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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 through digital media and interface design.

References

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- Mogel, Lize, 2008, *On Cartography* In Nato Thompson, *Experimental Geography*, 2008, New York: Melville House,106-111.