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## Feature articles translated to English

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## OF THIS WORLD

Geography is an action of writing that is practiced by each one of us at every moment. This writing results only from being located, and it is now composed of the dots and routes that appear on GPS devices, at present so many and so common. Positioned and repositioned, in single place or on the move: we are written, with concrete evidence. Thus confirmed on the screens of these tiny devices, our existences seem to amount to our movements and stops in the here and now, continuing in the next space and time. Without a doubt, this technology fosters the rise of a geographic awareness by the user. It invites us to experiment with mobility and the writing of the self. However, it is not necessary to use it in order to express geography. Geography precedes technology, and locating is not enough to account for the extent of this experience.

In Brazilian artist Caetano Dias' video *O Mundo de Janiele* (2006), a little girl on top of a roof in a favela twirls a hula hoop around her waist. Between heaven and earth, Janiele traces loops around her like a Spirograph, embracing the surroundings, endlessly attempting to include it while aspiring to exteriority. Like a planet circling around its star, the camera regularly rotates around the girl, gradually revealing the surroundings to which she belongs. This work expresses the individual's desire for spatial extension, yet the circular movement limits this expansion within a clear-cut circumference. Janiele's geography is carried to the outside in a centrifugal movement, in radiance, but her writing remains restricted to a delimited zone. Maybe it is in the human nature to yearn for the writing of oneself beyond the horizon—as suggested in *O Mundo de Janiele*.

Very far from there, the map of China is tattooed on the back of a man, a map marked by lines and inscriptions in place of the stopping points of the *Long March Project* (2002-2005). This initiative from Qin Ga is part of a series of interventions produced by an artist collective, in reference to Mao's Long March to the interior of China, a journey of great historical value. *The Miniature Long March* is documented on Qin Ga's back. It is a response to the long journey of the collective—one stroke for each decisive moment of it—that is forever etched in the flesh of the Chinese artist. It is another writing, the incorporation of a journey corresponding to the remarkable challenge of writing oneself into a territory through a long march. This geographical project engages the artist in the territory as much as the territory is engaged in the artist.

Our belonging to the world is something primarily personal because geography is experienced individually. Like Janiele in Caetano Dias' video, we are all poles at the center of the Universe, animated by a desire to move and to connect, a desire of open space. Like Qin Ga we wander about this world, criss-crossing it according to a drawing of our own initiative, and we, in turn, are marked by the world.

## Interlace

Obviously, geographical awareness—presently being put to the test—is not only limited to an individual writing or one human being's relationship with his or her environment. Localization is a very personal experience, but it cannot be imagined without the individuals who, like us, leave their marks on the uneven surfaces of this world. Indeed there are geographies, shifting geographies that intersect and meet, forming a network of links diversely located. There is no shortage of artistic practices exploring collective geographies. In recent years, psychogeographic projects based on mobility and community action have stood out at many events. They rest on the formation of communities and are aimed at constituting alternative maps and experiencing urban environments. For example, Angela Dorrer's pilgrimages in the project *Urban Pilgrims* (2004-2008) prompted the participation of groups in several Canadian and European cities, gave rise to an ensemble of collective urban portraits. Among the events devoted to psychogeographic projects, the Conflux Festival (held annually in New York) has also encouraged several daring quests.

Similarly, artistic initiatives relying on locative media distinguish themselves through the use of satellite geolocation technologies. Since GPS are increasingly integrated into cell phones and vehicles of all kinds, they are increasingly present in the artistic sphere. Works produced by means of locative media create subjective contents that are related to geographical coordinates provided by satellite, building bridges between physical and virtual space. For instance, *Can You See Me Now?* (2001), an excellent creation by the British collective, Blast Theory, is inspired by video game esthetics, and challenges web users to compete virtually with runners fitted with GPS devices on the "field".

More than ever, people's geographies are associated with one another. Population displacements, migratory movements, tourism and

various kinds of exchanges interlace geographies and multiply meeting points. Within the context of the much discussed globalization (political, economical, cultural, etc.) human activities are considered according to their location, relocation and geographical extension. On the one hand, cultural diversity is more visible than ever, and networks of exchange have multiplied. On the other hand, a tendency toward cultural homogenization threatens this diversity as well as the identity of certain human communities. Works on these thematics are numerous, whether documentary, activist or poetic. Take for example the works of Ursula Biemann on nomadism and the notion of border, such as *Maghreb Connection* (2006) which deals with migratory movements in Northern Africa. Or the initiative of netartist Heath Bunting, *BorderXing Guide* (2002-2003), which provides all of the necessary instructions for illegal border-crossing. These are but two examples among a very rich international artistic production.

The environmental crisis also contributes to the development of geographical awareness, since the world is now perceived as a single space, a common environment. Climatic change, in particular, has fostered a widespread preoccupation. In this context, borders are abolished: territories are perceived in continuity with one another, since upheavals spread far beyond their points of origin, reaching every individual. Such preoccupations are, incidentally, at the center of Andrea Polli's many works on atmospheric conditions. In other respects, Carmen Gonzalez and Leslie Garcia, from the Mexican collective Dream.Addictive, created *Atmospheric Pollution* (2007), an interactive representation of the contaminants affecting the planet. Environmental awareness is necessarily connected to geography, and lately it has given rise to a multitude of artistic projects.

Finally, the development of communication technologies also supports this global vision, and offers alternative extensions for our geographies in a virtual mode. International circulation of information has grown and become more democratic with the Internet, despite the well-known fact that a large part of the world does not have access to the Net yet. The success of GPS adds to these realities, as does the popularity of digital cartographic and Earth visualization tools on the Web. Satellite vision has imposed itself and has all kind of applications in the Web environment.

In the field of digital cartography, far-fetched proposals are common. It is as if the individual—without real moorings—is putting these instruments to the test by using them in uncommon ways. Virtuality lends itself to all kinds of manipulation, and some whimsical and highly customized territorial representations appear there. Individuals rediscover the pleasure of spinning a world globe. They can travel to remote areas, approach places of their choosing and link subjective multimedia contents to these geographies. Obviously, many of these atypical maps are found in the artistic domain, for instance: Jan Robert Leegte's *Blue Monochrome* (2008), a ready-made map (in reference to Yves Klein's IKB) that samples a zone of the Pacific Ocean in Google Maps; the geometrical interventions of the duo JODI called *GEO GOO (Info Park)* (2008), a work that uses the graphic vocabulary of cartography to form improbable routes; or *Google is not the map* (2008) from the Italian collective Les Liens invisibles, which gathers a series of 35 critical and humouristic representations called *GeoPoeMaps*.

## Geographies

Contemporary artistic practices that reflect on geographical awareness are numerous and diversified. By referring directly to places (using cartography, geolocation technologies, Earth visualization software and many other means), these practices question our geographical perceptions and offer new forms of writing. This issue of *ETC* presents a series of articles aimed at exploring these productions and providing a variety of perspectives.

Hence, Erika Nimis explores the impact of an international cultural event such as Bamako's biennale of photography (Mali) on the way African photography is perceived in the world of contemporary art. Taking a close look at this situation, the author exposes the machinery that favors the interest of the market over an actual knowledge of African creation. Ludovic Fouquet is also interested in the effects of cultural globalization, but with respect to theatre. His article deals with the circulation of the same shows on a worldwide scale, focusing on several theatrical creations that explore the themes of geography.

Sylvain Campeau shares a reflection about the new mode of vision that results from geolocation technologies such as GPS. Both philosophic and poetic, his text concentrates on the works of several Quebec artists who have adopted this view from above. Equally interested in the GPS, Andrea Urlberger deals with artistic practices

choosing locative media that question territorial representations and the notion of border. As for Bernard Schütze, he invites us to consider geography in the works of three artists that opt for flux and movement, as much in the imperceptible phenomena of the Earth's atmosphere as in the geographical imaginary.

Sylvie Parent

Some links

Long March Project – <http://www.longmarchspace.com>

Angela Dorrer, *Urban Pilgrims* – <http://www.urbanpilgrims.org>

Conflux Festival – <http://confluxfestival.org>

Blast Theory – <http://www.blasttheory.co.uk>

Ursula Biemann – <http://www.geobodies.org>

Heath Bunting, *BorderXing Guide* <http://www.tate.org.uk/intermediaart/borderxing.shtm>

Andrea Polli – <http://www.andreapolli.com>

Dream Addictive, *Atmospheric Pollution* – <http://dreamaddictive.com/ap>

Jan Robert Leegte, *Blue Monochrome* – <http://www.bluemonochrome.com>

JODI, *GEO GOO (Info Park)* – <http://geogoo.net>

Les Liens invisibles, *Google is not the map* – <http://google.isnotthemap.net>

## GEOLOCATING ARTISTIC PRACTICES—THE BORDER ISSUE

Crossing and understanding territories with a GPS or a cell phone is to link mobility with a technological device which allows for a live and automated determination of spatiotemporal coordinates. This link brings geolocation into being.<sup>1</sup>

Geolocation does not break with old means of navigation and representation such as the map, the tale or the image, but it can signify an extension, or rather a shifting of these means, by opening up to new possibilities, new uses, and thus new territorial representations. In the commerce sector, the GPS and other geolocation devices are primarily used for on-board navigation, because they provide real-time tracking of trip indications. Alternatively, artists explore different potentialities of GPS generated coordinates.

One of the first and most common artistic acts of geolocation is to record journeys. Often presented in the form of dots, lines, and even traces in the sand (in a work of Dutch artist Esther Polak<sup>2</sup>), coordinates draw a representation, both cartographic and narrative, of an explored landscape. The GPS then becomes a recorder, similar to a film camera or photo camera,<sup>3</sup> which captures a traveled territory. For Masaki Fujihata, one of the first artists to have used it, GPS is a device that can record the tridimensionality of a given territory.<sup>4</sup> Unlike a synchronous map whose overall view often leaves the 'time' factor out, geolocation produces a representation of mobility. The physical space is represented by travels, specific uses and ephemeral positions, which are calculated in real-time. In other words, an often personal experience turns into a rather objective recording of the world.

However, the GPS is not only a travel recorder. Geolocation also allows for the identification of one's own spatial position in real-time; through positioning, it allows an access to representations, images or data related to a location. For Peter Weibel,<sup>5</sup> director of the important Center for Art and Media (ZKM, Zentrum für Kunst und Medien) in Karlsruhe, Germany, many landscapes are juxtaposed—a physical landscape with mental or psychological ones. The latter are composed of maps, images, narratives and networks. For Weibel, it is possible to access specific points in a mental landscape from a given location in the physical space. Thanks to geolocation, it is now possible to either escape more easily from the physical space, or conversely, to anchor the sphere of diverse representations, images, narratives and networks in a specific location. Through the articulation of these different layers, greater porosity between territories and representations emerges. Yet, such porosity does not mean easier physical circulation, but it does create additional possibilities beyond being represented in a space and interacting with it.

Thus, the geolocation principle appears as a way to 'embody' oneself in territories and to be part of them. Since it permits deep connections between humans and their environments, geolocation is not just a simple augmented reality, it is an articulation, an intensification of the links between an action and its territory, and between a point in physical space and the corresponding position in a mental space.

In principle, the use of geolocation is possible everywhere (bearing in mind technological limitations), but it seems more pertinent in some zones of a territory than in others, such as in border zones, where the exact determination of coordinates has often been, or still is an issue whose importance is greater than that of knowing 'where I am'. The geographer Jacques Lévy does not believe that borders exist without States: "It does not have an object. Before [the State] has the means to chart and defend it, it remains a dream. In a demilitarized world open to exchanges, it loses its meaning."<sup>6</sup>

The border that creates specific territories (active interfaces connecting two spheres, two States, two juridical systems, etc.) refers to a particular occupancy of, and inscription on, space. Its exploration, and even experimentation seems very important, and it is the object of several geolocated artistic projects.

### Recording the Alsace

In 1992, with the intention of capturing a climb of Mount Fuji, Japanese artist Masaki Fujihata<sup>7</sup> used GPS for the first time. He then produced digital maps that located not only the path of the climb and the videos, but also digital images of the Mount Fuji, integrating time, and thus the speed of the climb, to create *Impressing Velocity* (1992-94). In 2000, he began a series of works entitled *Field-works*<sup>8</sup>, which uses again the idea of video localization and of the construction of a landscape through the recording of coordinates.

In *Field-work@Alsace* 2002, Fujihata traveled the Alsace region (France), asking passers-by where the border or the passage between the two countries was located. He constantly asked the questions "Are we in Germany or in France?" and "Where is the passage between the two countries located?" In this work, the border is neither geolocated on a map nor is it treated as an object; instead, it emerges from the narratives and perceptions of people he meets. The idea of the border cease to be a pure geopolitical limit to become a more mobile and vague concept, closer to individual uses than to a drawn and rigid limit established through countries' negotiations and conflicts.

The border separating Germany from France is represented by narratives of passers-by, while Masaki Fujihata's trip is geolocated by a GPS recording. On a black background, these lines represent the landscape through the artist's only subjective and particular experience, to which videos of his encounters and discussions with Alsations are added. The videos are not only placed on the lines of the GPS where they were recorded, but they are also oriented according to the angle of the camera used during the take.

The border between Germany and France (marked by a yellow line) is barely visible, buried as it is under the travels of Masaki Fujihata and the videos relating the border experiences of the Alsations. Impenetrable in the past, the frontier appears in this work as 'spongy'<sup>9</sup> and dominated by personal experiences.<sup>10</sup>

### A 1:1 map

*Moillesuaz 1:1* (2008) also broaches the issue of geolocating around a border. Stéphane Degoutin, Elie Kongs and Gwenola Wagon<sup>11</sup> (of *Nago Voyages*) exhibited and produced it in part during the *Version Beta* show, presented at the Center for Contemporary Images of Geneva in November 2008. In that case, travels are recorded by GPS in order to produce a sort of subjective map of a territory; instead, it is the whole territory that is enriched, or rather transformed into a representation space, juxtaposing itself over a real territory on a 1:1 scale.

In this work<sup>12</sup> located at the Franco-Swiss border, 5 km from Geneva (Switzerland) and 1 km from Annemasse (France), it is possible to listen to geolocated soundtracks while travelling—"geolocated", because they are "linked" to specific places. With a cell phone and earphones, the visitor of this *in situ* installation activates a particular sound according to a specific place. So, one can travel both sides of a territory and listen to 77 samples from different soundtracks. Every visitor takes part in an individual and active exploration of the territory, moving in a sound envelope, like in a diving suit,<sup>13</sup> locating oneself in the physical space while enjoying access to a soundscape that is neither visible (through speakers, for example) nor audible for people who are not part of the exhibition.

*Moillesuaz Echelle 1* turns this border space into a single representation, stacking up landscapes, narrative and sound cartography, but also everyone's individual journeys and experiences of the visit. In opposition to Jorge Borges' famous short story,<sup>14</sup> where a map as large as a territory makes it unusable, *Moillesuaz* slips the 1:1 territorial representation beneath the surface. This is a possible response to a cartographic criticism from American urbanist Edward Soja *Why Loving Maps is Not Enough*<sup>15</sup>, who addresses the limitation of maps by emphasizing how important it is to introduce time through time of

travel, time of existence and thus time of narrative in territorial representations.

Mobility and geolocation make border territories active, adding data to delineations on a map. Some artistic projects broach the subject of the hardening of certain borders, like that between the USA and Mexico for Torolab<sup>10</sup>, and some try to wear away the lines marking differences between countries, as do the works of Masaki Fujihata and Nogo Voyages. By closely linking mobility, representation and territories, they certainly reflect ongoing geopolitical transformations, but they are also in the line of a utopian thinking whose dream is to abolish every boundary (Lévy, op. cit.).

Andrea Urlberger

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ever more hybrid appliances integrate both the Global Positioning System and cell phones-related systems. This explains why it is better to use the word 'geolocation' instead of GPS, even if the latter refers to the device most commonly used.
- <sup>2</sup> Esther Polak is a Dutch artist who experimented with GPS location in many projects. *NomadicMilk* (2006-08) consists of following different routes of milk in Nigeria, routes of imported milk and routes of the milk produced by a group of nomads, the Foulani. The GPS allows for the recording of these two sets of routes and, with the help of a small robot, it permits the production of drawings in the sand, something closer to Foulani's customs than geographic maps. Cf. <http://www.nomadicmilk.net/>.
- <sup>3</sup> Jean-Louis Boissier, Interview, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006. See [http://www.ciren.org/ciren/laboratoires/Paysage\\_Technologique/index.html](http://www.ciren.org/ciren/laboratoires/Paysage_Technologique/index.html). This web site is the result of the research project *Paysage technologique. Art, architecture et paysages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> session, DAPA, Bureau de recherche architecturale, urbaine et paysagère (France).
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. *Mobilisable*, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, ENSAD, Paris. <http://www.mobilisable.net/2008/>.
- <sup>5</sup> See the interview with Peter Weibel about the use of GPS in artistic practices on [http://www.ciren.org/ciren/laboratoires/Paysage\\_Technologique/theorie/index2.htm](http://www.ciren.org/ciren/laboratoires/Paysage_Technologique/theorie/index2.htm).
- <sup>6</sup> Jacques Lévy, *Dictionnaire de la géographie et de l'espace des sociétés*, in <http://www.espacestemp.net/document840.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.fujihata.jp/>.
- <sup>8</sup> [http://www.centreimage.ch/expos\\_events.php?id=14](http://www.centreimage.ch/expos_events.php?id=14).
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. also the work of an Italian group of artists, architects and photographers, *Multiplicity*, especially the work *Border Device* or *Solid Sea*. [http://www.multiplicity.it/matrix/matrix\\_map.jpg](http://www.multiplicity.it/matrix/matrix_map.jpg).
- <sup>10</sup> In another *Field-Work*, *Mersea Circles* (2003-2005), visitors equipped with a video camera and a GPS are invited to travel the coast of Mersea Island in Essex, UK. The recording of the lines associated with the films renders back the Island's geographical shape.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.nogoland.com>; <http://www.nogovoyages.com>.
- <sup>12</sup> From October 30<sup>th</sup> to December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008.
- <sup>13</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Spähen III, Schäume*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2004; Partly translated in English, in *Terror from the Air*, Semiotext(e), 2009.
- <sup>14</sup> Jorge Borges, *Aleph and Other Stories*, Penguin Classics, 2004.
- <sup>15</sup> Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Blackwell, 1996, p. 174.
- <sup>16</sup> <http://www.torolab.org/>.

## WHERE AM I?

"The Earth is blue like an orange," wrote surrealist poet Paul Éluard. The first astronauts—the first men to have observed it from such a distance, in orbit, cut off from our basic earthly habitat for a short and rare time—have compared it to the very same fruit—identical in shape, but not in color. The meeting of these two perceptions conferred the rank of a seer on the French poet, and turned poetry into a divination. However, such distanciation—which allows for such poetic appreciation—is now accessible to everybody, in virtual form, thanks to a small device known as a GPS (Global Positioning System). Moreover (and this is why there is still a huge difference), what is experienced in this virtual—and even mediated—distanciation is a *satellite-based* look at our own position, our own place on Earth, through a projected positioning. So, this experience occurs in a reconstructed space that gives a specific idea about its location, cast on the surface of a map reduced to arteries, streets, roads and highways. And this information—requested and granted—is also subjected to the position's specific time, because it is a well-known fact that the person who uses and consults GPS does so with a potential trip in mind, often to be undertaken in the near future. GPS provides information about the place where we are at in relation to the place where we want to go, and vice versa, within the context of a journey that happens at a given time.

Furthermore, the small device also reveals to us that we are always situated in some place, in a relative location in a travel, captured between our destination and our point of departure—by an uncertain and relative motion transmitted jerkily on a luminescent screen. In short, the device comforts us: we are always in some place, and therefore, going somewhere. We are at a distinct point, betrayed by an oscillating needle, conspicuous among so many other paths and movements, made individual, transferred on an active and shifting map, followed by this man-made star, situated at the core of a map to come, which unfolds and reveals itself with our every move. It's as though we have our own star, a divine eye that follows and guides us—or rather, the human eye, which has no doubt replaced the divine, and which helps us on our road and in our journey. Incidentally, we should lift our head to the sky upon consulting this apparatus of presence, because the data is on the screen, and yet it comes from above in response to data that was sent from the ground, from our own position.

### Planispheric Vision

Above all, GPS opens a new level of vision. With it, seeing is not limited to horizontality anymore, with variants of high and low angles. Nor is it about a view that is restricted by landscape or by obstructing geographical accidents. These points of view were those of terrestrial bipeds and crawlers, they condition and have conditioned our usual mode of vision. But with GPS, we enter a new era, an era involving scanning and mapping, measurement and cartography of routes, and the capturing of the world in its totality.

A work with major consistency and exposure has given us an example of this new era of our vision: that of Bill Vazan. On August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1969, with the help of Ian Wallace he put "Canada between parentheses", one drawing a line in Paul's Bluff, Prince Edward Island, and the other in Vancouver, British Columbia. Obviously, we felt and knew nothing about this; all we have now are the images of the parentheses inscribed in the sand. On a virtual level however, this was a globalizing performance, a work constructed on a planetary scale. This was about inscribing a human trace in the silt, a trace of *poesis* and transformation, even if imaginary. The creative mind thus reached unexpected heights, producing a work without noticeable effects, yet with exceptional imaginary consequences. The same occurred with *Worldline/La ligne mondiale*, on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1971. In collaboration with 25 galleries and museums in 18 countries, a virtual line was traced and represented on a world map—the work only being perceptible as a purely virtual route whose replica on the map was but an extension intended for the eyes. Other works followed that were of a similar esthetic of cosmic reproduction. The *Ouales* series for example—each being a gridded image that created a global reproduction, a world map of places captured through photography: Montmorency Falls (2000), Ouareau River's waterfalls (2000) or locations in Egypt (2000). In these pictures, every place becomes an Earth, each a telluric element and contributing, in its own way and scale, to the great Cosmos. All of these create a sort of constant and repeated *suturing* of locations, raising them to a planetary status and showing their organicism.

### Images from the Celestial Sphere

In a way, the same goes for Alain Païement's *Parages*, a magnificent and imposing work presented in four different pictures, each cutting a horizontal section from a house where he had an apartment. The installation therefore presents several of these "satellite views," scrutinizing through scanning all of what composes the surface of things, of places, even capturing beings head first. Other works make the same bet, like *F3 (Living Chaos)*, *Constellation (Squat)* or *Feed Spot*. In these works, the various ground levels cancel each other out and merge on a single surface. The Earth's scattered matter rises up to us smoothing every protuberances. Nothing resists this accumulation of levels, grafted together via digital manipulation. Stairways transform into a construction that is lathed with joined boards. Snow that covers the surface of the earth, from where birds ascend, becomes a *tachiste* work. Of course, this scanning is fiction created by satellite vision. It flattens all masses and reduces all humans down to vague shapes, mashed as they are by the bird's-eye view. Vision falls on things and beings and no longer allows for locating anymore, schematized to the extreme, by offering a monochrome of lines and shades. Localization is impossible, and any identification, uncertain. Here, cartography operated so well that it leveled-out all differences and created a work through the denial of the unevenness of the ground, as well as through the absolute transfer of tridimensionality to the useful bidimensionality of the plane.

Another work, this time by Éric Raymond, clearly reveals the scope of the constant scanning of scrutinizing satellites. *Scanlines* consists of digital images on screen mounted on robots moving in a defined perimeter of three meters by three meters. The robots' movement reconstructs the image of a terrestrial surface—in this instance, the Grand Canyon. These moving plates construct a path made of horizontal and vertical movements until they cover an pre-determined surface; at the same time, they are animated with a camera that records each robot's position and tells it which direction to take. Furthermore, these images look like they come from videos, but they are actually photographic, and they spread out and complete each other until they reconstruct the geographic area that is supposedly captured and reproduced in real time. What we have here is a simulation of capture and reproduction made by satellite. It is the transmission of data and information in a closed circuit, the robotic animation of images that appear to be provided in real time by some Sputnik.

#### To Exist Down Here from Above

Actually, we should go a little further and talk philosophy. The technological apparatus, along with science, responds with a short and laconic answer to our concern and anxiety regarding the meaning and foundation of our presence in this place, on Earth, providing us with locating information. This apparatus of presence—as I have just named it, in the flight of a live reflection—analyzes the geographic parameters of our presence in order to inform us about our movements, our spatial destinies and our journeys. I said *geographic*, but some distinctions need to be made, for this is not about landscape, unevenness of the ground, differences in level, lakes or bodies of water at the bottom of some basin. These are ground obstacles that are planed down by GPS because they hinder movement. So what appears on the screen, digitally coded, is a gaze, a leveling view that planes down the Earth, translated onto maps that form the human appreciation of distances and expeditions.

Let us choose a reference to fully understand what this is about: Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon as analyzed by Michel Foucault. This device and model of vision was presented in a study on the origin of prisons, disciplinary measures and monitoring of individuals. This device was, as he wrote, "a kind of dark room where individuals could be spied on," "a transparent construction where the exercise of power can be under the control of the whole society," because, thanks to it, "everybody" can "keep watch on the smallest of watchmen." (Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 209; *Discipline & Punish*, New York, Vintage Books. Our translation.) Thus this is total surveillance, going as far as to show who is watching to whom is being watched—until both merge: self-regulation of society by means of mutual and continual surveillance.

Yet, something else is at issue with the satellite vision. What we face is the self-regulation of individuals, with respect to what I would describe as an anxiety and a pleasure taken in one's own distanced localization. Here, each individual is projected on an imaginary map, geographic and manageable, intended for oneself and aimed at the visualization of a place and a route in the world of one's day-to-day activities. But this individual is in this world, in a reified version, limited to the dim "being-between" that is commuting or moving between places, and is taken over by the transmission of data that, in turn, sets up a route, back and forth. By showing himself through images, one becomes an active part of one's own environment. For example, let's take an image from Luc Courchesne's *Journal panoramique* and you will see this subject, at the center of everything, yet absent, hidden by the central lens from where he captured himself, with his immediate surroundings, on photo. Moreover, because of the fish-eye lens, these immediate surroundings become a world, a globe, a planet-like totality where the individual sits enthroned. Since these images were taken in multiple locations in many countries—all of them visited, they become a glossary of places and movements. This series favors a certain desire for transcendence: in our journeys and travels, we keep looking at the sky, looking for immersion in the place where we stand. Yet, in so looking above us, we are already beyond place and location, in a beyond that is given through the image and is an image, a beyond that escapes us at the very moment. We believe that this beyond come to us by the image—but to be experienced only later, with delay and through mediation, in a prerecorded and delayed presence.

#### Where Am I?

Well, I am this point, atomized on a road that is a simple rope in the tapestry of the screen of an electronic device.

#### Where Am I Going?

The device will tell me. Better: it will show me. Hence, I will be able to become the movement and course that anticipates me.

#### In What State Do I Wander?

Precisely, I do not wander anymore. I am really at the place indicated by the arrow. So I go there, for I need to catch me.

That is it, as to my presence in this place.

Sylvain Campeau

## BAMAKO: CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY WITH A VARIABLE GEOGRAPHY

Bamako, Mali's Capital, has hosted an international biennale of photography since 1994 (mostly initiated and directed from outside of the country), which has become, against all odds, the entire African continent's showcase for photography. This paper is aimed at discussing how Bamakese photographers and all of the participants in this event succeed in reconciling realities that at times are in high contrast with each other: local realities, day-to-day livelihoods, and Western art market realities—a market that they don't comprehend but whose requirements they need to comply with in order to gain exposure on the international scene.

Let's begin with some clarifications. African photography is the photography produced by Africans, that is, by people who are born and practice in Africa; yet, contemporary African photography seems to entail many complex realities that are yet to be defined. For the art collectors and merchants (most of them from Northern countries), it is represented primarily through black and white studio photography taken during the years of independence (1960-1970)—best exemplified by Malian photographer Malick Sidibé, who was awarded a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale of contemporary art in 2007. Conversely, for contemporary art critics and curators, African photography needs to compete with the West's most contemporary creations, as it is promoted by a young generation of artists that often come from the African Diaspora. Since their change of artistic direction in 2000, "manifesto" exhibitions such as *Snap Judgments* (2006) or the Bamako Photography Festival have favored such a tendency, which is still underrepresented on the continent. This said, in some of Africa's big cities, art centers (such as the Centre for Contemporary Art in Lagos) or very dynamic schools (such as the CFP Association centre in Bamako) can be found. They foster new talent who want to conquer the international art market from home.

African photography is as old as the invention of the medium itself. As early as the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several African port cities witnessed the growth of a commercial activity that intensified over the course of the colonial era, despite prevailing censorship, which forced many African photographers to operate clandestinely, when they failed to have the opportunity to "collaborate" with the local colonial administration. During the years of independence (1960), sometimes earlier depending on the countries, the photography sector blossomed and diversified with the development of the press. Yet, as late as at the end of the 80s, Africa was still considered a "blind continent" by the West, that will gradually emerge from this blindness... or will it be the West that will slowly recover its sight? So, approximately fifteen years ago, "African photography" emerged in the West, principally through two Malian portraitists, Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé. Since then, an extensive but inconsistent literature has related the life and the work of these two photographers, from every angle and in every language.

Discovered almost accidentally, Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé were introduced to the world as the "Fathers of African photography", which is, historically speaking, nonsense. Photography was already a well-established practice in Bamako and others regions of Africa when Keita (b. circa 1921-2001) and Sidibé (b. 1936) made their names on the portrait market. And although they are both great photographers, they are not as unique as some believe, nor is their style. But because their uniqueness was proclaimed, their market value soared, and it is currently the highest among African photographers.

What is the present situation? Regardless of their specialties, African photographers work amid relative economic precarity; thus, they depend on the foreign market and its goodwill to develop their

activity. This economic reality leads the dominant Western art market to "fabricate" an African photography that primarily meets the interests of biennales, galleries, and collections. It is a photography that speaks volumes about the often stereotyped Western vision of Africa by which only a few experts assume the right to determine the "African" value of a photography that meets art market standards. Published in 1989, Sally Price's *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* is surprisingly still of great topical interest. Indeed, it is astonishing to realize how great the similarities are between art objects dubbed traditional and the photographic portraits from Africa—regarding the way they are collected, the invention of the object from a Western perspective, the opinions of "connoisseurs" having authority, the creation of a market. The American anthropologist goes even further, claiming that this type of event (in the form of exhibitions and publications) reveals our own interests in and quest for the Other, rather than informing about the artists and their works.

"To say a city is the capital of a discipline means that it has an important role to play, that it is a dynamic place; unfortunately, this is not the case with Bamako!" It is in these unflattering terms that Malian photographer Harandane Dicko, in an interview for *Africultures*, referred to the biennale which he himself is somewhat a product of.

From biennale to biennale, Bamako has become a place for field experimentation where photographers are manufactured for the foreign market. Besides Keïta and Sidibé, now there are contemporary photography products that have been created from scratch (thanks to the help of some outside "talent revealer") and intended for an exclusive Western consumption. There are numerous examples of this—and my intention is not to denigrate such and such photographer who, for obvious economic reasons, gets "influenced" in his artistic choices. However, putting our finger on this reality may prevent us from naively believing that the African photographers exhibited in Northern countries are all artists acting with absolute freedom. Economic factors weigh heavily, and this is especially true for an African artist. Incidentally, this is a recurring theme in the work of painter Chéri Samba, the most famous African artist in the world, regardless of category.

Samuel Fosso, based in Bangui (Central African Republic) is another African photographer who is well-valued on the market, and who has succeeded in welding creativity with pragmatism. Fosso was revealed at the very first biennale of Bamako in 1994. He is a photographer who decided to play the game of art collectors and who brilliantly transforms the genre that had him "discovered": the self-portrait. In reality, this genre that made Fosso famous is common among the studio photographers in Africa: beyond their entertainment value, the self-portraits primarily serve as "models" for the studio customers. For Fosso the icing on the cake results from the character he's created, from his physique and way of playing with it. Some critics even compare his works to those of Cindy Sherman or Pierre and Gilles' angelical and kitsch disco... In short, his works are set in a very contemporary art trend, far from the initial *raison d'être* of the African self-portrait. It is worth noting that the people around Fosso know nothing about his success in the West. He continues to operate his studio in Bangui, as if nothing—so much so that his neighbors think that he travels to Europe to take wedding pictures.

Because of the Western monopoly discussed earlier, some African photographers have not been "discovered" despite being absolute musts in their country, and they remain perfectly invisible on the international scene. Since Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé were "re-defined" by and for Western demand, it may be difficult to promote the work of other contemporary African photographers, because the African photography "experts" will declare that they're either mimicking Seydou Keïta or Malick Sidibé! This is what Philippe Koudjina, a photographer based in Niamey (Nigeria), has learned at his own expense; a tragic absurdity that has been well related in Paul Cohen's and Martijn van Haalen's great documentary, *Photo Souvenir* (2006).

Nevertheless, the Bamakese biennale has had some positive impacts such as the fact that more and more African reporters are recognized and published in the Western press. And let us not forget the upside of new media: the Internet with its many blogs and web sites devoted to African photography (such as *Afrique in visu*) are technologies that allow the young generation to show their works online at little cost, and reach many people without having to deal with cumbersome intermediaries. Similarly, collectives of young photographers, independent structures like the CFP (from which Harandane Dicko stems from), have allowed for a renewal of the photographic scene in a more constructive manner than that of the occasional intervention from Northern "experts." Yet, all this progress remains rather limited. And before continuing the revitalization of contemporary

photographic creation in Africa, it seems necessary to consolidate its fragile gains, by continuing to promote it and to raise awareness among African audiences who are directly concerned.

Obviously, African photography is a constructed object that is made visible and controlled from outside Africa, in the Western Hemisphere. Yet, photography is primarily concerned with representations (of the self and of the Other), and it remains an essential tool to resist the often one-sided view imposed by the Western Hemisphere, break the mental barriers imposed since the colonial era, and decompartmentalize the views from either side.

There are not only one, but many types of African photography. And the photographers are primarily demanding the right to be photographers just like any other, and not merely bearers of the label "Africa." Between the construction of and the orientation toward a certain "African photography" in the West, and the reality of photography as it is practiced in Africa, it is urgent to take position in order to avoid ensnarement (like in the Bamakese "mirage") and overcome obstacles (such as the economic precarity of living photographers, a judicial and political void that causes rapid degradation of archive funds).

Let's end on a combative note, with reflections by Hassan Musa, a Sudanese artist living in France. Without compromises, as much for the supporters of what he calls "artafricanism" (*artafricanisme*) as for the supporters of a black identity, he thus concludes an article published in 2002 in *Les Temps modernes*: "In order for us to get us closer to the current reality of Africans, it's time to look at this other African art that is overlooked by the Europeans: that of survival."

Érika Nimis

## GEOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY: SOME THEATRICAL FORAYS

There are many ways to begin a reflection on geography and theatre. One way is simply to consider the circulation of shows, which traces a worldwide map and increasingly exposes us to a common culture. As with cinema or certain contemporary artists, it is indeed possible to follow the productions of directors such as Robert Lepage, Dumb Type, Romeo Castellucci, Bob Wilson, Peter Sellars, Peter Brook, Marthaller or Ariane Mnouchkine. Attending the most well-known festivals, one realizes how the local character is under-represented, to the benefit of works having an international circulation. Paradoxically, these works contribute to the creation of a sort of global culture while nonetheless claiming geographical moorings regarding identity. For example, it is in Montreal that I discovered the Italian Romeo Castellucci and the Polish Warlikowski (who was then directing the British Sarah Kane). Like many festivals, the FTA (*Festival TransAmériques*) tries to mirror the contemporary international theatrical scene, and it is possible to see shows in their original languages to thus get a taste of the contemporary creations produced abroad. Now, I have seen the same shows in Montréal, Paris, New York, Brussels, Tokyo, etc. It would be valuable to study this particular, global culture, one that spins its standardizing web and imposes itself upon us through worshipping events. I wish to examine the geographical as a theme, stimulus, reflection and source of questions, through the creations of companies that specifically belong to this festival culture, and that appear in all of the capitals of the world.

Robert Lepage's work is, of course, to be considered foremost: his creations travel the world while simultaneously transforming these travels into *mise-en-abyme* (or circulations, as captured in the title of one of his shows)—precisely exploring the issue of identity via geographical moorings. Lepage's universe is shaped by the experience of the foreigner/Other and the reverie it induces, and by the journeys it sets in motion. Most of his protagonists are individuals in training, who are traveling far from home and who, while candidly discovering other cultures uncover themselves. Cultural difference becomes a vehicle for dream and fantasy in Lepage's work.

As a child, Lepage dreamed of pursuing studies in geography. This was partly due to the power of evocation of an Atlas (and we can also find roadmaps, astrological and sky charts in his shows—microcosm intermingling with macrocosm, and with the individual at their junction). So the plays are often about travels, encounters, trips and landscapes experienced. The US roadmap is one of the two material points of departure in the show *Circulations* (1984). Visually and symbolically, it evokes the journey, the roads and the

geographic itinerary that will be the protagonist's to experience. As a visual element, it unfolds along the trip, but it also suggests blood vessels with the drawing of its lines—suicide trails, by severance of the veins. In 1988, this journey through a continent was followed by the collision of tectonic plates (a geological movement that renders the same wanderings or geographico-ontological quests, in the show of the same name). Eleven years later, the fable unfolds on a worldwide scale: *Zulu Time* is a show that relies primarily on this global circulation via international airports. The international Zulu code becomes a new Esperanto; the maps multiply as solitudes pass each other by, while the time zones race and telescope themselves. In the two movies, *La face cachée de la lune* (*The Far Side of the Moon*, 2000) and *Nô* (1998), Lepage frequently plays with time difference: the terrorists mistakenly set their bomb to Osaka time instead of to Québec's time zone. In reality, the alarm clock was set on Japan time because one of the Japanese terrorists wanted to keep track of his girlfriend at her workplace. Explosion of time and space in these seductive delusion sensations, these links and connections in the making. So geography is both journey and formation, dreamlike and visual. It is brought into play through many projections of maps and road signs, before turning quickly into a metaphorical map, the line of the road meeting the stroke of the calligrapher or tattoo artist. Then, we have the impression that the blue dragon would be the name of a new continent, and at the same time a metaphor for everyone's inner violence and collisions of tectonic plates. So it should not come as a surprise that Lepage has directed Brecht's *La vie de Galilée* (1989), which recounts the dispute about the Sun and Earth's positions in the Universe, or that he envisioned *The Far Side of the Moon* in 2000, in which the race to the moon meets a more intimate and familial epic—all of this before taking up *Lipsynch*, a show that questions identity through voice, pursuing further cultural questionings via geography.

On the same level, but more virally, Argentinian Rodrigo Garcia is a critical observer of a globalized world that scoffs at geographical belongings and realities. Each of his shows upsets and puts on trial our global consumer society, by pushing our consumeristic rituals and formatting to the extreme (Ikea, Maradona and the Visa card are recurring deities in his work). The plays *J'ai acheté une pelle chez Ikea pour creuser ma tombe*<sup>1</sup> (2003), *L'Histoire de Ronald, le clown de McDonald's* (2003), *Jardinage humain* (2003) and *Balances mes cendres sur Mickey* (2007) emphasize how the same items are purchased all over the globe, just as in Wajdi Mouawad's *Assoiffés*<sup>2</sup> (2008), in which a young and angry protagonist claims that we are "ikeafying" and "walmartifying" ourselves.

Travels, shopping, solitudes, habits and manners: the shows reveal transmutations and progressive globalization. But they can also shed light on new, emerging behaviors. I'm referring to *Airport Kids*, a show by the Argentinian Lola Arias and Stefan Kaegi of Switzerland about the children who attend international high schools (*lycées*), who live all over the planet and who represent a third international culture which scoffs at geographical membership.

Kaegi now questions identity, identity and the geographical on a wider scale, after directing *Mnemopark*, a show which introduced Switzerland to the whole world (including Montréal). It depicts a Switzerland larger than life with its 37 meters of scale models of alpine pasture, filmed and traversed by electric trains handled by retired model-making enthusiasts. This said, *Airport Kids* is about having teenagers from an international high school of Lausanne play, talk, and relate their stories. These teenagers are always travelling from one country to another, speak many languages, have no ties with the world as their reference and name brands as their values. As if the Lepageans characters had babies in the airports of *Zulu Time*, babies that are later interviewed! The original cultural membership is still there, but it is less sweeping—it mixes with English language a lot, and the notion of the foreigner/Other is upset, giving way to a sort of global consumption that serves as identity: "These children are part of the *Third Culture Kids*, according to a professor of sociology. They neither have a homeland or an adoptive country, but a third place whose belonging relates to a global culture, nationless and borderless, without any geographical reference or moorings. They answer to it as if it were a brand: Angola, China, Brazil don't mean much more than Nike, Adidas, Reebok..."<sup>3</sup>

The set is made with cardboard boxes and steel, expressing many variations on the container theme. They determine everyone's constricted space, which is customized in turn by their continuous movements (a drum set, an office, a pillow corner and a sky filled with Styrofoam snowflakes, for the 6-years-old Italian who imagines herself as a 'sky stewardess'). It seems as if the spectator is in an airport hangar where containers and children can be transported, while snails are filmed moving along a map of the world, crossing

countries and even continents in an instant: a powerful metaphor! Since it is not always easy to separate a local identity from an international one, there is a little game involving small presentation cards indicating an individual's country of origin, and then a common nationality (Swiss). The game alludes to local characteristics: the little African who sings, the Brazilian, who is awkward but so communicative and joyful, the little Chinese boy, thoughtful but playful and with a cute lisp, and the composed Irish sitting at his booth, pretending to be an air traffic controller. When interviewed, each describes his own utopia (to live on a floating city or space, or in the clouds, to have many houses, to have but one currency, one language...). The video allows for manipulation of scales and distances (one sees inside the boxes, people speak through cameras—inevitable in an Internet era), but it also fills a void: one of the actors has gone back to Indonesia, following her parents' latest job transfer. She could not be physically present in the show, but is present in image, and at first the spectator does not know that this is not filmed live from her box. Travel, presence, culture, image and here also, microcosm (the small box, the small family unit described by lonely children) against macrocosm (the travel, the planet, then space), all of this in a mobile set that is once again drawn from airports environments. An original cell and flux, a transiting container that becomes synonymous with membership.

The geographical can also be a pure visual source that does not concern a cultural belonging as much as a larger attitude facing the world, a floating and drifting attitude without any point of reference, experiencing dilution and conflicting scales of dimension (microcosm again).

Since 2002, little by little, Japanese collective Dumb Type has created *Voyage*, a mesmerizing show presenting individuals against a backdrop made of sky charts and roadmaps projected on a wide screen, and then reflected on an adjacent mirror plate. Maps, lines and landscapes unfolding: dilution in the image with the help of a giant reflection, that of an image into which the actor is immersed. Immersion and suspension are the two dominating moods: "A mood of unprecedented opaque uncertainty surrounds us. Asleep or awake, when you try to forget it and to paralyze your mind, it does not go away, like a second skin of anxiety and fear. Pretend to be indifferent: you will not hold on, you will not be able to forget about it as if it was about someone else's problems or about events isolated from you by the TV screen."<sup>4</sup>

Dumb Type often refers to our attitudes and behaviors toward death, political correctness, foreigners/Others and to our contemporary technological environments, in performances merging image, dance and theatre of a few words with the visual presence of the text. In *Voyage*, the traditional mapping is substituted by the digital world, a world of lines and digits, sometimes replaced by images of trees. That both merge is not trivial: digits with trees, digital codes with landscapes, the map and the world.

The very title *Voyage* suggests a visual rendering of the geographical relayed by videos and mirrors, the double and the reflection, as many doubled proximities that open onto the larger and wider, even to the infinite. For years, Lepage has been drumming into us that we can grasp the whole world in our kitchen; it is in a container, in a little box that children describe to us in the global circulation; it is only in the reflection of oneself or of a map that the world is broadened. This is how the geographical turns into an ontological, if not metaphysical, quest.

Ludovic Fouquet

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> (Translator's note) Respectively: I Bought a Shovel at Ikea to Dig my Tomb, The Story of Ronald, the Clown from McDonald's, Human Gardening, and Throw my Ashes over Mickey. Since these plays are yet to be published in English, all title translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> (Translator's note) Thirsty. This play is not yet translated into English.

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Kaegi as quoted in the Festival d'Avignon program, July 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Preliminary notes on the project, accessible on the web site of their European producer: <http://www.epidemic.net/geo/art/dtype/prj/creation.html>. (In French and in English.)