Logistical Perspectives
by Mitchell Price

Orbiting the Port Phillip Prison, out in Truganina, about 22km west of Melbourne's central business district, are totems of uninhibited circulation. When the privately operated maximum security prison was first opened in 1997, it mostly stood isolated amidst cleared but undeveloped farmland. Three decades later, the suburb has become a hotspot for the emerging logistics industry, concentrated with warehousing, distribution centres, third-party logistics firms, cold storage facilities, and server farms, with a growing residential population to service this new infrastructure. The expanding meshwork of roads around the prison tell a story of the area's changing industrial landscape. In the block west of the prison lies Network Drive, a road which leads into Shiny Drive, then Prosperity Street, which adjoins Infinity Drive and Perpetual Street. South of the prison is Logistics Drive and Delivery Drive, on the corner of which sits an unmarked Amazon Web Services data centre. The web of distribution hubs north of the prison is serviced by roads such as Distribution Road, Future Place, Custom Place, and Foundation Road. Perhaps the most cruelly named is Freedom Way, a road paved in 2020 during the construction of the MidWest Logistics Hub, situated directly across from and orthogonally feeding into the prison complex.

While the area's key arterial roads, such as Dohertys Road, Palmers Road, and Leakes Road, refer back to the early white settlers of the region, these newer, more capillary-like roads index no such history. Instead, they invoke a sense of complete placelessness. It is also worth noting that

Figure 1. On the corner of Logistics Dr and Delivery Dr, in Truganina, Victoria. Image by author.

these older roads once contained possessive apostrophes – Doherty's, Palmer's, Leake's – suggesting a concrete territory with a demarcated history, at least until the Geographical Names Board removed all apostrophes from Australian street and place names in 1966. The stripping of the possessive form was possibly the first sign that "anthropological space" was waning as the purely transient "non-place" (Marc) or "logistics space" (Cowen) asserted a presence.

The ironic positioning of Freedom Way adjacent to the prison is the most revealing of the evolving geography of Truganina. On the one hand, it can be read as a joke against the incarcerated, with Freedom Way forever just out of reach and allusive; or, alternatively, it could mark a celebration for the recently released: *this way towards your newfound freedom*. On the other hand, it speaks to the absolute freedom of capital whose perpetual

Figure 2. Satellite images of Port Phillip Prison from 2015 (left) versus 2025 (right). Images from Google Earth.

flow is facilitated by an increasingly robust logistics industry spreading throughout the region. A freedom which is simultaneously juxtaposed with the incarcerated while being perpetuated by it.

Over the past ten years in particular, a sweep of industrial developments has transformed the region, from east to west, rapidly enveloping the prison in every direction while careful to retain some distance from undesirable association. This unique geography sheds light on the uneasy yin and yang of circulation and incarceration, between the mutually dependent logics of control and disciplinarity. However, this dynamic in Truganina is quickly changing. After decades of mismanagement by the British security company G4S, the privately run Port Phillip Prison was decommissioned by the Victorian Government at the end of 2025. The inmates were set to be moved to other maximum security facilities, most heading to the newly constructed Western Plains Correction Centre in the semi-rural town of Lara, about 40km south-west of Truganina. Emptied of prisoners, the future of this prison is uncertain. Will the surrounding logistics estates succeed in swallowing it entirely?

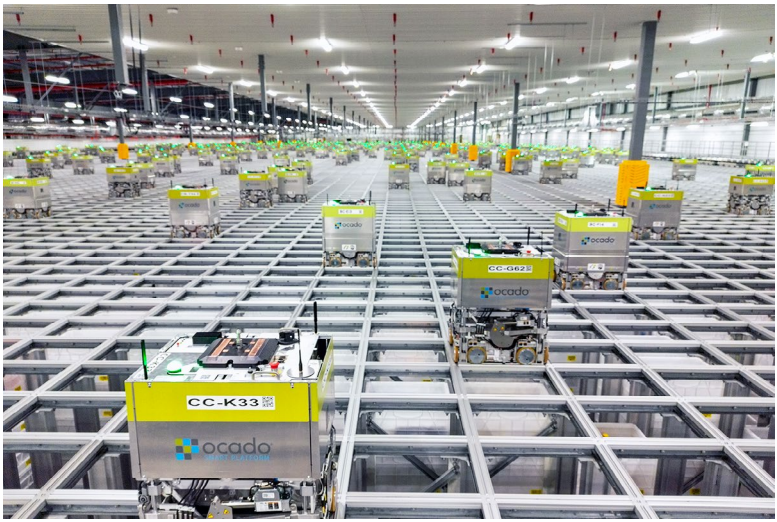

Figure 3. "The Hive" in a Coles customer fulfilment centre. Image by Ocado. https://www.ocadogroup.com/newsroom/news/coles-opens-first-fulfilment-centre

The Grid

In late 2024, Australian supermarket giant Coles became the newest fixture in Truganina, opening an 87,000 square metre customer fulfilment centre (CFC) directly across the road from the Port Phillip Prison. The area is shared with major retailers and wholesalers like Woolworths, Metcash, JB Hi-Fi, Target, and Uniqlo which also operate large-scale distribution centres nearby. The Coles CFC, as is the case with many of the distribution centres in the suburb, is built specifically to serve online delivery orders, sending groceries directly from the warehouse to customers. The rise of e-commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic substantially reshaped consumer habits and, consequentially, the infrastructural cartographies of supply chains and warehouses that make distribution to consumers possible. In a conventional supermarket, the layout of goods typically follows a recognisable grammar: items are grouped by type or by temperature. A

decade ago, online orders were usually fulfilled by workers essentially shopping on the customer's behalf. Workers walked up and down the aisles, picking items from the shelves, often directed by a handheld device that determined their routes around the shopfloor. However, as warehouses are erected to exclusively address this growing online market, we see a transformation in their logics of spatial organization.

The Coles CFC stems from a partnership with the British logistics firm Ocado which installed its Ocado Smart Platform (OSP), a mix of proprietary hardware and software. The highly-automated CFC is built around a sprawling grid of metal tracks suspended above columns of stackable containers filled with grocery items. The grid functions as a network of guide rails for several hundred robots that pick up and move around containers of items for packing (Fig. 3). Stock is placed into containers upon entry into the warehouse by (human) workers and then sent automatically into the grid to join columns of stackable containers. Bots then pass over to scan from above. When a product is required for an order, the self-driving units reach below to select a specific container and bring it to a human worker for packing, after which the container returns to the grid. These robots – collectively named "The Hive" – are managed by what the company refers to as an "artificial intelligence 'air traffic' control system" – or the "Hive Mind" – which oversees the complicated choreography of autonomous vehicles.

The management of logistical space is enacted through a continual calibration between the actual and the abstract. Warehouses are usu-

Figure 4. Overhead view from an ultra wide-angle camera in an Ocado warehouse in London. Image taken from https://youtu.be/ssZ_8cqfBlE?si=c_vKhOqybjSjXpye and edited by author.

ally rife with simple geometric forms: cubes, grids, and straight lines that facilitate the storing and outgoing transportation of consumer goods. These simple geometric arrangements instantiate a more general abstract logic that shapes how space is operationalized. This juncture between the concrete territory and the abstract map registers a perpetual struggle that energizes logistical capital, and it is a tension that is continually overcome but never completely resolved, as we will see in the case of the Ocado-designed warehouse.

The driving geometric form of the CFC is the grid. On the one hand, there is the physical grid, the material object comprised of acres of intersecting beams of metal built to certain specifications.

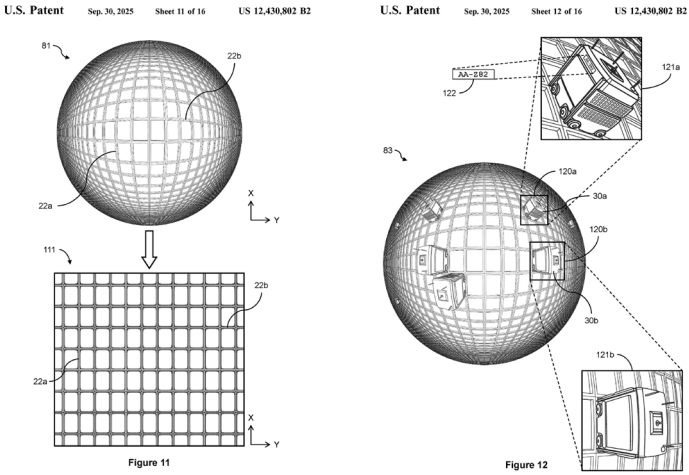

Figure 5. Calibrating a camera for mapping image pixels to grid points in a storage system, US12430802B2, 2022. https://patents.google.com/patent/US12430802B2/en

On the other hand, there is the abstract grid, the grid as a mathematical object that exists on a Cartesian plane: an idealized form of rational organization. It is the ensemble of sensors, software, and labour which works to superimpose the two. In the case of Ocado's system, the grid is in part managed by overhead cameras that provide a bird's-eye view of the warehouse's operations. Given the expansive scale of the grid, ultra wide-angle lenses are employed to capture the space – however, this predictably produces a distorted image (Fig. 4). The flat grid becomes represented as a sphere. This would be fine if the intention is simply to survey the area. Wide-angle imagery goes hand-in-hand with surveillance whether it is peepholes in doors, convex mirrors peering around a corner, or fish-eyed CCTV cameras, all panoptic in design. This is not the case here: in such an automated facility no sensor goes without somehow feeding back into the data loop.

A recently granted patent for Ocado elu-

cidates this underlying logic in more detail. The patent covers a series of techniques to calibrate an ultra wide-angle lens for overseeing a grid-like storage system (Fig. 5). It describes the use of a neural network to detect and predict sets of parallel tracks across the grid, tracing the parabolic curves that the distorting lens imposes onto the layout. Using its training data and parameters such as the camera's focal length, distance from the grid, and rotation/tilt, the software is able to map points of the real-world grid onto pixels in the image, and, vice versa, pixels can be corresponded to specific points on the grid. If there is a discrepancy between mapped points and the known coordinates of the grid, the calibration system will determine an error function in order to update the initial parameters, iteratively repeating the process until the grid and its mapping align. After a camera has been calibrated, it is able to "flatten" the image back into something resembling Euclidian space where the rectangles comprising the grid regain their four right angles. Most interesting, however, is the way this is framed in the patent. The projection of the curved image back onto a two-dimensional plane is presented as mostly being for user-friendliness; that is, for human interaction.

According to the patent, the mapping techniques apply to a lens that "introduces distortion compared with a normal lens that reproduces a field of view which appears 'natural' to a human observer." This naturalness, surrounded in scare quotes even in the patent, is suspect. There is, of course, nothing natural about the images produced in these warehouses, no matter the degree of distortion. Tens of thousands of square metres of steel and autonomous robots defies anything that could

be categorized as "nature." Within these logistical spaces, what matters is less the strict congruency between the map and its territory, but a more general correspondence between the two. The grid as a network of plastic points can be stretched and deformed as long as the territory and its representation are *topologically* compatible.

Vanishing Points

What is a "natural" image? And natural to whom? Presumably, a natural image is one where straight lines are presented as straight, and space is projected on to a relatively unwarped plane. At the very least, one should be able to agree that the Ocado images above constitute an "unnatural" image – perhaps leading us to an understanding of the natural image by demonstrating its opposition. However, twentieth-century debates by artists and visual theorists reveal the topic of perspective is far more evasive.

In *La Perspective Curviligne* (1968), which was published in English as *Curvilinear Perspective: From Visual Space to the Constructed Image* in 1987, André Barre and Albert Flocon critique the rigidity of classical perspective. Starting from the position that there is no such thing as a "normal" image, the authors call into question the assumed verisimilitude of traditional perspective in painting and photography where all straight lines converge into a single vanishing point as they recede. Against the dominance of the central vanishing point, they posit that it is instead one modality of representation among many. In its place they offer "curvilinear perspective," where straight lines are projected onto a curved geometry and a wider field of view

is represented in a circular frame. Curvilinear perspective multiplies rather than abolishes vanishing points. As can be seen in the ultra wide-angle imagery above, such a geometry has five vanishing points: the parallel lines of the grid can be seen converging at the (1) top, (2) bottom, (3) left, (4) right of the frame, as well as at the (5) centre into the z-dimension.

The authors suggest that the spherical perspective of curvilinear art retains a greater fidelity to the *experience* of perceiving the world, and its adoption will lead to more sophisticated subjectivities. "Curved structures," they claim in the book's conclusion, "will engender architectural arrangements that will renew our understanding and our feelings. […] Infinity will be better integrated into pictorial experience. Our new grasp of the visible should transform our fear and rejection of reality into an eager desire to understand it better, to love it more." In an introduction written for the German edition of the book in 1984, Flocon reflects on the spread of the more sensuous curvilinear style in the years after its publication "despite the ever more exasperating Pavlovian conditioning via television and the information industry." The former epitomizes the hegemony of photographical realism as the way that truth *should* look (he writes: "The little Renaissance picture frame [i.e. the television] obstructs one's own direct vision of things and makes indifferent Philistines of the public"). And the latter – "the information industry" – is targeted presumably for its refusal to take on any perspective at all, concerning itself with infinite flat planes and axonometric plans.

In the same introduction, Flocon reflects

on the absence of perspectival conventions in architectural plans he encountered during his time as a student at Bauhaus. He writes: "The removal of vanishing points, the strict parallelism of concordant straight lines, the regular and infinitely ascending terrain that overflows the edge of the drawing are perhaps an expression of consumer goods, running uninterrupted from the conveyor belt, which would unavoidably bring about a sense of well-being and ease." While Flocon recalls being impressed by the style at the time in the late-1920s, he notes that "the danger too often arises that such control will become a tool of megalomaniacal speculators" who wish to see everything at once without the contours of perspective. Space is not to be drawn from an "objective" bird's-eye view, but from within the tangle of lived experience.

Ultimately, the curvilinear perspective is concerned with reinscribing the suppleness of

Figure 6. "Tornado" amusement ride. Image by author.

subjectivity back into the image, resisting the homogenizing grasp that traditional geometry has in the representation of space. It likely goes without saying that a thread of communist utopianism persists throughout the text – Flocon was kicked out of Bauhaus for his student activism and militancy; and at the end of the updated introduction Flocon proclaims "in the future the uncertain, the ambivalent, and the relative will be our lot." It is ironic, then, to see the ways that curvilinear perspective has been taken up in the twenty-first century. Rather than realising the utopia of socialist subjectivity, such a perspective is more often incorporated into surveillance technologies that populate the dystopian horizon of logistical capital. Outside of skateboarding stunt montages, Yorgos Lanthimos films, and National Geographic TV shows, the fish-eye lens is frequently adopted in industrial settings to police the movement of labour and commodities, literally tracing consumer goods "running uninterrupted from the conveyor belt."

What Ocado's patent reveals is precisely that perspective is a problem to be overcome. The grid as a material form and the grid as an abstract ideal is mediated through sensors which are necessarily partial in their vision. The scope of the wide-angle lens intentionally distorts the image, requiring continual calibration to reinscribe the abstract grid onto its warped plane and an algorithm to "flatten" it back into an image usable by an operator. While the ultra-wide lens multiplies the image's vanishing points, further inscribing a specific subjectivity into it, the perspective of logistical capital is sufficiently flexible to navigate these contours.

The New Prison

Just outside the AWS data centre, on Delivery Road, sat a portable amusement ride folded up on the back of a parked truck (Fig. 6). It was the kind of carny ride that could be assembled and taken apart in the same day, travelling from fair to fair when required. This particular attraction was named "Tornado": a classic Gravitron-style ride which quickly spins from a central axis while the centrifugal force pins riders, who collectively face the ride's centre, against the back of the wall. When the ride reaches top speed, the base slowly tilts up and turns riders onto their side.

Perhaps this ride, which sat here dormant, functions as a perfect avatar for contemporary capitalism: defined by superfluous movement, speed going nowhere, modularity and flexibility, and perpetual crisis – these travelling amusement rides do not have the best track record safety-wise. Furthermore, the riders themselves, who face the ride's centre, compose what Alexander Galloway calls a "reverse panopticon." If the centralized gaze of the panopticon was a diagram of disciplinary power, then it is a multiplicity of gazes fixed onto a single object that diagrams the infrastructure of contemporary control society. This is the gaze of the modern factory, "seeing" – often via non-visual means – the flows of goods and labour moving through its circuits from every perspective at once.

Unsurprisingly, this is also the gaze of the modern prison, as is demonstrated in the new Western Plains Correctional Centre, picking up where Port Phillip left off. Like the ride, the prison also sat dormant for several years after its

construction in 2022, though it remained staffed throughout this period despite there being no inmates to watch over. At least $36 million was spent staffing the prison while it was without prisoners, likely paying for hundreds of thousands of hours of superfluous labour. Upon opening in mid-2025, this billion-dollar facility boasted its advanced deployment of artificial intelligence to manage inmates using facial recognition and movement monitoring to track prisoners across the facility. This includes the ability to pre-program the CCTV system to follow specific individuals as they move around the prison. While the inmates may be moving far from Truganina, the logistical heartland of Melbourne, they will have found that the principles and technologies of logistical management have followed them.

The constantly evolving landscape of Melbourne's west elucidates the logistics industry's flexible relationship to space and perspective. The roads are an extension of the grid, facilitating the flow of capital with names that invoke perpetual and friction-free movement. However, these logistical spaces are mediated by cameras, sensors, systems, and people which necessarily "distort" them by imposing a perspective. These infrastructures have to constantly navigate the problem of perspective through processes of calibration and adjustment, iteratively closing the gap between the multiplicity of logistical media and the spaces they operationalize. This doesn't require "naturalizing" the representations they produce. Instead, logistical capital treats the geometry of space as that which is infinitely malleable.

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