Digital-Cultural Ecology and the Medium-Sized City

01-03 April 2016

Abstract Submission Form

1. Paper / Proposal Title: Black Mobility Matters: An exploratory study of Uber, hacking, and The Commons in Baltimore

2. Format: Written paper / verbal presentation

My colleague, Aaron Tobey, submitted a proposal that has strong overlap with my interest. The two of us are willing to be on placed on a panel or co-present if it benefits

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6. Abstract (300 words):

Public access to viable mass-transit is an essential organ of any city. Urban mobility is directly tied to opportunities in employment, education, health and nutrition, advocacy, and leisure. Yet, many medium-sized cities across the United States lack the economic resources and political momentum to better their public transportation infrastructure, perpetuating a dependence on urban car use. Baltimore's particularly slow transit reform is partly rooted in its history of racial tensions and spatial segregation. The lack of mobility contributes to the city's stagnant population growth, poverty, and concentrated crime. Such outcomes further hobble political and economic justification for transit reform.

This essay compares two methods of urban mobility for car-less residents in Baltimore—Uber and hacking. The rapid growth of mobile-network technologies and the 'sharing-economy' have revolutionized conceptions of urban mobility, but not necessarily for the better in the long run, as Uber's drivers and customers (re)imagine the Commons within a neoliberal framework. Hacking, Baltimore's long-standing informal alternative to urban immobility, provides an interesting

contrast with different implications for the Commons based on reciprocity. Through these comparisons, I speculate a civic-minded, open-sourced Uber-like model that capitalizes on Baltimore's car-centricism while envisioning a strengthened Commons through cooperative networks. This line of inquiry is motivated by what the public sphere may look like in a post-suburban-networked city, as the Global North becomes evermore posthuman.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Malcolm Rio is a graphic and architectural designer-thinker from Baltimore, Maryland. He is currently an AICAD Post-Graduate Teaching Fellow at Maryland Institute College of Art, teaching across architectural design, graphic design, and foundation studies. Malcolm's research and design work explores the overlaps between cybernetics, historical narratives, the structuring of bodies and identities, space and time. Malcolm attended Rhode Island School of Design on a graduate fellowship for his Master of Architecture, and was recognized with the 2015 Alpha Rho Chi award. He also holds a Bachelor of Science in philosophy and Bachelor of Fine Art in graphic design from Towson University.