URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY
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• Paper / Proposal Title:
Representations of “Smart” Cities in William Gibson’s The Peripheral (2014) and Agency (2020)

• Author(s) Name:
Vasileios N. Delioglanis

• University or Company Affiliation:
Independent researcher

• Abstract (300 words):
On discussing ubiquitous computing, artist and architect Mark Shepard defines a “sentient city” as “one that is able to hear and see things happening within it” ("Toward" 31; emphasis in the original). He writes that “[c]ities are ‘smart’,” because “[a]rtifacts, spaces and systems we interact with (and through) on a daily basis collect, store and process information about us, or are activated by our movements and transactions” (Introduction 9). Shepard’s observations about “smart” architecture are evident in William Gibson’s latest novels The Peripheral (2014) and Agency (2020), which also present futuristic dystopian, dark, ghostlike, yet highly-technologized and sentient cityscapes where human action is constantly mediated through object-interfaces. This also corroborates Shepard’s view that “[n]on-human sentience” has been evident in science fiction writing ("Toward" 33). Being highly imbued with science fiction elements, these two novels serve as cases studies through which ubicomp technologies can be
explored, as they both bring to our attention an emerging world that is currently being shaped by ubiquitous computing technologies, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things. The present paper concentrates on the ways in which Gibson encapsulates through his literary practice the recent advances in the fields of ubiquitous computing and artificial intelligence with the depiction of multilayered, networked, “smart” urban spaces. The author sheds light to constantly expanding ubicomp systems of networked connectivity in which smartphones and AI entities are invisibly and transparently connected with other devices, while computing processes are embedded in the urban environment and the surrounding objects. While Gibson has been commenting on new media technologies since the 1980s, he now shifts the readers’ attention from digital technologies of cyberspace, as is the case with his previous works, to current location-aware, mobile, and ubicomp systems of mass surveillance and interconnectivity, in an effort to present the affordances and limitations of such technologies.

Works Cited

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

**Vasileios N. Delioglanis** holds a Ph.D. in Locative Media and North American Literature and Culture from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. For his Ph.D. he was funded by the Board of Greek State Scholarships Foundation (I.K.Y). In 2018 he received a postgraduate travel grant by the European Association for American Studies (EAAS) to conduct research on locative media in the Department of Media Study, and the Center for Architecture and Situated Technologies (CAST) in the School of Architecture and Planning, at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, U.S. He also holds an MA (2012) in American Literature and Culture, and a BA (2008) in English from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He is currently teaching English at secondary education state schools in Greece. He is also a web intern at and member of the European Association for American Studies (EAAS) as well as a member of the Hellenic Association for American Studies (HELAAS) and the Multimodal Research and Reading Group of the School of English, AUTh. His research interests include locative media, location-based games, contemporary American fiction, Cyberpunk and Cyberculture, hypertext and multimedia fiction and the fusion of literary practice with new media technologies.