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Datalogging the Landscape

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The path is an extension of walking [...] Thus the walking body can be traced in the places it has made: paths, parks, and sidewalks are traces of the acting out of imagination and desire. (Solnit 2006: 29)

The natural world allows us to leave our mark through the footsteps we make in the sand, and through the wearing of the turf as we create short cuts to our destinations. It is these individual, unique distinctions that track our movement, yet due to natural world phenomena we may not see or experience these exact same routes again. The footsteps are washed away and the desire line once created by a shortcut may become overgrown as a new, quicker route takes its place.

GPS datalogging devices now enable us to track our routes through space. A walk across the worldly landscape can now be saved into the digital landscape, a world of multiple pixels and in many instances two-dimensional flat plains. De Certeau writes of the 'walker' who experiences the routes through the city, in contrast to the 'voyeur' who views the city's design from the rooftops above (de Certeau 1984: 92). Now, both the walker and voyeur are in many ways coexisting simultaneously through these technologies. Providing these two instances ask the question of how our experiences of walking and wandering across the landscape differ from the representations provided by the mapped view. The act of wandering combined with this form of emergent map creation allows for both practices to be undertaken seamlessly, with the digital map growing with every physical step. These maps differ those found within the pages of books, or even those paths that can be seen on already digitally mapped satellite views. These maps are personal to our own journeys. Although they can be shared, each route can also remain solely the property of its creator, as they wander away from the constructed pavements, sidewalks, roads and trails in the search of their own



newly defined routes. Geotagging photos and collecting the data on digital maps to share with others provides a window to some of these experiences, enabling us to create what Tuan defines as 'landmarks' (Tuan 1977: 71). Instead of more traditional map markers such as churches, windmills and railway stations, the photographer and walker of the path determine these new user-generated landmarks. The landmarks although two-dimensional photographs depict three-dimensional worlds, adding an extra layer to the map, far removed from the iconic representations of top-down simplified objects. These maps can also become annotated with wiki comments and videos extending the once worn path further either during or after the walk. Each datalogged route can be annotated with the walker's own narrative.

The datalogger can capture the route made by our footprints and draw the lines in-between, whilst the narrative of the journey is still determined by the walker in their pictorial representations. The images provide an idea of a landscape through the eyes of the walker, as although the GPS fixes the photograph to a point on the map, the actual position in terms of where the walker was facing is still only held in the moment the photograph was taken and is left as a memory through a displayed image. In the absence of taking any photographs on the route, we can view other people's imagery taken along the same route. However these images are part of the other walker's narrative and experience. The same natural, evolving landscape will hold subtle differences each time it is walked. The routes captured may be personal to the walked experience. Therefore the imagery often only means something to the person that took it, such as the pattern on a tree trunk, which may not be found as easily by other walkers. The natural landscape

also continues to grow and evolve, therefore the digital snapshot needs to be constantly updated to expand with its ephemeral nature.

It can be seen that these smaller, individual, experiences are yet to exist on 'traditional' maps, with the walker acting as explorer in these instances. The digital map provides a contrast to the already constructed worldly path always found in amongst the forest canopy. This new data is now being mapped permanently for the user as their movements are tracked with their every step. New digital paths are created, and can be viewed without the need for physical worldly path to be constantly worn away in order for the route's presence to be remembered. This raises the issue of how are we now, through digital technologies, re-mapping the landscape with this collected data. This paper examines our relationships with the new maps we create in relation to the real world walking experienced whilst constructing them and how these growing technologies are possibly reworking our understanding of these re-generated routes, trails and places.

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Re(cognition) Mapping. Redefining Space, Place and Territory

Since its origins, the maps were meant to set a mode of understanding, interpretation and representation of the world.

As a communication tool, the maps are able to spatializing the interaction among social, economic and cultural urban reality in a graphic expression that provides the meaning of the urban system itself.

Geographical representation systems such as Google maps, Google earth and Google view have introduced a new way of understanding the world from a small to a large scale, allowing anyone, anywhere and anytime to collaborate in the construction of the urban representation by geotagging and geoblogging an urban experience.

In the city, there are different systems of signs that collide, combine and hybridize setting up new languages and redesigning old modes of representation. This can be even more intense regarding the technological developments that not only modify how one represents the space, but completely changes what one calls space.

Taking into account the idea that the analogical ways of representing the city have been overlapped by the digital ones, an exercise of the representation of the São Paulo city was developed based on a semiotic methodology to be applied to the Graduate Course of Interface Design. Once the city concentrates all the metaphors of the digital age: network, interface, interaction, territory, representation and connection, the students are constantly exposed and influenced by the urban environment, as well as they have been directly or indirectly designing for it.

The first goal was to construct a representation of the city by means of registering regarding the different layers of perception of space and time, and consequently, of urban memories. The idea of memory has been related to the notion of perception, considering that one can just memorize what is perceived. The discussion on representing through a map is focused on cross-disciplinary and collaborative production embodying art, media, architecture, urbanism, design, geography and technology. The project aimed at

discussing how to visualize spatial and personal relations taking into account the increasing mobility and the saturation of electronic media that transforms linear narratives in networked forms (Mogel, 2008).

Considering maps as a tool of orientation and navigation, the proposed exercise starts with a semantic diagram which comprises the contemporary urban subjects related to the São Paulo city. This first reflection is a product of the semantic interpretation of the urban reality. From this starting point the students are motivated to produce graphic metaphors by means of postal cards. Both semantic and graphic approaches are established to introduce the students to a conceptual way to represent the city that combines different repertoires and graphic expressions that make part of the design discipline. This first stage of the project potentializes the symbolic interpretation of the urban reality, once the representation is based on the collective and conventional sense of the city.

Then, motivated by this first approach, the students are invited to experience the city as a phenomenon in a movement of observation and perception capturing visual urban fractions, moving images, sounds, real situations and subjective impressions with their cell phones. The physical space becomes an interface for the representation of contemporary life in the city once it supports different languages and media.

All the collected urban visual materials are geocoded and geotagged as well as linked to the initial semantic and graphic representation. The intersemiosis between the city and its representation intend to create an ongoing map that expresses analogical and digital ways of representing the urban experience in a critical and constructive cartographic experiment. This map should be presented as a result of the city as an interface of observing, creating and materializing stages and sensible layers of the city of São Paulo.

Vilém Flusser pointed out that humanity lives in a codified world where communication establishes the premisses between understanding and representation of the phenomena that take part into the world. For Flusser (2007, p.130) the man “must mediate, must give a ‘sense’ to the world.”

The new media, especially the locative one allows broad participation from all who live and interact in the city. The research project aims at establishing a students’ proximity towards communication and production of the contemporary city through the use of mobile technology by means of images and videos. They provide material to represent a map that materialize the city through the students’ diverse cognition. Thus, the ongoing project considers the very individual perception from the common citizen leveraged to a larger scale that ends up in a collaborative, democratic and inclusive map. An ever-green reinterpretation of physical cities and the meaning of urban life thorough digital media and interface design.

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Uplay. Urban Playgrounds

Developing Ludic Strategies
and Interfaces for Participatory
Practices in Urban Space

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Location: N 51° 27' 22" E 6° 43' 56"

Code: C

This is a game. This is not a game.

Do you want to play?

Some Rules

Space, place and time do matter.

If public space becomes fiction, same is for borders separating playgrounds from other spaces.

The relativity of time is more than a famous formula.

You can try to ignore the ghosts of the past. However, you cannot avoid meeting them. And they might like to play.

If you consider sensation, fantasy, narrative, challenge, fellowship, discovery, expression and submission as nodal for triggering game pleasures you should not forget that the same is for life in general.

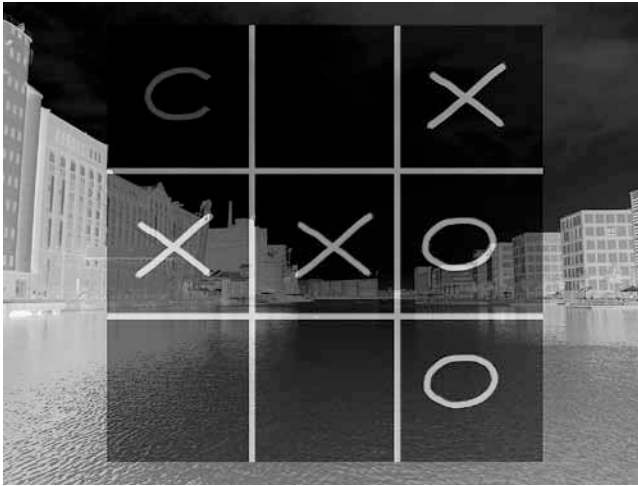
Commitment is essential. However, commitment does not mean obedience. Watch out. Listen. Yet do not only focus on two senses. Smell, touch, and taste are relevant as well.

You will never get what you've expected.

Suspension of disbelief is not an appropriate option.

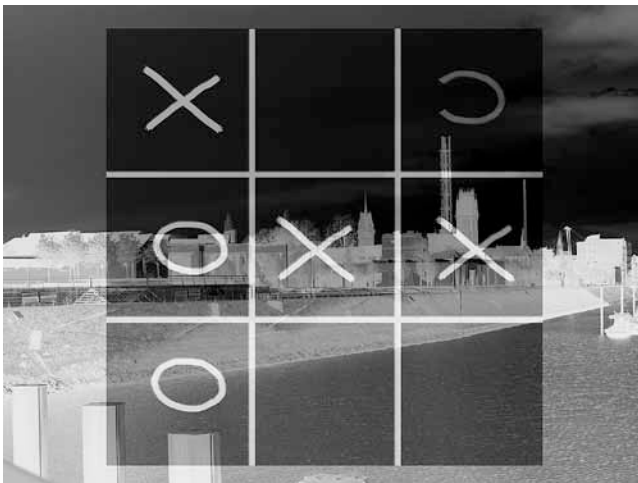
Mechanisms of mutual observation may increase attention and intensity.

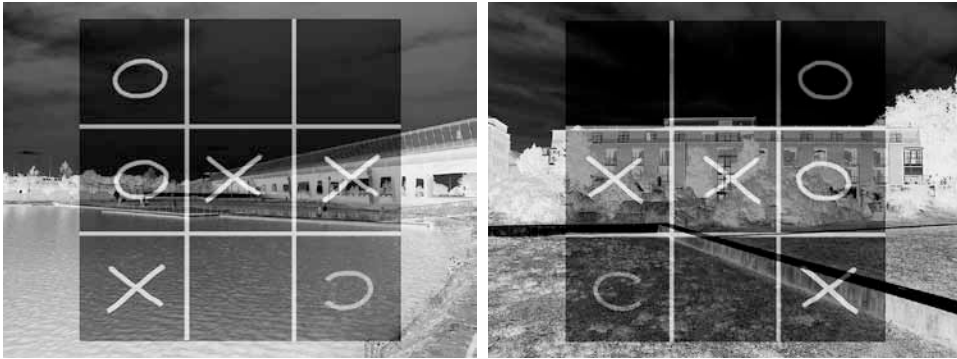
They may also increase levels of stress, distress and distrust.



Someone has paid for this. What if this someone is you?
 Obviously, humans get pleasure from another's displeasure. Yet you might also get pleasure from someone else's pleasure. Ever tried?
 You will have to decide how to deal with gender difference: you can ignore, balance, accept, or strengthen it. However, you will have to deal with the consequences as well.
 Sharing knowledge will be helpful for others – and therefore for you.
 Fate is another word for lacking power. There's nothing supernatural about it.
 If you think of play as a game, you will lack any chance to win.
 Five of ten instructions prove as useless. Another four are misdirecting or simply wrong. Thus you will have to find the right one.

This one is for you.
 Good Luck!





About Uplay Ruhrort

UPLAY is a workshop for artists and researchers involved in the development of ludic strategies and interfaces for forms of social/participatory/political (inter-)action in urban space. On the issues are a.o. locative strategies and tools for urban play, potentials and problems of participatory formats and collaborative/distributed/networked game development.

Participants are not only invited to present and discuss their own projects, but to collaborate on the development of a game(-level) located at Ruhrort. A public lecture-presentation by the workshop leaders is followed by closed workshop-sessions for applied participants; game sessions are open to the public.

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