URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, AI AND BIG DATA.

• Paper / Proposal Title:

Apple Town Square: Digital Placemaking and Digital Transformation of Urban Public Space

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• Abstract (300 words):

This explorative paper rethinks digital placemaking and urban digital transformation with an example of Apple’s “town square” plan. A term without consensus on its definition, digital placemaking is an emerging phenomenon that describes the integration of digital technologies into urban environments. It is integral to the digital transformation of the urban public spaces concerning how the places are planned, designed, programmed and inhabited. This paper utilizes urban assemblage thinking (Guattari & Deleuze, 1987; Dovey, 2012) and the concept of oligopticon (Latour, 2007, 2012) to examine a thwarted “town square” deal between Apple Inc. and Federation Square, Melbourne’s significant public space. It sees Apple “town square” as an intricate form of digital placemaking that reveals contemporary challenges faced with urban public spaces and cultural institutions. These challenges include architectural, business, digital and ultimately public issues. For Arendt (1958), power does not only exist in concert but also suggests potential and temporary characteristics. Therefore, as a paradigmatic Western
political organization, city-states remain the most crucial material pre-requisite for power. This paper urges urban placemakers and governments to examine not only technological applications and data policies, but also the value systems that guide urban decision-making processes. In doing so, it provides new insights into how urban governments can engage with digital technologies and contributes to the ongoing discussions in Science and Technology Studies (STS).

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Isabel Fangyi Lu is a PhD Candidate in the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne. Her PhD thesis explores the practices and politics of digital placemaking. Her research interest sits at the intersection of art, technology and democracy. She is a recipient of Australian Government Research Training Program (2018-2021). Her PhD is part of a collaborative Australian Research Council Discovery Project on arts precincts. She has contributed to Visual Culture Wars at the Borders of Contemporary China (Palgrave Macmillan) on ambient meme culture and Journal of Urban Affairs.