

# Future Guides for Cities through Collective Mapping and Citizen-produced Media - Michelle Teran

## INTRODUCTION

The ever increasing proliferation of media generated through the collective use of mapping and image-making platforms, like YouTube and Google Earth, are creating new ways of seeing and exploring the world. "Future Guides for Cities through Collective Mapping and Citizen-produced Media" proposes to artistically investigate the new reality created by the integrations of digital networks and the city, where place constitutes media and media constitutes place.

I intend to investigate the connection between media and place by describing a city through citizen-produced media, specifically video, and through some of the people who create it. By researching this connection, I will reflect upon the social and cultural issues around how and why people make and put videos online and how they are related to the places where they live. These explorations will take place over several cities in order to provide a comparative study of the similarities and differences in the ways that city-media realities are constructed. The results of these investigations are envisaged as a compilation of various aspects of my research about emerging urban topologies and will be presented in an artistic form.

## BACKGROUND

The ability to easily produce and disseminate media has created more opportunities for people to share their own personal stories by documenting events around them. Since YouTube's inception in 2005, there has been a surge in self-directed media production carried out at an ever increasing scale. In 2007, YouTube introduced a geotagging option on their publishing platform. This allowed people the ability to 'tag' the geographical location of their videos, which would then appear as a layer of information on Google Earth.

Much has been written about the social impact of YouTube; how online video feeds on repetition (Kambouri, Hatzopoulos, 2008), on vernacular culture (Sherman, 2008) or the discursive nature of media (Manovich, 2008). There is in fact now so much to be found on YouTube that one could spend an entire lifetime simply studying the various types of videos being made. My interest however in this contemporary situation is not to simply look at the videos in themselves but to explore how they are connected to the places where they were created in the first place. By concentrating on this relation I want to highlight what I consider a very complex reality generated when media meets place, through which conventional understandings of media somehow being 'placeless' are challenged. This for me proposes a shift in thinking about media and cities being separate situations or entities towards thinking about media, physical place and the communities formed within each becoming intricately intertwined. This aspect of community is a core issue for me since it also starts to incorporate the people who are making the videos. Media is not only **not placeless** but it also has a **face** behind it. Therefore it is the relation between media, media producer and place that I intend to reflect upon. These areas first require some definition in order to serve as starting points.

## Media

From the moment that people were given the means to do so, they began to document the things happening around them and tell their own personal stories through media. In the 60s, the super-8 camera was introduced to the general public and through this the advent of the 'home movie'. Using these cameras, people started to document everyday events, such as birthday celebrations, dinners, singing,

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raising children, holidays, weather, performances, festivals or sport events. Over the decades, there have been new technologies and formats introduced, from the analog to the digital portable video recorder to present day where cameras are inserted into most portable computers and mobile telephones. However what people actually do with them remains the same, that is to document and describe what they do and where they live. These seemingly disparate actions and personal archives together become a collective production of memory. What I think is different from the past, and is in fact unprecedented, is the current scale to which media is being produced and also the ability to easily publish it online, such as on YouTube. This means that there is not only more of it out there but that it is also publicly accessible, searchable and linked together. Videos can now be tagged in ways that describe different aspects of that video but also geo-tagged and connected to a map, such as on Google Earth. This creates a fertile and very present networked situation that is only beginning to be understood and explored.

### **Media Producer**

I consider the migration of media from private to public channels to be one of the more critical issues of our time. Whereas before media was shared between friends and families, it is now distributed and publicly broadcasted, making it easily viewed by complete strangers. The willingness of people to publicly broadcast themselves suggests for me different social phenomena. On one hand it creates an inquiry into the kinds of narratives, self-representative acts and performances that emerge through the self-production of media, and are easily locatable on the internet, while on the other it points to the shifting boundaries between the public and private realms. Inspired by this shift and movement towards disclosure, I am seeking to explore the rationale and implications behind this impulse, specifically: To what extent is this person aware about what he or she is doing? Is there a certain agency involved in these actions? What are the affinities and associations, both through the forming of community and the production of knowledge, that arise through the public distribution and sharing of media?

### **Place**

By inserting place into this relation I am setting out to study the notion of difference. This aspect of difference can be examined in two ways: To look at how media is tied to one urban location that might or might not be the same experience when you move from one place to the other. To challenge the notion of difference between media and physical place and between offline and online community by proposing that these seemingly binary states are in fact intricately intertwined.

### **THE PROJECT**

The core aim of my artistic development project is to investigate the relation between media, media producer and place by describing a city through citizen-produced media. These city spaces will be studied through online research, using the methods of mapping, and combined with actual physical visits to the cities themselves. I will use the cities of Bergen and Madrid as my starting points and then move towards other as-yet-undetermined locations. I choose Bergen and Madrid because of their cultural difference as well as difference in size and population.

It is my intention to use these two methodologies in order to assemble what I feel is the most important and relevant information: What does the placement of media on a map tell about a city? What kind of media do people produce and for what reasons do they geo-locate it? Who are the media producers? If media creates another type of community then how is it connected to the community within the place?

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What other relations between media and the city can be discovered by physically exploring urban areas where media has been situated?

### **Mapping**

If the longitude and latitude coordinates are included with a video when publishing it on YouTube, then this video automatically appears on Google Earth and makes it possible to see videos as they appear in a city. I will use the technical possibility to locate YouTube videos on Google Earth as a starting point for my research. My aims are to look for and to study various videos within a city and through my own observations to make new relations and associations between the different media that I find there. This approach can be considered within the framework of found media, in which other people's material is used in the making of new artistic works. I am focusing on possible links that can be made between a YouTube video and where it was produced in the city in ways that start tell a story about a place and of the people that live there. In other words, what is the new knowledge being generated by the culmination of these simultaneous yet autonomous acts of media-production? Within each city my interest is in studying different characteristics of citizen-produced media.

These could include:

- the types of videos being produced (themes, aesthetics, etc)
- who is being represented within the videos
- where in the city is media concentrated and where are the gaps
- possible concentrations of specific types of videos in one area
- how a city changes in appearance and content as you move through it.
- the qualities of sameness and difference both within and between cities.

It is also my intention throughout my fellowship to develop additional methodologies for re-locating media to place which will be incorporated into these mapping investigations.

### **Site Visits**

When somebody publishes a video on YouTube, then this person is automatically given a YouTube channel. One of the features of this channel is the possibility of sending somebody a message. I intend to use this potential to try to contact some people who have made videos in the city for the purpose of visiting them in person. This is intended to examine what other possible relations can be discovered by physically exploring urban areas where media has been located. I intend to conduct meetings with different video authors who could also provide tours to some of these sites. Through these initial encounters I would like to collaborate with some of the people that I have met to develop different performance actions within the city, which would be open to the public. The type and format of these actions would be determined by the results of the exchanges that I have.

By making direct contact within different video makers I am interested in discovering who some of these people are and if they are aware of the implications of what they are doing: Is there is strong sense of agency involved? How do their actions create a new form of knowledge? How do their attitudes or approaches to media-production shift when they are directly provoked and challenged?

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In this way I aim to complete the loop, first by studying a video that was made and put online, then re-locating media back into the city and highlighting some of the people who have produced it.

### **Bergen**

The city of Bergen will be the starting point for my project. It will be one of the cities that I study while also being the main space (KHIB) from where I work from. Around the Kunsthøgskolen i Bergen and the city of Bergen, I will develop the tools, strategies and techniques to carry out this work by first starting locally and then using this knowledge generated from this initial investigation to then move out into other cities. KHIB will provide me with a studio workspace, with a computer set up for online research and post-production. This studio space can potentially extend to other resources, such as workshops, within the academy as my needs develop. My two main supervisors, Jeremy Welsh and Anke Bangma are both based at KHIB and will provide my main support and guidance during my fellowship. Bergen also offers an amazing concentration of high-level media artists, educators and researchers to help in the development of my work through the mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise. Some are working around KHIB as well as other institutions and presentation spaces in the city. The community of research fellows working around KHIB, Jeremy Welsh's research project 'Institute for Unstable Urbanism' and The Digital Cultural Research Group, specifically Jill Walker Rettberg and her research on digital storytelling, are a few to be named. Therefore I fully intend to tap into the intellectual community within KHIB and around Bergen. This actually points to the benefits of working in smaller cities, as it allows more access to a concentration of talented individuals that would not be possible in larger urban areas. A full list of potential connections and exchanges are included in **Appendix A**.

### **Madrid**

As a large urban area, I am interested in studying Madrid. This is because of several interesting videos that I discovered within one of the neighborhoods in the city. In the Northern district of Hortaleza in Madrid, various and diverse videos of political actions are embedded within the area. These include an animated compilation of images countering fascism, an interview with a representative of a neighborhood association before a demonstration for public health, interviews with different members of the United Left during a several day meeting that occurred in the area, a protest by computer science students and a demonstration against homophobia in front of the Iranian Embassy. Although the videos were created by different people, combined together they create an intriguing picture of that neighborhood. This is potentially an interesting political area that might or might not exist in other cities.

I intend to work around Medialab Prado, a cultural space in the city that focuses on the production, research and dissemination of digital culture and of the area where art, science, technology and society intersect. I intend to invite Jose Luis de Vincente, a Spanish media theorist and curator currently leading one of the research groups at Medialab Prado, as my external advisor. Therefore I would use the institution as a resource for working, knowledge exchange and visibility in ways that would be beneficial towards the development of my research while in Madrid which would also be linked back into Kunsthøgskolen i Bergen (KHIB). For example, a public seminar or conference held at Landmark would bring together artists, educators and researchers from around Bergen, Madrid and other as-yet-undetermined places.

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I plan to apply for a UCM-EEA Munch Extraordinary Chair Grant, a grant for visiting artists and researchers in the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Madrid, Spain) and in Research Institutions in Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. At the Universidad Complutense de Madrid I will make a connection with Maria Amparo Lasan Diaz who is professor of Sociology within the Department of Sociology and Political Science, and who is currently researching the social implications of communication technologies.

### **RESULTS**

Certain parts of my artistic development will be presented in Bergen through a series of public events. This will occur at several stages during the research fellowship and is intended to integrate the work carried out in one city with work being carried out within Bergen. This could include a series of urban interventions, performances, seminars and lectures. I intend to form partnerships with presentation spaces in the city (s.a Landmark and Bergen Kunsthall)

One of the envisaged outcomes for a final artwork is a printed publication that would also act as documentation for the project. I anticipate a lot of material will be generated through the process of the research, such as portraits, text, video interviews, sketches and map visualizations. The final format will be determined through the process of developing the research, but could take the form of an installation, series of performances and screenings, which will be presented in Bergen in the final year.

### **ACADEMIC RELEVANCE**

The work that I am carrying out through a research fellowship contributes to a larger body of knowledge around networked cultures and networked spatial practices, conducted within academic institutions and media labs around the world. The Visualizar research group led by Jose Luis de Vicente as well as the Inclusiva-net group at Media Lab Prado (Madrid) looks at the relationship of meaning, cause and dependency which can be found in information produced by social processes and the study of social and cultural inclusion of telecommunication networks regarding the development of new artistic practices and critical knowledge production. Networked Cultures based around Goldsmith's (London) is carried out by a group of researchers based at Goldsmiths College, including Irit Rogoff, that investigates the cultural transformations under way in Europe through examining the potentials and effects of networked spatial practices. Finally, Institute for Networked Cultures, led by media theorist Geert Lovink is a media research centre affiliated with the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences that actively contributes to the field of network cultures through research, publications and online dialogue. I have also isolated these examples because they all display an interdisciplinary approach to research that links together science, theory, activism, design, philosophy, art, architectural and urban practices.

### **ARTISTIC MOTIVATION FOR CREATING THE PROJECT AND CONTRIBUTION**

Within my artistic practice I have spent the past 8 years exploring the interaction between media and social networks in urban environments. This has resulted in several prestigious awards and international recognition within the field of media art including the recent Transmediale 2010 award from one of the most renowned media art festivals in Europe. My methods for studying urban spaces are done in a manner where research becomes embedded within the practice and where different connections and meanings start to emerge through the process of exploring spaces. This brings up many critical issues stemming from networked topologies and media production that include privacy, urbanism, architecture,

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play, the production of space and the question of ownership and relational concepts around data.

My previous works dealt mostly with the incidental production of images generated through surveillance use in urban space. Within these projects I would intercept live (wireless) surveillance and then highlight this voyeuristic act through the staging of various urban interventions. By using the strategies of de-contextualization and de-familiarization I wanted to create a sense of the unfamiliar within a familiar situation to introduce other possible ways of experiencing or relating to the city space where the action was occurring. In 2009, I started to experiment with the connection between YouTube and Google Earth which resulted in two short-term projects that took place within the small cities of Murcia (Spain) and Eindhoven (The Netherlands). In these projects, I started to move away from simply observing and amplifying found media and more towards interacting and collaborating with producers of media by inviting communities of YouTube video authors to participate in an artwork.

This is a new and exciting direction for me and the basis for what I am proposing within my research. The experiences of the past year, carried out on a small scale, have provided me with the expertise to now apply to a larger scale. This requires a more prolonged and comparative study between cities, allowing enough space for artistic development, research and critical reflection. Normally artistic production does not allow for this as there is a constant pressure to continually move from one project to the next, giving little time for development and reflection.

The unique approach towards the fellowship programme, that emphasizes practical and not theoretical research, combined with the length of time offered to work on a project makes it an ideal opportunity for carrying out this artistic development. I feel that I would not be able to achieve what I am proposing unless I was in Bergen and within the fellowship programme.

My proposed research will build on academic knowledge while making an important contribution within the media arts. By linking media back to the city in ways that directly involve the people who produce it, I am introducing an as-yet-unexplored connection within both the art and academic fields. It is this particular connection that makes my artistic research both unique and relevant.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conjunction to my research areas, these proposed outcomes should also be considered as starting points which will most certainly expand into other unanticipated directions and formats as I enter into my fellowship process. In deciding to engage in a comparative study of several cities the project can evolve and become more complex as I move and take the findings of my work from one city to the next and from media to media. This process would not only allow a comparative research between locations but also an investigation into what it means to navigate and understand cities using citizen produced media that can gain depth through progressive stages of exploration and interpretation.

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### **APPENDIX**

#### **Appendix A : Development Plan**

During the research fellowship I am interested in working with these local and non-local institutions and for the following reasons:

##### a) Local institutions

Kunsthøgskolen (KHIB) - Project base

studio facilities, production support, connection and integration with institutional research initiatives, contribution to knowledge-base

Supervisor A: Jeremy Welsh

Supervisor B: Anke Bangma

University of Bergen - knowledge exchange

Jill Walker Rettberg - associate professor affiliated with the Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies doing research about how people tell stories online

Landmark - presentation venue

Potential curatorial collaboration with Morten Kvamme

Hordaland Kunstsenter - presentation venue

Bergen Kunsthall - presentation venue

Piksel - Hack Bergen project

technical support / knowledge exchange

BEK - technical support / knowledge exchange

##### b) Non-local institutions

Media Lab Prado - institutional support, visibility, presentation venue, knowledge exchange

Media Lab in Madrid focusing on the production, research and dissemination of digital culture and of the area where art, science, technology and society intersect.

Supervisor C: J.L. de Vicente - Spanish media theorist, critic and curator

Universidad Complutense de Madrid - knowledge and research exchange

Maria Amparo Lasan - Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Political Science

Networked Cultures - knowledge and research exchange

Research group based around Goldsmith's (London) investigating the cultural transformations under way in Europe through examining the potentials and effects of networked spatial practices.

Institute for Networked Cultures - knowledge and research exchange

A media research centre affiliated with the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences that activity

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contributes to the field of network cultures through research, events, publications and online dialogue.

### **Appendix B: Proposed schedule for the 3 years**

#### Fall 2010 - Spring 2011

Conceptual and artistic development. Online research. Establishing partnerships. Bergen and Madrid study.

#### Spring / Summer 2011

Travel to Madrid

#### Fall / Winter 2011

Preparation for next city. Conceptual and artistic development. Online research. Post-production from Madrid and Bergen. First programmed public event within Bergen.

#### Spring 2012

2-3 month site visit (third city)

#### Summer / Fall 2012

Preparation for next city. Conceptual and artistic development. Online research. Post-production from third site visit. Second programmed public event within Bergen.

#### Winter 2012

2-3 month site visit (fourth city)

#### Spring 2013

Conceptual and artistic development. Post-production from fourth site visit. Third programmed public event within Bergen.

#### Spring 2013 - Until end of Fellowship

Preparation for final presentation. Writing critical text.

### **Appendix C: Reading List**

Peter Moertenboeck and Helge Mooshammer (eds.), *Networked Cultures : Parallel Architectures and the Politics of Space*, Publishers, Rotterdam, 2008.

Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (eds.), *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, Institute for Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2008.

Juan Martin Prada (ed.), *Inclusiva-net : Digital Networks and Physical Space*, Medialab-Prado, Madrid, 2008.

Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

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Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Temple Smith Ltd, 1970.

D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Routledge Classics, 1971

Constant, *New Babylon*

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, : Blackwell, 1997

David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*

Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Press, Cambridge, 1960.

William Mitchell, *Me++; The Cyborg Self and the Networked City*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2003

Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 2002

Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, Routledge Press, 2001

Ben Highmore, *Cityscapes: Cultural Readings in the Material and Symbolic City*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

Joe Moran, *Reading the Everyday*, Routledge Press, 2005

Lewis Mumford, *This City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*, Harvest Books, 1968.

Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, Penguin Books, London, 1978.

Mirko Zardini, (ed), *Sense of the City: An Alternate Approach to Urbanism*, Lars Müller Publishers, 2005

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