

Conceptual Proposal ElasticMapping

The proposed project "ElasticMapping" is not so much about the production of one product, one piece. It is rather to investigate the cinematographic qualities of location data "as such" and see if the envisioned "ElasticMapping" editing software brings about an awareness and tangibility of these qualities and possibilities.

Artistic background

With the increased possibilities of personalized mapping that come with emerging presence of locative media¹ in society, the traditional cartographic objectivity of "The Map" is challenged in a daring way. Artists investigate those new possibilities, and I have been working on the subject since 2002

In each of my subsequent projects the visualizations of GPS data does evolve from realistic data visualization (AmsterdamREALTIME) to more subjective, flexible and even abstract representations. I also designed settings where interaction between the data, participants and audience played an important role (MILKproject, SouvenirZeeland, NomadicMILKproject). During this process questions about the value of GPS data as realistic representations of movements, their potential as a storytelling medium, connections to local and global experiences of space, and experiences of and representations of time became more and more important.

For the latest project NomadicMILK, I did work with a specially developed tool: a GPS drawing robot that is able to present GPS tracks in outdoors situations, independent of power supply or indoor shelter. Within the projects I so far totally respected the GPS-data and their visualization as a form of realism. This now started to shift when working with the robot. The representation of both time and space had to be compressed, scaled, and deformed in order to make the robot draw a sand line that is recognizable and functions as a representation to which the participants and audiences could relate in a direct manner. During this process I found myself building a very basic software-editing tool for GPS data.

Communication needs editing

To my surprise the edited tracks became even more "real" in the experience of the participants and audiences. But soon I realized that there was no need to be surprised: for other mechanized visualizations of reality, be it photography, film or sound recordings; editing, cutting and reframing had always been developed, shortly after the invention of the technology itself. Exactly with this purpose: to be able to represent reality in a recognizable manner that people can relate to and experience as accurate representation. This realization opened up for a practice based and theoretical investigation.

At this point I am mostly interested in location-based data and their possibilities of subjective mapping. And I would like to develop this concept of editing software for GPS data further, also because I believe, or expect, that in order to overcome the intimidating realism of GPS recordings it is a breakthrough to be able to flexible manipulate the data itself. The possibilities to design and even really build such a tool instead of just accepting what is being made by other (commercial) parties is a radical subjective approach in itself.

ElasticMapping residence proposal

The project ElasticMapping differs from other locative media projects that it explicitly does not aim to enrich a specific location or a specific track with other meaningful data (stories, images sound fragments). Instead it will focus primarily on the meaning and the dynamics of the location (track) data itself. It does not even work with an underlying map, or any geographical reverence, the animations as I see them now are being made as self referential as possible. I could for example edit a specific track and make it "dance" with a track from a

¹ Sat-nav systems, Google maps mash ups, Open Street Map, GPS tracking applications on smart phones and the like

total different time – or space frame. This opens up for the use of cinematographic tools like cross-cutting², flash backs, crowd shots, cutaway shots³ extreme blow up's and zoom outs and the like on GPS data. This way I hope to find out if subtle (or blunt) decoupage techniques can be used on sets of rough GPS- and other location-based data, and make them more meaningful and expressive for audiences.

Relation to place

So far in my projects I worked with data that have a close relation to the landscape involved. I am very interested in non-urban location data: local traffic, cattle tracks, ploughing farmers and food chains. The economic logic of mobility is often the basis of my data selection. To develop the software it is good to work with a similar specific ambition. In Banff center contexts I was strongly thinking of working/testing with the editing and transformation of existing scientific/objective data of wildlife from the National Park, for example tracks of grey wolves, cougars or elk.⁴ These data are, in contrast to wildlife photography or filmed documentary, only presented in scientific contexts, and not very easy accessible for broader audiences. The possibilities offered by ElasticMapping software might change that.

It would be very exiting to collaborate with scientists, and see what it does to them if their data, intended to presented as objective as possible, now is used to create drama.

Exhibition piece

This way the final exhibition piece could still be a poetic work: a wildlife track animation either presented as a beamer projection, flat screen presentation or series of prints.

But I expect the software itself to be evenly or more interesting, and although beta versions of software are not the most easy "objects" to exhibit, I would be very motivated to find a suitable form to show this in the right practical and theoretical context in the series of proposed exhibitions. This might be possible in the form of a "making of" documentary, or better even in an interactive setting where people can do editing experiments on the spot.

Links to relevant work:

-example of GPS track animations based on children's GPS drawings in Dutch Polder
<http://www.elasticmapping.net/GeoTales.htm>

-example of 2002 GPS project: AmsterdamREALTIME
<http://realtime.waag.org>

-award winning MILKproject www.milkproject.net

-example of robot drawing: <http://www.elasticmapping.net/NomadicMILK.htm>

-general blog on Nigerian NomadicMILK project www.nomadicmilk.net

-abstract of ElasticMapping paper forISEA2009
<http://www.beelddiktee.nl/tekst/ISEA-abstract-eng.htm>

-Website Esther Polak <http://www.estherpolak.nl>

² the editing technique of alternating, interweaving, or interspersing one narrative action (scene, sequence, or event) with another - usually in different locations or places, thus combining the two; this editing method suggests **parallel action** (that takes place simultaneously); often used to dramatically build tension and suspense in chase scenes, or to compare two different scenes; also known as **inter-cutting** or **parallel editing**.

³ a brief shot that momentarily interrupts a continuously-filmed action, by briefly inserting another related action, object, or person (sometimes *not* part of the principal scene or main action), followed by a cutback to the original shot; often filmed from the POV of the character and used to break up a sequence and provide some visual relief

⁴ For an example of GPS based research in Banff see: Kortello et al. 2007 *Interactions between cougars (puma concolor) and gray wolves (canis lupus) in Banff National Park, Alberta*