills force us to respond to and redefine the very idea of "smartness" that is at stake.

Structure of the research workshop

For this workshop, we have developed a novel, experimental format. Eight practitioners have been invited to bring an object, experience or case study to be presented to another practitioner as a provocation (name and contact details will be provided in advance). Each presenter is asked to show an object or case as a starting point for problematization. Instead of a rigid separation between each presentation, the workshop will proceed in the form of an intersubjective chain of presentations: after a short introduction to his/her object or case, the first presenter will hand over to the second presenter, who will start by problematizing or, rather, 'making idiotic' the previous presenter's object. In the process of making idiotic we ask contributors to consider how *we* might slow down; how does the character of the idiot show us otherwise unseen blind spots, or consider the perspective from those who do not have, or perhaps, do not want a political voice.

Organising committee
- Michael Guggenheim (Goldsmiths, University of London)
- Martin Tironi (School of Design, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile)
- Liam Healy (Goldsmiths, Design, University of London)
- Fabian Namberger (Goldsmiths, University of London