
Claiming the Portable Home/

Creative Acts of Identity Placemaking within the Networked Digital Domain

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Leeds Metropolitan University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

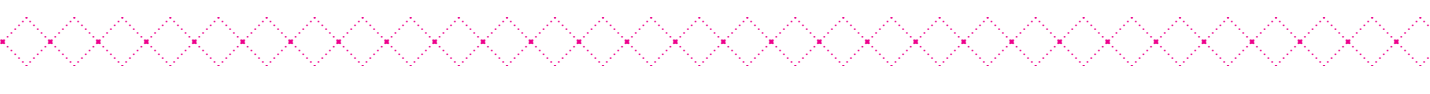
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October 2010





Please Note/

A digital version of this document, with underlined hyperlinks, is available to download from:
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All underlined content within this document indicates an established hyperlink.
No alternative emphasis is suggested.

Items submitted for examination, in accompaniment to the paper thesis/

Artist book: Cultural Probe: 8 July 2008- 8 July 2010
DVD archive of works made during the PhD

Abstract/

The digital revolution and the arrival of the internet have shifted the global social environment. This change in society has enabled new collaboration and partnership, access to and accumulation of previously unobtainable data, and it has transformed methods of communication. This research imaginatively stepped into this new space to produce works of new media art that investigated placemaking within the digital domain.

The project drew on the open-source culture and methods of hacking social media to engage with syndicated public content on the internet, handheld technologies, and geo-located datasets. Emphasis was placed on uncovering behavioral situation generated through the networked culture of the internet and developing original methods of storytelling that relay socially useful narratives. Furthermore, the research used ethnographic approaches to creatively investigate the concept of the transnational experience within the new cosmopolitan space. It engaged with the concept that the global community is forming a new culturescape that is impacting on the evolution of creativity, politics and the sciences.

The scope of the tools used adjusted and evolved in parallel to the continuous and ever changing media available on the net. The outcomes of the creative practice are therefore delivered across networked art, code, geo-located narrative, digital print, video, animation, installation, and a hybridization of all of these.

The project contextually identifies with current new media practice and it is situated as a creative competitor, participant and contributor in this space through successful public research outcomes that include exhibitions, publications, conference speaking, and attainment of grants and awards.

The examination submission is structured as a transmedia portfolio. It contains the printed supporting document to the practice, an artist book called 'Cultural Probe: 8 July 2008 - 8 July 2010' and a DVD archive of works made during the PhD research project.

I confirm that the thesis is my own work; and that all published or other sources of material consulted have been acknowledged in notes to the text or the bibliography.

I confirm that the thesis has not been submitted for a comparable academic award.

Megan Leigh Smith 2010

Document Overview/

Artwork List/ p. 8

Research Objectives/ p. 9

Identification of the research question, aims and objectives and a brief synopsis of how they were met throughout the research process. This area is expanded upon within the body of the thesis.

Introduction/ p. 12

The situation that led to the decision to be a part of new media practice and the reasons for enquiry into this area of art making which is affected by, and uses as a tool, socially networked environments initiated by the internet.

Hacking the intimate/ a bridge to a culturescape/ p. 21

An overview of the building blocks that enabled new media practice to develop and become a new language, and how my own practice was guided towards this area of research and experimentation with tagging space, place and identity within this new culture.

Cultural Probe/ a method for tagging space/ p. 33

A description of the development of a research methodology through experimentation with participation in practice and how this process could be recorded, broadcast and archived using social media tools, while ensuring both my practice and reference tools evolved in conjunction with popular advancements in the media.

Projects///

Megan + Edwige/ the bending of space but not me/ p. 43

Our City, Our Music/ tagging place/ p. 50

SocialMoment + Pst!/ hacking as a method of practice/ p. 57

They are moving forwards/ p. 68

A reflection on the evolution of my practice during the PhD project and how it sits with other artists who embrace social media, open source culture and making with a *socially useful* agenda. A look at how establishments are actively moving towards enabling and catering for a more cross-disciplinary and collaborative approach to research and creative production.

Concluding on collaborative practice/ an evolving transformative process/ p. 73

A critical reflection on the importance of the major social shift brought about by the internet and the open source culture, the impact its corresponding tools are having on global creativity, politics and the sciences, and how this will affect future rates of production, complexity of research, and achievement of solutions.

Research Practice Outcomes///

Exhibitions/ p. 79

Speaking at Conferences/ p. 84

Awards/ p. 85

Bibliography/ p. 86

Artists + Works Referenced/ p. 91

Notes on images/ p. 93

Hyperlinks included within the document/ p. 95

Collaborator Biographies/ p. 98

Acknowledgments/ p. 99

Artwork List/

The works are, for the most part, listed in the order they appear in the text.

'Beat' (2005)

The DoGoSee.com Project (2006 – 2008)

'Child' (2007)

Making of 'Child' (2007)

My Portable Home (2008)

Cultural Probe (2008-2010)

647 days 18 hours (2010)

Playground/Play Ground/Ground Play/Lay Round PG (May 2009 – present)

Edwige Pronovost in Leeds/New York/Toronto/Cocoa Beach (2008-2009)

Edwige Selflessly Caged in the Web (2009)

As I try to be an avatar & Edwige tries to be me (2010)

Our City, Our Music (2008-2009)

SocialMoment (2010)

Pst! Physical Space Tweets (2009)

Pst! **micro**CONTROL (2010)

Research Objectives/

The research question, aims and objectives identified at MPhil stage are as follows. Brief descriptions of how they have been addressed are outlined below. They are all addressed in more depth within the thesis.

Research Question/

Focusing on the contemporary experience of operating within multiple locations, cultures and spaces simultaneously:

how is individual space generated, claimed and situated within the *digital domain*,

how are intimate actions and perceptions of the self articulated within the *digital domain*,

how is the self extended to reach others via the *digital domain*?

Aims/

1. To generate, locate, and situate the self within the technology mediated physical and emotional environment of the *digital domain*.

2. To investigate embodiment within technology enhanced environments by extending the boundary of reality to include both the physical and the 'virtual' as one hybrid functional/dysfunctional operating space within the *digital domain*.

3. To demonstrate, through art practice, actions of extending the self to others in attempts to carve out a socially networked space which exposes personal identity.

The question and aims were evaluated and tested through practice and were resolved through a combination of projects that imaginatively explored the *digital domain* from both first person perspective and third person. Initial explorations were independent though as the PhD progressed the extension became more collaborative and curatorial in order to discover original methods of relaying stories into and across networked space. The final stage of the research concentrated on demonstrating how identity, situation, location and place are articulated within social media and can be used to tell narratives that could not have been relayed before extension into the *digital domain* was made possible.

A full list of the art works produced is found on page 8. A set of DVD's archiving the work produced accompanies this document.

Objectives

1. To explore claim and perception of space using a mash-up of geo-locational data, narrative, public social networking platform content, SL experiences and other appropriate forms of social experience generated within the situation of the *digital domain* to document and place the self.

Each piece of work made tested and evaluated new technologies in order to creatively extend the social use of the media. It was central to this PhD research that the media shifted from project to project in order to stay aligned with and abreast of popular web-based social platforms. This resulted in the development of several new methods to articulate narrative in socially networked space and provided critical works of art that reflect the situation of the current culturescape.

2. To embody the *digital domain* through performance by living vicariously through Edwige Pronovost, a Second Life avatar, to analyse how humans as characters appropriate and make social or structural claims on space, in particular in the effort to form a home, and to document the physically immersive and augmented situation encountered within digital space. Performances in physical space will be matched with similar encounters inworld and recorded through video, photo-documentation and narrative documentation on my blog.

This work is found within the section [Megan + Edwige/ The bending of space but not me](#), which highlights attempts to become a Second Life avatar through performances in Leeds, New York City, Toronto & Cocoa Beach. This work is represented as a series of still images and as a video that document both travel through the cities and visits to their corresponding spaces in Second Life. In addition, 'Edwige Selflessly Caged in the Web', looks at how an avatar can further extend into social media beyond the pre-script of the virtual world in order to stake claim on digital space.

3. To gather this research via the cultural probe method using myself as the case study, as a 'trans-individual'¹ actively carving out a home within the *digital domain*. This placemaking will take shape as a series of performances, designed journeys and collaborative events within the *digital domain*.

1 For the sake of subject clarity, the term 'trans-individual' is replaced with 'transnational' within the document.

The 'Cultural Probe' became the research methodology, where the practice was documented across several social media platforms, carving out a place for my research and actions within new media practice. Furthermore, the archive of logged events enabled the fabrication of new work, in particular the artist book, 'Cultural Probe and '647 days 18 hours'. The section of this document titled [Cultural Probe/ a method for tagging space](#) discusses this in more depth.

“We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us.” Marshall McLuhan (1964)

Introduction/

Questions to resolve through practice/

Focusing on the contemporary experience of operating within multiple locations, cultures and spaces simultaneously:

- how is individual space generated, claimed and situated within the *digital domain*,
- how are intimate actions and perceptions of the self articulated within the *digital domain*, how is the self extended to reach others via the *digital domain*?

This paper documents how I have contributed to extending the field of creative practice within the arts, in particular within new media, and what I have uncovered as an artist using new forms of technology as my tools. I will discuss the creative action of sharing stories on the web in an effort to be more fully engaged with a social space that spans a greater geography than my daily travels enable, and how this act contributes to a social education. Most importantly, I discuss how I and other artists are exploring concepts of identity and the hybrid experience of new community using the web as our playground for documenting space and place with location-aware technology and participative projects. To situate my research within current new media practice, I draw on works by artists; Cao Fei, Jer Thorp, Marisa Olson, Ben Rubin & Mark Hansen, Jonathan Harris & Sep Kamvar among others. Psychologist, Dr. Aleks Krotoski's research into web identity is discussed and Don Tapscott's research, with nGenera and the University of Toronto, is used to reference the social framework of the generation in which I, and the above-mentioned artists, are operating within. Reflections on artistic practice centred on nomadic identity and the transnational cosmopolitan imagination, by Hou Hanru, Director of Exhibitions & Public Programmes at the San Francisco Art Institute, and Marsha Meskimmon's, Professor of Modern Contemporary Art History & Theory at the University of Loughborough, reference current critical reflection on new media practice within Contemporary Art. This PhD research project has been a part of a global shift in creativity and socio-political culture. The paper points to some aspects of this change and discusses how my practice has documented, responded to and is situated within this transformed space.

The research aims and objectives identified at MPhil stage are as follows. They are addressed throughout the document.

Research Aims:

1. To generate, locate, and situate the self within the technology mediated physical and emotional environment of the *digital domain*.
2. To investigate embodiment within technology enhanced environments by extending the boundary of reality to include both the physical and the 'virtual' as one hybrid functional/ dysfunctional operating space within the *digital domain*.
3. To demonstrate, through art practice, actions of extending the self to others in attempts to carve out a socially networked space which exposes personal identity.

Research Objectives:

1. To explore claim and perception of space using a mash-up of geo-locational data, narrative, public social networking platform content, SL experiences and other appropriate forms of social experience generated within the situation of the *digital domain* to document and place the self.
2. To embody the *digital domain* through performance by living vicariously through Edwige Pronovost, a Second Life avatar, to analyse how humans as characters appropriate and make social or structural claims on space, in particular in the effort to form a home, and to document the physically immersive and augmented situation encountered within digital space. Performances in physical space will be matched with similar encounters inworld and recorded through video, photo-documentation and narrative documentation on my blog.
3. To gather this research via the cultural probe method using myself as the case study, as a 'trans-individual' actively carving out a home within the *digital domain*. This placemaking will take shape as a series of performances, designed journeys and collaborative events within the *digital domain*.

While the research questions, aims and objectives pointed the path of the project they were not precise instructions for what I was to uncover and produce, especially as this research focused on exploring social place within the internet, a space that has dramatically changed throughout the course of the research project. Using the objectives as the practical foundation, the art works produced were tested, improved and re-assessed in order to achieve the aims and to develop original content. The objectives were arrived at through a crossover of works made. In particular, 'Cultural Probe', a lifelogging experiment that provided an overview of the intermingled aspects of my practice, research and life, became the referencing tool for the methodology of my practice because it was a system to expose and claim place within social media while documenting attempted extension into the *digital domain*. The aims were achieved progressively and organically throughout the project. In some cases the works aligned with all three aims, though the second aim is primarily addressed within the Project section of this document, called **Megan + Edwige/ The bending of space but not me**. Like most art practices achievement of goals was through exploration and journey.

When I initiated the project in 2005 I was concerned with the idea of human emotive and sensorial interaction in technology-mediated situations. The social environment of the web that is now mainstream was not yet present. Extension into the internet was still primarily text-based though, Flickr², an online photo sharing network, had just entered the market and was gaining popularity. Facebook and Twitter were not in the public domain³. The relevance of Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) as an art form was heavily debated or disregarded within the Fine Art courses I was exposed to - a discussion that also took place within the press industry and across Hollywood as more Pixar films were being produced and analogue methods of animation were being substituted for digital approaches. I was interested in the digital revolution and how I could be part of this movement as an artist.

The creative journey taken on this PhD has been heavily influenced by two complex factors that affect each other:

1. my identity as a culturally hybrid person or transnational⁴ and the affinity I have for other artists and researchers who share this experience and how we interpret, engage with and uncover locality; how we placemake⁵.
2. the social & political revolution enabled by the web and digital methods has affected the global concept of community identity, forcing a new globalness upon the world.

My research and the development of my practice is accurately articulated by Hanru: "This process always begins with the exploration of intimate experiences and ends by revealing some acerbic critiques and challenges facing some imminent essential social issues. One can call this a strategy of politics of intimacy" (2008, p.48). Through the practice of storytelling I started at the emotional core and worked outwards towards revealing the following self-defined concept of a culturescape:

2 Flickr launched in 2004, it was acquired by Yahoo! In 2005 (Fake, C. 2005).

3 Facebook publicly launched to any user with a valid email address in September 2006 (Abram, C. 2006). Twitter officially launched as twttr in July 2006 (Arrington, M. 2006).

4 I was born in Canada and grew up on the border of Quebec and Ontario; an area known for its varied cultures and languages, I participated in both. I have since lived in Mexico, Guatemala, Taiwan and England and travelled within 25 different countries. From each of these places I have retained a different memory and perspective on culture, traditions and language. This experience has helped form my interest in transnational art, which looks at the complexity of globalization and understands that cultural interactions are of a transient nature. The Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation at the University of Arts London suggests that. "...established certainties about the nature of culture, tradition and authenticity are being constantly questioned. The movement of peoples and artefacts is breaking down borders and producing new identities outside and beyond those of the nation state. It is no longer easy to define the nature of the local and the international, and many cultural interactions now operate on the level of the transnational" (2007). I count myself as an artist producing work on these concepts and also living as a hybrid of the culture I have absorbed.

5 Gabi Scardi defines the transnational artist and their methods of practice-based placemaking in her essay, *How Many Roads*, as, "...artists from all over the world: from Europe to Southeast Asia, the Middle East to America. What unites them is an intercultural outlook that is not a deliberate choice, but a spontaneous response to the stimuli and the influences of the different environments in which they have ended up living" (2006).

The story of a place developed through a networked combination of factors, those involving location/region, cultural situation and participant behaviour - and pertaining primarily to a globalized and cosmopolitan culture that is participating in dialogue online.

6 Norbert Wiener (1894-1964) is also recognised as the initiator of Cybernetics; the study of information feedback systems.

I also identify a parallel between the evolution of my practice and Norbert Wiener's Loop Theory⁶. The expression, 'In the Loop' refers to the inability of anti-aircraft gunners to hit their targets with accuracy. Krotoski describes the essential issue in this way:

7 Dr. Aleks Krotoski describing Norbert Wiener's loop theory in her BBC series '[Virtual Revolution](#)'.

Norbert Wiener asked 'When we walk, why don't we fall over?' He argued that what keeps us upright is a constant loop of information to and from the brain, a loop of action and reaction that allows us to predict future action. So Wiener saw the gunner, his gun, the plane and the pilot not as separate entities but all embedded in the same loop of continuous feedback. Only through thinking in this way, linking human and machine together as one could the gunner successfully hit their targets (2010)⁷.

My practice projects have progressively moved away from emotional subjects directly attached to my body and embedded themselves more and more within cosmopolitan studies. Using new technologies as my tools I have been able to narrate and creatively draw new social space by letting my tools and approaches evolve throughout the research. With each piece I have gradually increased the perimeter around me, contributing to a physical trace of a journey and my place. This process has also allowed me to predict the future progress of my practice in a way similar to an unfolding story. As I have moved from one project to the next, I have been expanding the space around my body to chronicle social place. The action and reaction generated by making each individual piece has directly stimulated the creation of future pieces, subsequent loops, or one central progressive movement, into a creative space. This movement has not been based on a linear model for producing practice-based work but rather on a networked system from which I draw inspiration, and within which each project is interlinked.

This research is situated within an artistic practice that seeks direct engagement with the greater public rather than the art community; it seeks to exchange with the utopic idea of a universal public, or what Marsha Meskimmon, calls the cosmopolitan imagination. This is practice which "... pushes the boundaries of the imagination, ..., by [applying in practice] a critical shift from asking what artworks show us about the world to asking how they can enable us to participate in and potentially change, the parameters through which we negotiate the world" (2010, p. 6). She suggests that "...cosmopolitanism asks how we might connect, through dialogue rather than monologue, our response-ability to our responsibilities within a world community"(p.7). In order to practice in this way it is essential to not only understand the mind-set but to also

have tools that can enable this approach. Through the course of this research project various commonly available tools that enable exchange and dialogue in unique ways have been used to make new work. Furthermore, artists working with these tools and methods are also identified within

this document in order to contextualise my practice within the current art movement. While the word, common, in art language is problematic because it identifies a social class divide between those who can understand, make, collect and discuss art practice and those that can not, it would be unintelligent to suggest that a divide does not exist. A growing number of artists are using the tools commonly available, through mass production, global distribution and intense marketing such as mobile phones, socially networked sites and GPS enabled devices, to make work and to take their public profile into their own hands, an action that is also present within the music industry as musicians gain their identity and fame on MySpace, Facebook and YouTube. Not only are these tools financially obtainable to a mass market and making it easier to self-promote, most importantly they are empowering a common population to contribute to creative practice. Furthermore, creative *socially useful*⁸ content is being shared on the web and is resulting in the formation of new communities with a common interest, which in turn boost creativity in the population and increases access to and acquisition of information. Part of the shift that is occurring within the digital revolution and web 2.0 is that more art is being made than ever and what rises to the top of the emergent system is the result of the same old principles: luck, hard work, talent and promotion. Similar to the internet's design⁹, according to which any one component can be missing from the equation without the system failing, the network algorithms and social involvement that make up the web could make the contributor/producer, self-identified as an

8 Socially Useful is a term used by the artist Jenny Holzer in her creative practice. Elizabeth A. T. Smith, curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago says that Holzer "...consistently emphasized the artwork as a carrier of ideas that stimulate a passive viewer to become an active questioner by inviting reflection on intentions, meaning and authorship" (2008, p. 27). I have acquired the terminology within the context of this document to reference new media art works and methods of practice that are actively engaging society through participation in positive, constructive and collaborative ways.

9 The structure of the internet was built in typical military style, where if one section of the grid should fail it would not collapse the system. In 1989, Breners-Lee, invented the first edition of the World Wide Web on top of the existing internet. He then gave all his source code away for free. This democratic act not only identified him as a social crusader in a capitalist and militarized environment, it also allowed for the development of the World Wide Web. The abbreviated prefix www or the term web became an infamous symbols of a space made and assembled through the networked imagination of a massive population that is still growing exponentially. Incredibly the web is governed by no central administrator. The growth is due, in part, to industry who seized the opportunity to encourage computers into more homes and into schools in the 1980's. The result of this action led to a population of creative and imaginative people who distributed their code and knowledge amongst each other making the web what it is today. Poetically, the web could be associated with the story of a wild beast who has appeared, multiplied, become uncontrollable, and is now a haven for, among other things, the cultivation of memes, tools, and culture. Through its evolution it has shift the course of social history on a massive scale. The US military who initially helped build the concepts of the internet into a network most likely could not have predicted that society would take its tool and effectively produce the largest social and progressive partnership achieved in history to date. Meme: "...the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation... Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions... Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Dawkins, R. 1989).

artist or an analyst, a star overnight. A leveling of power is occurring with users of social media (Krotoski, 2010, Virtual Revolution). This shift is impacting on the distribution and exchange of information and allowing for a change in the form of creative process. It is also revealing a rising common attitude enabled by the web, a collective social value that is not new to history but becoming more prevalent; the confidence to share.

The *New New Human Beings*¹⁰ are an example of a cohort of rising artist in China, who are born out of materialistic and consumer driven societies and their activities are indicators of this global political shift in power. Hanru describes below their creative behaviour, but the statement is also relevant to Tapscott's *Net Generation*¹¹, as both groups spring from a similar space on the timeline:

They throw themselves into the flux of images and information of the current "global art world" and absorb all kinds of new inventions and fashions. They disregard the distinction between "high" and "low", elitist and popular, low-tech and high-tech, intellectual and consumerist, "art" and "entertainment", established and underground. It's an alternative world distancing itself from the hegemonic and dominant power system. This distancing or transcendence is their most powerful form of political engagement. It is a form of social competition in this age of global empire, one where there is not political opposition or utopia beyond these confines (2008, p.46).

Drawing on the research of Krotoski, Tapscott and Hanru and based on the social framework within which my creative practice lies, with its uses of popular or common tools, I feel the *New New Human Being* generation is redefining creative practice beyond Contemporary Art. This new form of making takes from the situation of open culture on the web. Furthermore, interdisciplinary artists are now starting to shift social perception of art practice as more and more people are able to claim a creative stake in practice either as a maker or a consumer. The more conventional gallery-based curatorial system to promote, broadcast, and to receive information on the arts is no longer the only model now that the web has become a predominant facet within the home. The artist Jenny Holzer also agrees that artists can effect change, but she warns in her conversation with Henri Cole that, 'it depends on whether one is competent, lucky, and change is about to happen anyway' (2001, quoted in Smith, E. 2008, p. 33). This document discusses the evolution of my own practice alongside the socio-cultural shift that has taken shape over the last five years because of the rise of internet users and functionality, and how I have adopted a working ethos of making work that can tell a *socially useful* story with the contents of the web.

10 *New New Human Beings* came of age post-1989 China. Which aligns with the same time stamp as Tapscott's *Net Generation*, born between 1977-1997. Most of the artists mentioned in this document are born within this range, including myself.

11 See Tapscott's chapter: *The Net Generation Comes of Age*. In *Grown Up Digital*. 2009.

Setting the loop in motion/



fig. 1 Megan Smith, 'Beat' (2005) installation shot, *Testbed 3*, Leeds Met Gallery.

Humans form a biological system that functions, in some respects, similarly to networked computers. The brain functions through a series of synapses relaying information to the body, the body responds through movement and sensation. With this in mind I started my practice loop with 'Beat' (2005; fig. 1), an intimate body-based piece that combined CCTV live feeds with pre-recorded video of an ultrasound of a heart. The installation was shown on two separate occasions, during *Testbed 3* at Leeds Met Gallery 2005 and at *SightSonic* 2005. The piece was relatively interactive but my creative goals to have the piece directly linked with the human body, and subsequently generate a measured experience, failed due to my inexperience with programming and using sensory electronics¹². The second challenge with the piece was the use of CCTV as my tool. I respect the use of this tool in art-making but I did not want to align my practice with CCTV art or make work, at that time, which was aligned to surveillance culture. Though it

12 I later came across *Cardiomorphologies* (2004), by the artist George Poonkhin Khut, at the Arnolfini 'Inbetween Time Festival of Live Art and Intrigue' (2006). This piece was conceptually similar to 'Beat' but far more sophisticated technically. Details here: <http://georgekhut.com/artworks/cardiomorphologies/cardiomorphologies-v1>

13 I have since used CCTV once in an installation, 'Edwige_ and Megan_at_Barkston_House_Leeds' (2009) where I was finally able to resolve one of the above issues by showcasing it alongside a live webcam feed which was intended as social comment on the death of analogue CCTV and the unavoidable fact of current IP tracking.

was the available technology that I could understand to relay a visual live feed, I had hesitations on acquiring it for future use as, even at that time, I classed it as a dated tool and I wanted to move beyond the analogue system¹³.

'Child' produced between 2006-2007 (fig. 2), was by far the most self-referential story I could have told during this research project as I worked on a digital gestational process that paralleled my own biological experience of becoming a mother for the first time. The goal was to explore technology-mediated experience and to bond with technology. The making of the CGI animation, and subsequent website documenting the process, allowed me to



fig. 2 Megan Smith, 'Child' (2007) digital still from video.

experience and reflect on the intimate situation of human engagement with computer generated imagery. While struggling through the technical aspects of the software¹⁴ to create the exact size of forearm, adjust the eyebrow depth, and to manipulate the x, y, and z-scales in the abdomen to manifest breathing, I was also biologically engineering the same within my own womb. I felt as though there was no break in human creation; I was making, reflecting and programming, with all aspects of my body and mind.

¹⁴ I used Poser 4.0; a software package for 3D figure design & animation.

The animation was exhibited and used on all promotional materials at NeMe & IMCA's *The Mirror Stage* (2008) at the Lanitis Foundation in Cyprus and at *Odoor Current - New British Art* (2007) at the Genghis Gallery, in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Yiannis Colakides, curator of *The Mirror Stage*, discusses the situation of video art in his introductory essay in the exhibition catalogue:

Video is a recording medium, which captures the 'real' or other machine generated imagery. The recorded reality is manipulated through editing, compositing and/or other means, which strip the presented pieces from their context, their initially recorded 'reality'. As such, . . . , it can be said that video constructs reality by manipulating its appearance and thus, . . . , generates what may be perceived as reflective works where the image substitutes the documentation of reality and rises superior to it helping it to assume a symbolic presence comparable to that achieved by the other art disciplines (2008, p. 10).

I agree with Colakides argument, that video work is competitively placed within current art practice. This is now evidenced by major artists recognized for their contribution to video practice such as Tacita Dean, Bill Viola, and Darren Almond. However, what I was trying to achieve with both 'Beat' and 'Child', and where I differ from Colakides view, was that I was interested in

bringing renewed importance to the process of being involved with the technology in order to tell the story of creative development and to engage an audience with the tools and process. This action itself can help "...it to assume a symbolic presence," (Colakides, p. 10) by making the work more democratic and situating the practice of artists who work with Do-it-Yourself (DiY) approaches. Though very much an analogue approach, I drew inspiration from the installation/performance piece 'The Way Things Go' (1987) by artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss, an example of filmed work that reveals the creative process, without major editing, and successfully engages an audience demographic that lies far beyond the art world aficionados because of its use of common or household content.

In addition to my desire to produce art in a democratic manner to cater to a large demographic, I also decided that it was necessary to produce pieces that connected with the body in the pursuit of work that could bolster emotional and physical reactions from my audience. The pieces, 'Beat' and 'Child', unnerved my viewers into conjuring comments on biometric scanning and surveillance culture tied with technologies such as facial recognition¹⁵. 'Beat's interactive nature made the audience aware of their heart rate and generally caused a physical uneasiness. The reaction to 'Child' became a social experiment where I discovered that parents, especially those with reservations about technology, became agitated and at times aggressively opposed to the piece of work. However, when I exposed the 'Making of Child' in a web-based storyboard that documented the process of making it, combined with my memoir of being pregnant the piece suddenly became a relaxing and engaging story¹⁶. At this stage of my research, and within most of the subsequent projects accomplished during the PhD, I aimed to reveal the structural process, demonstrating that excessive edits can decentralize a piece from its initial intention, a situation that occurred to some extent with 'Child', and that the tools used can act to reveal honesty in storytelling which can empower the audience to engage and therefore make a piece more democratic.

15 Part of the research leading up to Child did involve some facial recognition research. I also analysed my facial features using SI FaceGen Modeler to age myself to 45 and to 60 years of age.

16 The website can be accessed here:
<http://www.megansmith.ca/child/child.html>

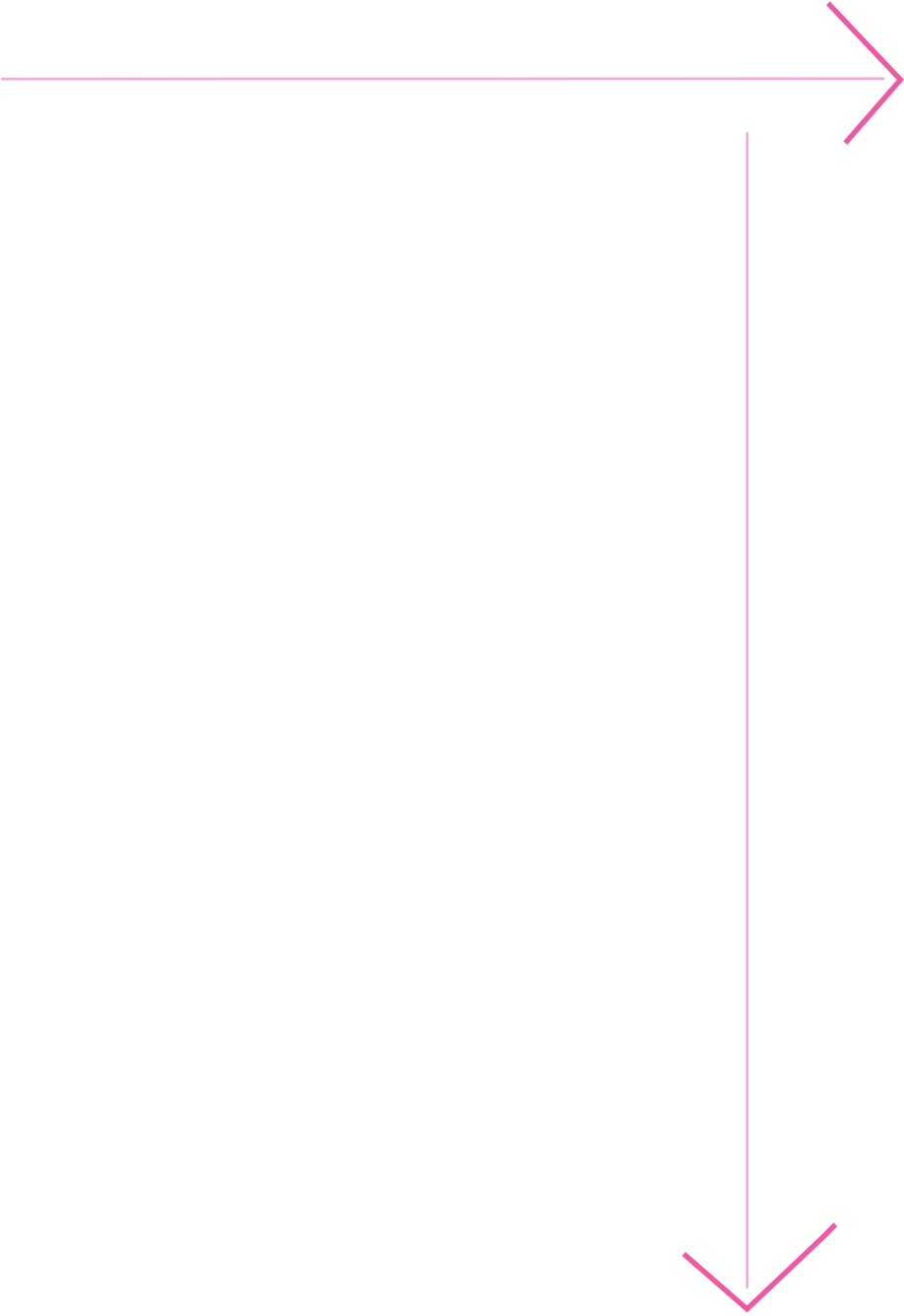
Hacking the intimate/ a bridge to a culturescape/

'Child' was the piece that bridged the analogue to digital process and the web-based story 'Making of Child' became the channel that allowed the research to extend into discovering and playing with online narrative. It initiated a deeper look at the effects of receiving data from a screen. It was also the beginning of a new work ethic for me, which put emphasis on subtle hacking without intending to break the computer or the network but instead used these tools to upturn the pattern of giving and receiving data. The following excerpt, taken from McKenzie Wark's *A Hacker Manifesto* (2004, 004), describes the work ethic that I learned throughout the course of the research project.

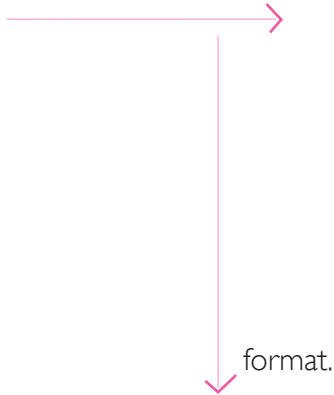
"Hackers create the possibility of new things entering the world. Not always great things, or even good things, but new things. In art, in science, in philosophy and culture, in any production of knowledge where data can be gathered, where information can be extracted from it, and where in that information new possibilities for the world produced, there are hackers hacking the new out of the old. While we create these new worlds, we do not possess them. That which we create is mortgaged to others, and to the interests of others, to states and corporations who monopolize the means for making worlds we alone discover. We do not own what we produce – it owns us."

Furthermore, it is researcher Eric Raymond who discusses how the hacking of something actually spawns from an attitude. He writes that "...hackers solve problems and build things, and they believe in freedom and voluntary mutual help" (2001); all values that I aim for when developing my practice. The result of this attitude is that a hack may "...be characterized as an appropriate application of ingenuity. Whether the result is a quick-and-dirty patchwork job or a carefully crafted work of art, you have to admire the cleverness that went into it" (2003).

The 'Making of Child' website is read in a landscape format, a non-standard approach to revealing information online, and the construction of it can be considered to be a moderate hacking initiative. Perhaps one of the great inventions of all time, the printing press, actually hacked and then inhibited a method of information access by pigeonholing text into a prescriptive format, the page. In the West, this is read from left to right, and from top to bottom.



The artist Scott McCloud has written about the *Infinite Canvas Idea*, in which he suggests should be "...treating the screen as a window rather than a page"(2009). This is the approach I adopted to relay the web-based 'Child' narrative,. It allowed for the distribution of time across the piece. This kind of making outside the box is still somewhat complex as the common entry-level tools, that most people use to express themselves on the web, do not permit a user to break away from the traditional



The hacking ethic of manipulating a system to make it do something it was never meant to do is essential to pushing technologies and creativity forward because it can force people to see patterns and facts that exist but are not appropriately narrated. Observing via the screen also *extends the field of vision* by enabling a new method of reading layers of information, which affect learning. Curator Nicolas Bourriaud believes that "...today the screen has become the main frame through which we see the world"(2010). He argues that it is not only the format that is important but the layers of information displayed such as pop-up windows and extensions with hypertext that are directly influencing the ways that artists are making and producing work. Furthermore, Professor Lev Manovic of the University of California, San Diego, discusses how the layering of information on a screen affects history. He refers to the use of film and video process, and explains the access and acquisition of information as an experiencing of a network; as acts of co-existence and addition:

Time becomes spatialized, distributed over the surface of the screen. In spatial montage, nothing is potentially forgotten, nothing is erased. Just as we use computers to accumulate endless texts, messages, notes and data, and just as a person, going through life, accumulates more and more memories, with the past slowly acquiring more weight than the future, spatial montage can accumulate events and images as it progresses through its narrative... here computer screens function as a record of memory (2002, p. 272).

Visualization artists have played a key role in helping society realize the extent of data and connection that exists online. They have helped to shift the attitude of web use from a passive user system to a more empowered public who are enthused and inspired to use the internet

for its potential. A significant piece in aiding this social shift is 'Mapping the Internet', also known as, 'Day in the life of the Internet' (2003; fig.3), an optical chronicling of a day in the life of the internet by Barrett Lyon of The Opte Project. It gained popularity because it visually articulated the convoluted connections that existed online. It was a revolutionary image for two reasons, first, because it demonstrated the complexity and undecipherable aspect of information flow and social connection established through the internet, a fact that internet users were aware of but found difficult to imagine to its full extent; and second, because like Breners-Lee, Lyon freely released his code. I am not aware of other applications of his code, however the gesture is representative of an attitude and an ethic of a pronounced cultural shift towards a more connected society.

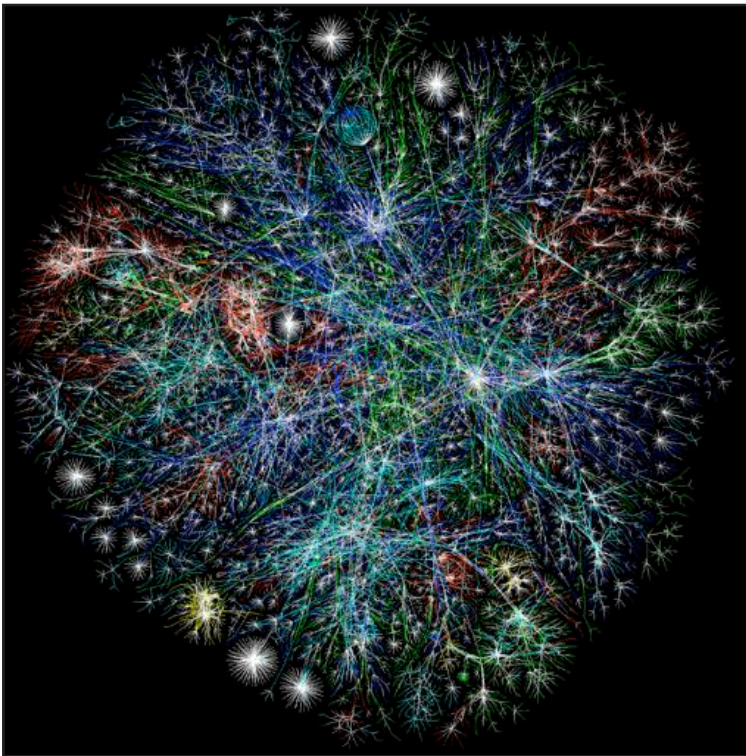


fig. 3 Barrett Lyon [The Opte Project] 'Mapping the Internet' a.k.a. 'Day in the life of the Internet' (2003) digital image. Creative Commons Image.

Lyon's visualization can be symbolically compared to the observation that humans form a biological system that functions, in some respects, similarly to networked computers by drawing attention to the complex structural narrative that make up both the body and the internet. His piece encouraged me to attempt to engage with communication and, in particular, look at new ways I could develop community with a network approach, and to make work that could embody a locality. In order to push Scott

McCloud's *Infinite Canvas* theory further, I started to think about creative acts through which to playfully map the internet in order to relay a story or a culturescape. The screen was just one end of the spectrum of information relay and I decided it was important to push the audience to read data in new ways and across greater distances. In order to do so, I needed to understand Internet Protocol addresses (IP) and the capabilities of Application Programming Interface (API) to relay new narratives using Global Positioning Systems (GPS). By the end of the PhD I was able to combine all three of these tools to hack social media itself and re-programme it to specifically tell community-based narratives.

Technically, a personal journey through the internet is registered with Internet Protocol addresses, which attach a computer or an internal network to the internet. These paths are what Lyon used to make a 'Day in the life of the Internet'. The data, though not visually mapped, is held forever on web servers. A personal computer user will know where they have been online but reverse-tracking of visitors to one's spaces is also possible with details such as the general geographical area of the visitors available through the system administration of blog and web packages. Programmes, such as Google Analytics, allow users to see data in great detail. It can reveal that people from all over the world are watching a specific person's content beyond the level of interaction that is experienced through deliberate or orchestrated communication exchange. This informed representation of one's identity sitting alongside active engagement of adding to the social web can alter a person's sense of space and help them understand of their public¹⁷ audience (danah boyd, 2008). Dr. Stephen Boyd Davis, Reader in Interactivity at Middlesex University, discusses how the networked individual can customize both spatial and temporal experiences: "... the world is different depending on who you are and where you start from. With the advent of portable interactive technologies..., what matters to me now at this moment in my current location and circumstances can become central. This introduces a form of subjectivity we could call the egocentric subjective, in which my location and other aspects of myself impact decisively on the representation" (2009, p.47).

17 danah boyd's PhD thesis, 'Taken Out of Context', discusses the impact of teens experiencing and building identity in the age of new social media. Her research looked at how globally connected spaces of interaction, such as MySpace and Facebook, can shift generational and social perspective. <http://www.danah.org/papers/TakenOutOfContext.pdf>

In 2000, Bill Clinton, then President of the United States of America, made GPS data more accessible to an international public by loosening the grip on satellite data; an action that gave rise to a surge of online maps. Google harnessed the market by releasing Google Maps and Google Earth, which provided an innovative three dimensional perspective on the world. Its maps were in such detail that it became an attractive social application used to locate one's home, to give and receive directions and to explore for amusement. Perhaps one of Google's greatest initiatives in constructive marketing was their subsequent decision to release some control to the public. In 2005, following other mega companies like Amazon and Ebay, they released their Application Programming Interface (API) to an already infatuated public. This enabled the established community to interact with the software and become creative with it. This was a new phase in online development, and is when sharing content became and increasingly popular and 'hip' activity. The writer Tim O'Reilly, coined this new social space Web 2.0. Lev Manovich reflects upon and quotes O'Reilly's stance saying that "...one important feature of Web 2.0 applications is design for hackability and remixability [and that these companies purposely made] available their programming interfaces and some of their data to encourage others to create their own applications" (2008, p. 74).

This release of control to the public and the ability to play with the maps to reveal stories combined with accessible tools like camera phones and inexpensive Global Positioning System (GPS) devices entering the market, impacted on my creation of work online, especially as the API release facilitated the development of 'The DoGoSee Project' (DoGoSee). This ultimately enabled the creation of a more networked work and ultimately a *socially useful* approach to practice which simultaneously developed my aim to generate, locate, and situate the self within the technology mediated physical and emotional environment of the *digital domain*.

I worked collaboratively with Ben Halsall¹⁸ to develop 'The DoGoSee Project'; a storytelling initiative that was outward-looking from the body. Instead of concentrating on attachment, empathy and emotion, the focus of the project relied on community and risk to develop networked storytelling. Using a blog to interact with a public 'DoGoSee' initiated four performances between 2005 and 2007. The first was in Berlin, a city neither Halsall nor myself had been to before, a fact that prompted the initial inquest into how to discover a place when no personal physical or emotional connections to the location yet exist. The entire 5 days spent in Berlin were left in the hands of a blogging community that determined our actions within the city - from where we ate, to what hotel we chose to stay in, to what we did, who we met, and what we found. In return for their advice and instructions we used mobile phones to document each discovery and we posted the findings onto the blog in real-time. The project resulted in a live stream on the web generated through a partnership between the public and us. Google's release of its API enabled the embedding of the data onto a map that chronicled the narrative journeys.

¹⁸ see biographical details on collaborator Ben Halsall at the end of the document.

¹⁹ Sites such as Flickr will currently embed an image in its exact location on a map using GPS technology housed within the camera.

²⁰ Moblog: used to describe a blog which can be updated via a mobile phone using SMS or MMS.
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0985850#m_en_gb0985850 Accessed: 30/05/10.

'The DoGoSee Project's' realization was directly tied to increased access to web based mapping, geo-location, and the increased prevalence of affordable yet sophisticated camera phones in the UK. It also relied heavily on hacking in order to make all the technologies perform together. In 2010, this can now be done with relative ease¹⁹. Labeling and geo-locating images, videos and text, is now almost an invisible and even automatic activity, called tagging.

The artist Alfie Dennen, has been promoting the area of hacking and narrative practice by encouraging people to document their lives through the publishing of images to the web from their mobile phones since 2003. He termed the action 'mobile blogging' and shortened it to moblog when naming his purpose-built website, a word that entered into the Oxford English dictionary in 2005²⁰. In the same year an image of a person trapped in a London Underground station, during the London bombings, showcased on Moblog in real-time prompting a surge of

traffic to his site and news coverage from major corporations (fig.4). While mobiles have been commonly used as essential 2-way communication tools since the 1990's, their sophistication and accessibility began at this point to make them more powerful distributors of information to a wider audience.



fig. 4 'Adam Stacey, London, 07/07/05' (2005), on a tube train between King's Cross and Russell Square, London, July 7.
Creative Commons image.

Around 2005, the action of documenting one's location and then instantly sharing the experience online started to become a hobby, fad, or common and popular activity and one that has also helped break news and release suppressed information. The artist and writer Christian Nold, who has developed large community mapping projects, references the shift from a niche activity to an activity of critical mass in *Emotional Cartography* (2009). He notes that: "Mapping Emotions had become a meme that was not mine anymore, but one that I had merely borrowed temporarily

from the global unconscious” (p. 4). The association with the concept of borrowing an idea is important as it demonstrates how individuals imitate and engage with good ideas, in a sense hacking them to suit their purpose or to tell a story²¹, and in this case, leading to the collective effort to share over 5 billion images on the social web (Sheppard, 2010)²², to create a new mapped space of human experiences or a culturescape.

Mobile technologies are also being used in focused creative ways such as ‘The Big Art Mob’ developed by Channel 4 and Moblog. Since its inception in 2005 more than 3000 images, from graffiti to bronze sculptures, have been added to mapped locations across Britain, (personal communication, May 2010)²³ an action that allows for local narratives to be strung together through remote and immediate participation.

21 This process is not dissimilar to early art education where children and beginner artists are sometimes encouraged to mimic works of masters in order to learn basic methods for producing, which then leads to independent practice.

22 On 19 September 2010 the five billionth photo was uploaded to Flickr, which is only one of several online spaces where people upload and discuss their photographs. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/yeoaron/5000000000/>

23 Statistic sourced directly from Alfie Dennen who has been managing the site since its inception:

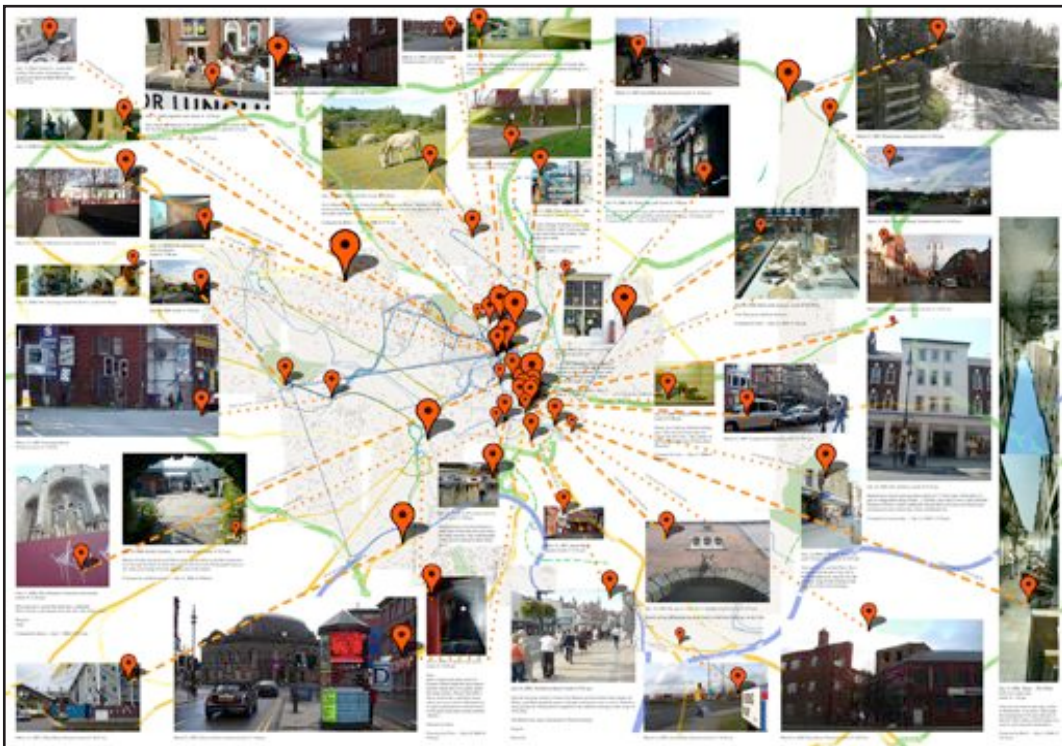
@alfie how do I figure out the total no. of images on <http://www.bigartmob.com> map? And what was the date of the first entry?
5:36 PM May 10th via TweetDeck

@cawsand good question, ill come back to you the morrow if that's cool?
5:44 PM May 10th via TweetCaster in reply to cawsand

@Alfie great. Thanks.
5:46 PM May 10th via TweetDeck in reply to Alfie

@cawsand Morning. First post April 7 2007, 3375 posts (up to 10 pieces of media per post), of which approx 75% have been mapped.
8:48 AM May 11th via Brizzly in reply to cawsand

fig. 5 The DoGoSee.com Project, 'Leeds Map' (2007) digital print. 2378mm x 1682 mm.



'The DoGoSee Project' developed during a period of increased access to technology and, by the end of 2007, events had taken place in Highbury, London and twice within Leeds. In 2007, Leeds Met Gallery, and the *Situation Leeds Festival* commissioned the project, to encourage the local community to document the city with mobile phone photography. The visual results of the initiative were delivered in projected live feeds to the gallery walls relaying a networked story. Among other objects in the exhibition, three A0 maps (fig.5) provided a sample of the structure of the journeys experienced.

The project's intentions were to step towards defining space with accessible handheld technology, geography, community and place. The result was the development of an online networked performance with visitors to the online space participating, contributing and determining the performance, and the making of a non-linear story that was as much about our discovery of place as the making of a new narrative space online.

In 2005, Aaron Koblin, Technology Lead of Google's Creative Lab, made another important piece of visualization. 'Flight Patterns' (fig.6) used the data from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration to plot the air traffic over the country during one day, into a pattern. Though this work does not document activity on the internet, Koblin built on artistic practices that uses the internet to source information and to use emergent patterns to relay information. This work took the The Opte Project's visual discovery one step forward by allowing the public to identify the narration of the networked situation within a recognized geography. It is the artist's decision to remove the underlying political map of the U.S.A. in this piece that made the work so important as the data itself clearly mapped major landmarks and the country's geography. By making the flight patterns available in this method, the piece uses new tools to aid in visually deciphering dense networked data for a public who could not have accessed it before; allowing the audience to place themselves within the emergent activity. It is a piece of art which then becomes a tool to help push the argument for climate change and policy; it can reveal the extent of air security that the U.S.A. must manage, and it throws up questions about the extent of industry travel needed by any one company on a given day.

fig. 6 Aaron Koblin,
'Flight Patterns' (2005)
digital image.
Image courtesy the artist.



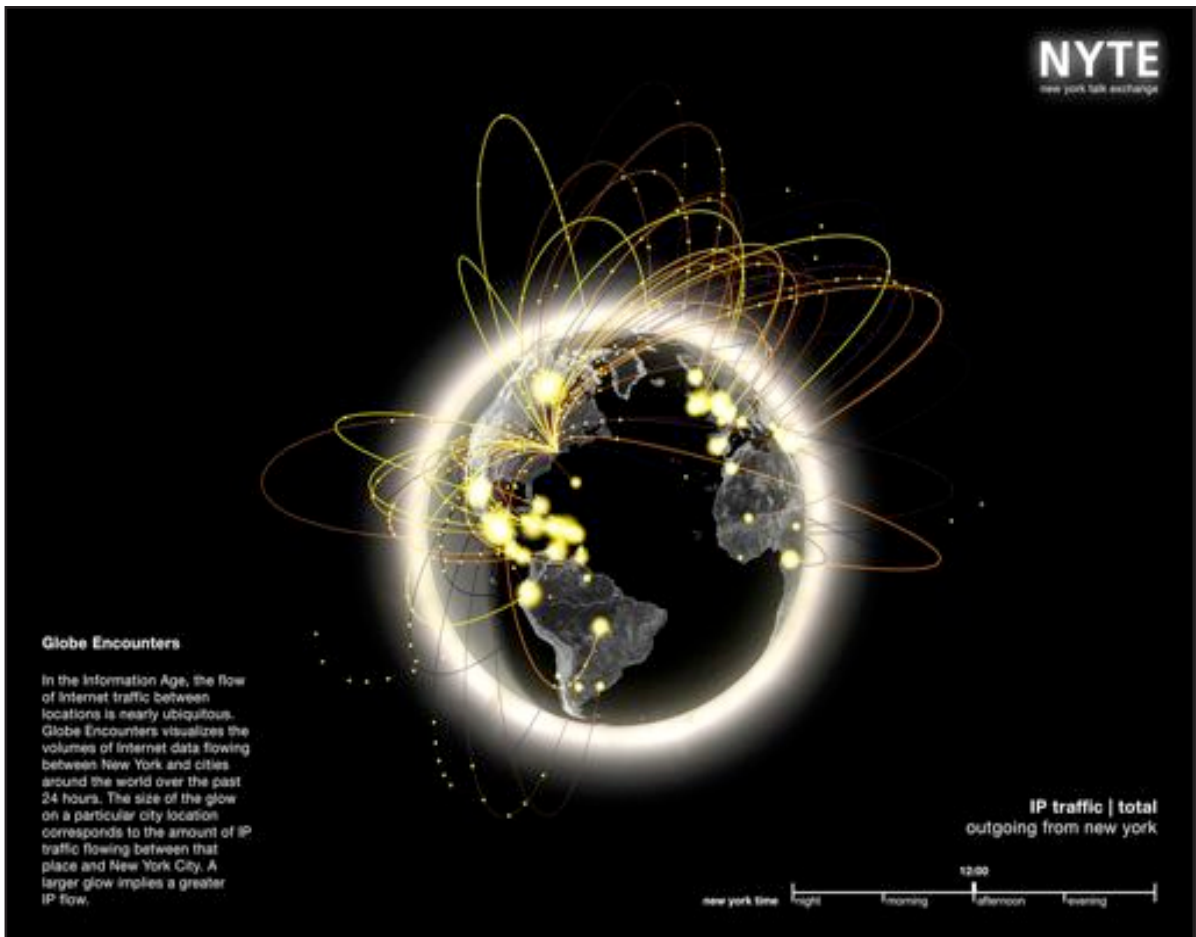


fig. 7 Aaron Koblin, 'New York Talk Exchange' (2008) digital image. Image courtesy the artist.

In 2008 Koblin went on to develop '[New York Talk Exchange](#)' (fig.7) in collaboration with Senseable City Lab at MIT for the MoMA. In this work IP was used to map the amount of data exchange in one day between the people of New York City and the rest of the world. The glowing areas on the image articulate centres of contact that received greater levels of data. In this piece, a specific geographical area is used to tell an even more intimate narrative, one that people can ground themselves with.

These story-telling pieces demonstrate the ways that artists are mediating information and contributing to and making sense of emergent data and social space. By 2008, when the exhibition *Design and the Elastic Mind* opened at the MoMA in New York, there was an infusion of map-making and visualization applications available online and to purchase. Not all of these tools were successful for reasons discussed in writer and critic Peter Hall's chapter, *Critical Visualization*, in the book that accompanied the exhibition. Hall states that, "...cascading veils of information, as famously depicted in the binary code of the 1999 film *The Matrix*, have become a definitive signifier of our age" (2008, p. 122). This statement pinpoints his readers towards a specific zone on

a timeline, the same one I used at the beginning of this text to introduce the concept of the *New New Human Beings* and place myself within the *computer age*. The visual shift produced social excitement and progressively took shape within interface design on the screen. The manner of reading masses of information in overlapping layers was as much driven by web browsers as it was for aesthetics and emotional influence by the gaming and creative software industries. It has prompted a new non-linear pattern of reading where a computer user interprets multiple layers of information on one screen while sifting through information in a way that best supports their purpose as artists, designers, or analysts. I refer to this method of ingesting and scanning information as an act of *extending the field of vision*²⁴.

Furthermore, in practice artists are forming Narrative structures, aided by visualization tools, from the abundance of layered data published to the internet. This act is helping to decipher and understand the situation of the information age²⁵, and the visual information, in either its new legible or aesthetic form, is contributing to anthropological research. The artist Jer Thorp shared this observation, at the *Thinking Digital* (2010) conference, when he sates that: “Our relationship with information has changed... and it is changing”²⁶. He then advocates that scientists, designers and artists need to form partnerships when dealing with the abundance of information produced by the web in order to ask and respond to the important and social challenges that are stemming from this new global database of knowledge. In reference to the art project ‘*We Feel Fine*’, by Jonathan Harris and Sep Kamvar, Thorp declared the work now represents: “5 years of gathered concise data about the feelings of the people on the internet, and,..., [it] has become a very useful repository of data for scientists.” Hence, not only is it a valuable research pool that chronicles human emotion as the social web has unfolded, it is also an important piece of art that tells social stories. Perhaps, screen media, visualizations and participative projects realized through emergent models are simply the re-awakening of a looking-pattern/method

24 Over time scientific experiments have proven that the brain can change the way it processes and receives information. One significant study in this area of cognitive research was done by C. Shawn Green and Daphne Bevelier at the University of Rochester, U.S., in 2003, where they proved that playing games like Counter Strike and World of War Craft can “expand your field of vision and speed up your processing of visual information” (Tapscott, 2009, p.98).

25 *Narrative Structures* are the title conceptual artist Mark Lombardi (1951-2000) used for his method of practice, which produced node-based drawings that mapped social and political relationships across the world. Among his most famous work is ‘BNL, Reagan, Bush, & Thatcher and the Arming of Iraq’, ca. 1983-91 which was requisitioned by the FBI from the Whitney Museum of American Art after 11 September 2001 as a resourceful piece of research. Most importantly the drawings became visual maps that allowed viewers to understand syndicated public information that was previously only obtainable in the form of text, most often published in newspapers and journals. The maps unravelled complex social situations while triggering a new method of reading data (Hobbs, 2003). *Ben Fry suggests* that “Lombardi’s drawings walk the fine line of the informative and the aesthetic, but even more important, his projects give us an eye into the possibility, and the depth to which we can understand complicated information” (2009). which in turn articulates the importance that this form of visual information relay and analysis will have as more and more data is sourced through participative and collective efforts.

26 Thorp speaking at Thinking Digital (2010) <http://videos.thinkingdigital.co.uk/2010/05/jer-thorp-wired-uk/> Accessed 29/09/10.

that had been forcefully programmed to be dormant through the traditional practice of reading pages of text. Maybe, via the social web interface and through artists reflecting on new available data retrieved through the emergent systems, there is a new ability to communicate and to expand human potential. Possibly, humans are actually now

retrieving a skill and a method of perception that is in fact more true to the natural structure of a social narrative; if visualized – a layered and networked system. I also wonder, as this new method of communication is adopted, if it is possible that learning and social participation are becoming a fuller emotional experience because of the democratic interactivity that the web allows? I can see my practice expanding, post-PhD, to explore in more depth change in behavioural patterns adopted through the process of learning by visualization and social engagement. I am most interested in how this learning method is affecting cosmopolitanism or globalness perspectives within localized environments. I will discuss this further in the **Conclusion**.

27 It would be naïve to assume that the internet and handheld technologies have reached to every corner of the world, or that they need to. However, they are available at varied and increasing degrees of teleconnectedness worldwide, even within the most remote or poor locations. Krotoski discusses increased access to mobile technologies in Africa in her *Virtual Revolution* series (Episode 1) and Tapscott also references shift of access from solely western society to a more universal public (Chap. 10). Research on internet culture and consumption rates in Trinidad by Daniel Miller and Don Slater relays a model of acquisition that is gradually being mirrored around the globe (2000).

Occurring in parallel to the evolution of the research project was the global adoption of the social web and digital technologies²⁷ and the popular associated activity, to make, test, and to hack its systems, hardware and ideas. Simultaneously, there was rebellion within Fine Art & Design. Artists using these methods of practice were considered to be simply producing 'pretty visualizations' and poor grade images. Along with art critics some schools of thought were, and in some instances still are, clutching at the dated philosophy that: "In the popular imagination, the internet was a discrete place detached from the 'meat-space' of the physical world; hanging in empty space" (Hall, p.122). I agree with Daniela Benelli, Councilor for Culture, Cultures, and Integration of Province of Milan, that: "...artists act as sensitive seismographs of the present; in their work, individual habits and collective practices, the most profound characteristics and feelings of contemporary life, are made manifest with exceptional immediacy" (2006, p. 7). The visualization artist and co-founder of the open-source programming language 'Processing', Ben Fry, says: "we must maintain a humanist view of data, relying on our own faculties to tell a story, ..., and to improve the discourse surrounding data, we must disavow our fascination with the intricate and complicated by learning how to throw things out" (2009). It is the artists' role then to be selective with the data, so that they may articulate a story that forms a piece of work within the complex emergent network. While The Opte Project provided an intimate glimpse of the confusion housed within a day or even a minute of experience online, it is an image like the one taken by Adam Stacey in the London Underground that cuts to the chase and uses the appropriate media to narrate and mediate a situation. Early adopters of these new methods of working, who have taken the revolutionary ethic of hacking to improve communication flow by drawing narrative structures and creating culturescapes using new social media tools, GPS, and data are the *New New*.

Cultural Probe/ a method for tagging space/

Lyon and Koblin's visualizations became pieces of art because the authors had the imagination to articulate a situation that then transformed networked data into a spacial artefact, giving the audience the ability to understand the information within a new context; in its place. The objects evoked emotion, a reaction that allowed the graphic image to become a story. The creative development loop traced during this research produced practice-based works that analysed human emotional connection mediated through technology in 'Beat', both 'Child' pieces and then it stepped into the system with 'DoGoSee' to create a narrative structure online. The next action was to persist with the hacking ethic of combining media and story to take a new look at the manner in which information is provided and experienced in the mainstream culturescape while concentrating on concepts of place and drawing on my personal transnational experiences.

'My Portable Home'²⁸ (2008; fig.8) used a tent, a rogue internet signal, a laptop, a cell phone, and audio-visual equipment. The tent was a symbolic shelter, or a temporary home within the city. It represented a way to strip back the comforts of a home and focus on the activity of communication, an act that can make one feel 'at home' regardless of surroundings. The piece documents a conversation between my mother and myself, with me based in the city of Leeds in England, and my mother in the countryside in Canada, and thereby references two geographically distant spaces that are networked through the internet and satellite cellular activity, and isolated by various GPS data points. Furthermore, the piece demonstrates the current ability for cultural groups to sustain contact with loved ones, a *sense of home* while being apart; a situation aided by the increased public access to low-cost web-based communication systems. The piece is also part of a collaborative project orchestrated by curator Lars Vilhelmsen. To date, over 40 artists have worked with the tent and 'travelers' box', on which I rested the computer, spanning a geography that crosses the U.S.A., England, Germany, France and Denmark.

28 'My Portable Home' was developed, in part, for curator Lars Vilhelmsen's *The Travellers Box* project. In 2008 it was shown at *Wooloo-New Life Berlin* and at ICA Overgaden, Copenhagen.

My contribution to the project, 'My Portable Home', was designed to creatively articulate the traced path of IP addresses from a personal perspective. It worked by contrasting the opposing spaces of individual and shared space, both important aspects of the emergent network upon which the work is built and reliant upon. Both the demarcation of the GPS and the time stamping of the conversation allow the work to become placed within a digitally-situated and structured relationship. Through the making of 'My Portable Home' I understood that the individual as an act

of being solitary or unconnected with others is impossible. However, the alternative is the case, where the individual refers to a distinguishable entity within a network. When this individual or entity is operating with social media and the web, over time they develop a physical trace in the form of a journey that can be narrated.



fig. 8 Megan Smith, 'My Portable Home' (2008) digital still from video.

'My Portable Home' did not focus on attaching itself or immersing itself within the network it deconstructed contextually, instead it was positioned upon its structure, as a broadcast web-based video documentary of the performance. It simultaneously was staking claim for the transnational experience of home, which inhabits a global world and makes oneself at home through dialogue. Meskimmon declares that artists working in this area of practice "...participate in a critical dialogue between ethical responsibility, locational identity and what [she] would call cosmopolitan imagination" (2010, p.5). In reference to the artist Yin Xiuzhen's work, 'Portable Cities' (2004), Meskimmon further argues that the political territories that currently exist need to be re-imagined in order to understand the new globalness and that it is essential to "...engage productively with the geographies of transnational exchange, ... through a creative map of portable cities" (p. 14). Engagement of kind will have the affect of establishing a more cosmopolitan society that understands the fluid foundation that is now in place, which has come about by both a digitally

networked space and emplacement²⁹. To propel this area of research further, and to document my behaviour, as I more thoroughly engrossed my practice into the web, I decided to adopt an ethnographic method using a mobile device as a cultural probe³⁰. While ethnographic studies often involve watching people, I determined an egocentric approach, as earlier described by Christian Nold, was more interesting and it would allow me to creatively play with the data without having to seek publishing permissions.

29 While *displacement* is the term usually used within this context to describe a transnational person's experience of movement, I agree with the critic Melanie Swalwell and theorist Meskimmon that it is a term that implies a lack of choice. Rather, the term *emplacement*, used here to refer to a self-directed behavioural action, is the "...making of place within rapidly moving and fluid network of exchange" (Meskimmon, 2010, p. 16).

30 I was interested in research on the integration of the physical and the digital environment by the Equator Group at Royal College of Art- Interactive Design Research Studio, but I decided that their Cultural Probe kit, that included paper, pencil, camera and a listening glass, could be improved and made more practical and resourceful by using an all-in-one connected device. See: (Dix, 2004) <http://www.hcibook.com/e3/casestudy/cultural-probes/>

On 19 July 2008 I wrote on my [research blog](#):

Cultural Probe

"The new iPhone has the capacity to encourage clustered activity within the *digital domain*. This will be reflected in the boost of new users on social networking sites, mobs descending on new applications, and in collaborative and collective ways that are still not imagined. By working with Google, incorporating GPS, and using the touch screen, among other features new methods for learning, locating, experiencing and accessing information will develop. In the rapidly expanding services available to internet users the use of Google on the iPhone enables users to tap into an established network.

I will be using this device over the next 18 months as a cultural probe, to gather information about people and their activities in relation to the definition of 'one's space'. I will monitor and track my movements using GPS and I will maintain a blog that describes my location, my emotions, and my discoveries. It will be a self-report of the experience of embodying the domain that is limitless, but encountered intimately in my hand."



fig. 9 Megan Smith, 'Cultural Probe' (2008) digital collage made for the launch of the experiment.

Between July 2008 and June 2010 I used an iPhone as my primary tool for the project called 'Cultural Probe'. It was a lifelogging experiment that provided a thorough overview of the intermingled aspects of my practice, research and life. It became an important referencing system for the methodology of my practice, which by this point was using social media to both make new work and to archive my research and art practice. I drew on multiple applications on the phone to source data on my locations and to contribute chatter and images to the web. I then allowed web applications to mash my contributions into various places at once such as Flickr³¹, Facebook³² and Twitter³³, which I also fed into my blog both automatically and manually. The artist book of the same title as the project, provides a visual reference to the activities I undertook and is a creative transcript that archives a large portion of my contribution to social exchanges online. I also see it as evidence of what Bourriaud calls, 'relational aesthetics', which he states is "...to consider interhuman exchange an aesthetic object in and of itself" (2002, p. 33). While it was not necessary to gather and form this work into a bound book in order for it to meet Bourriaud's definition, I decided it a necessary step to visually articulate the socially-layered method of the research methodology (fig. 10). The layout of the content refers symbolically to methods of reading on the screen where information is received in a layered manner. The cover is a record of my GPS tracks across the world since 8 August 2008. While the collection of micro posts provides a sample of my activity, more thorough extensions of the posts can be found by following the hyperlinks to my [blog](#), [Flickr](#), and [Delicious](#) accounts, and various other websites cited within the book.

31 First Post to flickr
21/02/06
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/meganleighsmith/archives/date-posted/2006/02/21/>

32 I joined Facebook during the summer of 2007 but have been unable to dig out of email backups or Facebook history the exact date as both systems will not allow me to search back to that year. If I decided to pay for my email service I believe I could retrieve this data.

33 I joined Twitter 8 July 2008.



fig. 10 Megan Smith, 'Cultural Probe: 8 July 2008 - 8 July 2010' (2010) sample from early book design.

Using the data accumulated with 'Cultural Probe' I have also made the work '647 days 18 hours'³⁴ (fig. 11) which is an interactive map and still images that reference my GPS trail for the duration of the title. The recording of my movement in this piece became a performed journey that carved out a networked narrative from digital space. Collecting data on myself, and then subsequently mashing it across platforms, allowed me to hack my identity into online space. At the risk of appearing like a social media junkie³⁵ or simply as an overuser of social media, I began to introduce my creative practice into these spaces and to discuss online how these platforms were

³⁴ The interactive map and images can be found on my 7 June 2010 blog post <http://megansmith.ca/blog/?p=662>

³⁵ Though I used Twitter to primarily discuss research with peers I transmitted the feed into my Facebook page in an effort to become transparent with the 'friends' I was connected to in that space. As I contributed to Twitter regularly the feed on Facebook was simultaneously updated. Occasionally, I lost friends as they perhaps decided that I was spamming my facebook wall with research jargon that was of little interest to them or conflicted with how they wished to remember me. My argument to maintain this way of relaying data was based on being honest about my identity. When Facebook developed, it was a place to rekindle nostalgic ties with people of the past. As I have lived in many places I have a large network, and arguably have had different forms of identity determined by my age, role, location and factors such as being on holiday or at work. I was interested in challenging the perceived memory that people from my past had of me so they could understand a more rounded me who had since experienced many things and was currently involved in a practice-based research degree. Over the last four years the nostalgia tension and inhibition online has eased off worldwide and younger generations, who are still forming their identities, are feeding the social media platforms with extensive amounts of data and reflection. John Tapscott argues that this sharing of information so freely may have a negative knock on effects in the future. I agree that security wise there are risks. However, I also believe that users of social media have breached a new form of socializing and communicating, and perhaps the result of this openness will become the building blocks towards a more inclusive and democratic society because these tools are facilitating networked freedom of expression and discussion.

becoming my tools. This process simultaneously built narratives about my work, archived my creative thought process and strengthened my identity as an artist. The artist Andy Warhol's disciplined and tireless 30-year accumulation of life's ephemera is a famous example of a creative practitioner drawing both from the culture around him and the tools of the time, in his case magazines and newsprint, invitations, handwritten notes, etc. The result, aptly named 'Time Capsules'³⁶ became an act of lifelogging not too dissimilar to artist Steve Mann's exhaustive acts of *souveillance*³⁷. The difference lies in the year, by the late 1980's and 1990's, when Mann was recording his life data he was able to wear his technologies to log his daily routines and encounters instead of compiling them in a box. While my recording of life using the available social media tools does not compete in length of time nor collection of matter to Warhol's 610 standardised boxes, I have been able to push the available tools, as my predecessors have done, to make the collected whole into a piece of art which reflects the situation I experience on a day-to-day basis. In doing so, I have become a participant in the activity of my practice.

36 'Time Capsules' is held within the The Archives Study Center at The Andy Warhol Museum, U.S.A. Information on the work can be seen here: See - <http://www.warhol.org/collections/archives.html>

37 *Souveillance*: "the recording of an activity from the perspective of a participant in the activity i.e. personal experience capture" (Kerr & Mann, 2006) http://www.anonequity.org/weblog/archives/2006/01/exploring-equiv_1.php

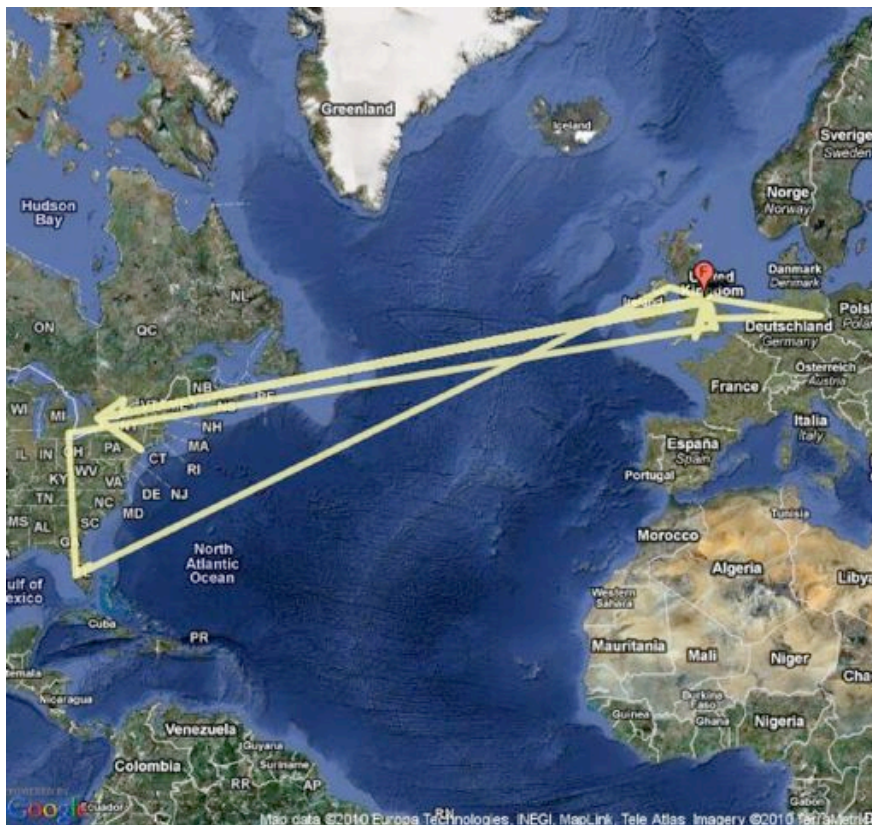


fig. 11
Megan Smith
'647 days 18 hours' (2010)
2008-08-28 16:33:48 -
2010-06-07 11:16:54
Distance: 46015.0 km -
Avg speed: 3 km/h -
Max speed: 23592 km/h,
digital image.

In the work 'Playground/Play Ground/Ground Play/Lay Round PG'³⁸ (May 2009 – present), I push the confines of a standard WordPress blog by breaking the linear chronological layout and ordered system of telling a story by spamming the site with content from my other blogs and by dropping curated content into the blog from external public sources. I would like to say this succeeded in breaking the format of the blog but actually I had to rely on previously acquired knowledge of HTML to 'properly' break it. In order to extend the piece I had to sabotage the original code of the author's text, though this author's work is still referenced within the website source code. The artist Daniel Eatock's and co-author Jeffery Vaska's revolt against the system of reading content online is significant. They developed a web platform, Indexhibit (2004), which assists artists to relay their work through a narrative structure based on the premise of the combination of 'index' and 'exhibit'. This model can be a more effective tool for artists by providing a presentation structure that enables their aims and ambitions and their process chronology to be expressed in one space. It allows the content of a webpage to extend into infinity to the right or left. Eatock's drive was to brake from traditional print methods and allow for the owner of the content to curate the space to their own needs and for their audience's experience. Eatock stresses on his website that. "...this is a break from traditional fixed layout design associated with print, and a move towards an interactive experience where the user creates their own viewing experience. This embraces recent interactive display methods"³⁹.

38 'Playground/Play Ground/Ground Play/Lay Round PG' is found here: <http://megansmith.ca/playground/>

39 Daniel Eatock, <http://www.indexhibit.org/history/> Accessed 27/06/10.

40 Olia Lialina: <http://art.teleportacia.org/> Accessed 27/06/10.

In my own curation of what can only really be understood as visual social chatter on 'Playground/Play Ground/Ground Play/Lay Round PG' (fig. 12), I added animated gif's to the piece for two reasons. First, in homage to artists like [Marisa Olson](#), [Joshua Heineman](#) and [Olia Lialina](#) who continue to use this retro and playful form of information relay to both shock and impress visitors to their sites. Among the most successful artists to work in this genre is Lialina, whose meticulously-built websites enable visitors to visually journey through participation while simultaneously learning about her work⁴⁰. Her refined process of creating playful and engaging narratives using the animated gif online are acts of rebellion that present a different approach to reading data. The second reason for my use of animated butterflies was to identify the graphic as a symbolic representation of visitors to the site who leave little evidence of being there. Though their IP address is listed within my website's visitor data, they have fluttered in and out of the space without participating.

On March 10th, 2009 I wrote on my research blog:

A butterfly - can enter and exit a window without one knowing, they can flutter by as you sit on your front porch, they can enter your back garden and settle on the pool noodle while the children play. They can be a friend from 25 years ago reading your status, a colleague catching up on your blog, a stranger reading your report, your aunt looking at your family photos, the person who is considering the purchase of your car through the online auto-trader. Sometimes you glimpse them through stats, comments, trails they leave behind. Sometimes you don't notice them at all and yet they have been by.⁴¹

38 The full blog post *Gradients of Intimacy in Public Social Spaces* was written in response to a *Pattern Language* workshop at the London Knowledge Lab run by Yishay Mor and Steve Warburton. It can be found here: <http://megansmith.ca/blog/?p=296>

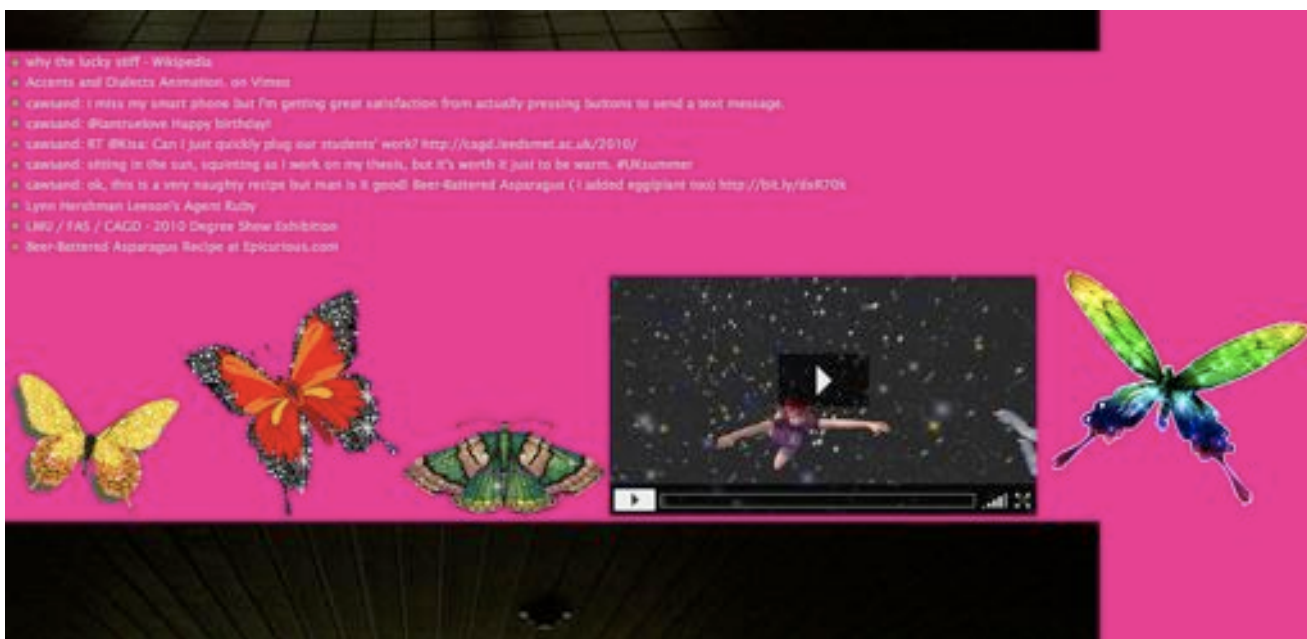


fig. 12 Megan Smith, 'Playground/Play Ground/Ground Play/Lay Round PG' (2009) screen grab from blog.

I also developed a persona called Edwige Pronovost who first appeared in Second Life in 2006. I would like to be able to say that I traveled vicariously through her but instead the shyness I experience in 'real-life' was also present in my avatar's personality. For the most part of Edwige's time in Second Life, we explored in a stereotypical tourist manner consisting of quick visits with a camera at hand. While I appreciated the intricate detail and interactive installations that artists build in Second Life, I was not drawn to building inworld, nor to carving out an identity within the space. This may have to do with not devoting extensive and repeated periods of time inworld, which most likely could have resulted in the development of a community within the space⁴². Instead, my interest with Second Life focused on the representation of the 'real' inworld. The illusion of the real is highly sought and delivered in Second Life, showcasing hyper-realistic simulation scripts which can allow an avatar's hair to move to an imaginary breeze to attempts to tediously re-constructed architecture based on real physical structures, such as H-Building

42 Maria Backe (2009, p.123) describes the extent that some members of Second Life engage with the location and community in her essay – *Self, Setting and Situation in Second Life*. She discusses the emotional connection that people associate with their avatar and the problems and benefits of developing a role that is separate from one's everyday identity.

43 Hu Fang, *Once Again, We're On The Road* <http://www.hufangwrites.com/nonfiction-en/Once-Again.html> Accessed 07/06/10.

and MoMA, which are discussed in works later on in this document. As I began to reflect on what I had visited in Second Life, it was the general fascination with hyperrealism that exists inworld, which led me to the recognize that I was most interested in identity failure.

As a self-declared transnational individual, having lived in several countries and had varied friend groups speckled all over the globe, I appreciated how quickly I could move around Second Life and was fond of speeding around the world rarely resting in one place because the option to teleport from one end of the world to the next was too addictive. I wished that I could do this in real-life. I was envious of the speed of travel via networked computer and my avatar's symbolic physical movement. Curator Hu Fang says: "Perhaps this is the way that travelling is done these days – there is no need to brace yourself through wind and rain, but instead, your left hand must grasp hold of the mouse, your right ear pressed onto your cell phone; without moving one bit, your body has managed to scale through rivers and hills"⁴². To a certain degree Fang is right, transfer of knowledge takes

shape online alongside emotional experiences and encounters, factors that form narrative experiences. The web can provide a rich adventure if one wants to engage and one does learn and gain from these online experiences. However, the 'hard' travelling I had done in the past tied me emotionally to the locations because I had memories in the form of stories. These narratives affected me both physically and emotionally. The argument that people glued to their computers and immersed in the web do not fully experience is untrue. They simply learn to experience the location in an alternative way. Regardless, I had no great stories to tell of my time in Second Life until I began to wonder how I could experience Second Life in a new way and how my avatar could become more physical, which I will further discuss in the next section.

PROJECTS///

Megan + Edwige/

the bending of space but not me/

My creative epiphany arising out of this work arrived when I discovered that the place I was most comfortable at in Second Life was in H-Building⁴⁴, a meticulously represented place that also existed in real-life and the location where I worked from 9 to 5 in 2008. At this point I started to embody my avatar in the physical sense. During my initial performance, I visited H-Building in the flesh as my digital character. The process was documented and the final piece developed, from the initial experiment, was a mash-up collage of the two spaces (fig. 13).

fig. 13 Megan Smith, 'Edwige_and_Megan_at_H-Building_Leeds' (2008) digital collage.

44 Second Life H-Building was built by artist Graham Hibbert, known as Kisa Naumova in Second Life. It was situated on LeedsMet Island within Second Life. It no longer exists. H-Building was a former building of operation on the Leeds Metropolitan University City campus. It is no longer in service and scheduled for future demolition.





fig. 14 Megan Smith, 'Edwige_and_Megan_at_CNTower_TO' (2009) digital image.

I then reviewed my collection of tourist snapshots taken in Second Life and selected three locations to visit in the flesh, as Edwige, where I would flip my position and confront my inability to embody both a digital character and a weather resistant 'flesh and blood' avatar. Between 2008-2009 I actually traveled to the three locations, and temporarily transformed myself into my avatar. I then reconstructed the tourist scene in the physical. I went to MoMA in NYC, the CN Tower in Toronto (fig. 14) and Cocoa Beach in Florida. In these spaces, my transformation was documented and I photographed them again as an avatar tourist would.

The initial outcomes played with autobiographical content and experience while flipping the manner of experiencing the virtual. I was making efforts to introduce Edwige into a new space within the system. I pushed her to not only occupy Second Life and the physical but also to enter the architecture of the social web in dynamic ways. She minimally ventured into Facebook, where her lone friend connection is me. This lack of narrative on Facebook could be construed as my failure to wholly embody my avatar; however, I am not an actress nor was I interested in developing anything other than the reality. By creating a fictitious story about Edwige I would not have been true to my own identity, which was in fact just Megan with the addition of blue hair and blue contact lenses.

'Edwige Selflessly Caged in the Web' (2009; fig. 17) was made in homage to artist Pipilotti Rist's work 'Selbstlos im Lavabad' (Selfless in the Bath of Lava)⁴⁵ (fig. 15 + 16), which I discovered under my foot in 2003, on a miniscule screen within a crack in the floor boards at P.S.1 gallery in New York. A pixy-sized Rist shouts up asking for help to anyone lucky enough to notice the hole or hear her quiet voice. In this work Rist is immortally caged within the bricks and mortar of the physical world. I tried to imagine the experience, from the perspective of a physical avatar kept a prisoner within the web and unable to experience touch or anything more than a scripted breeze. I was the physical Edwige trapped within the network. The piece is filmed using an application called BubbleTweet⁴⁶, which then embedded the video in a Twitter stream. To activate the performance I would tweet a short message about it with a hyperlink to the video. When my followers clicked on the link the video would pop up on their computer screen intruding on what they were already viewing. Edwige would blink and tap on the screen hollering, as Rist did, to: 'Please let me out!'

45 A web version of the piece can also be seen on Pipilotti Rist's website: <http://www.pipilottirist.net/lavabad/lava.html> Accessed 07/06/10.

46 Edwige's call for help can still be seen by following this link, though the interface no longer mimics Twitter and hence does not relay the illusion of intruding on your screen anymore. This results in a loss of the initial aesthetic. <http://www.bubbletweet.com/channel/cawsand/pnp2w> Accessed 07/06/10.



fig. 15 + 16
Pipilotti Rist,
'Selbstlos im Lavabad' [Selfless In The Bath Of Lava]
(1994) audio video installation
(installation view at SFMOMA, San Francisco;
photo by Ian Reeves).
Images courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.



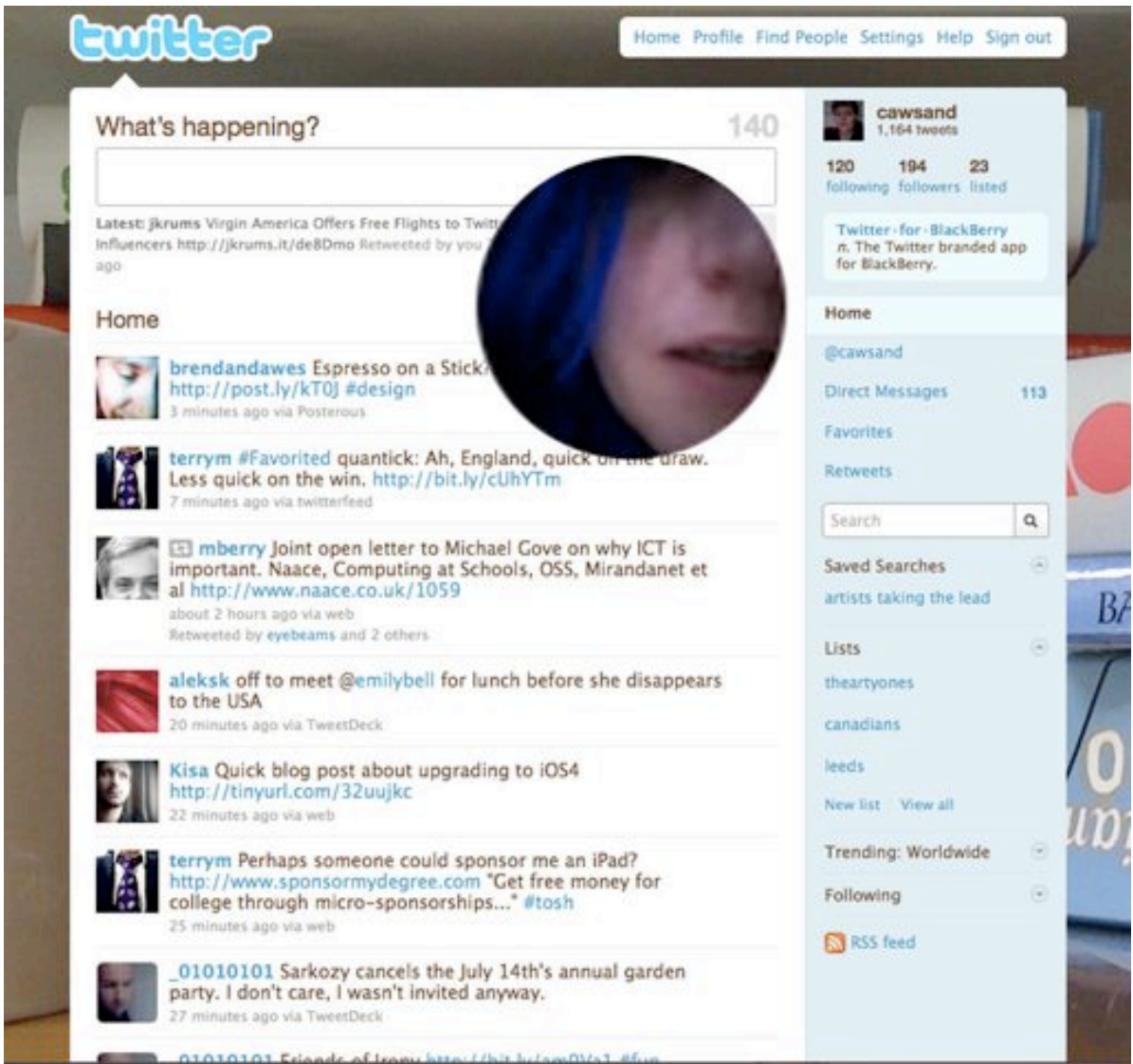


fig. 17 Megan Smith, 'Edwige Selflessly Caged in the Web' (2009)
digital reconstruction of web-based piece originally created 23/01/09.



fig. 18 Megan Smith, 'As I try to be an avatar & Edwige tries to be be' (2010) digital still from video.

'As I try to be an avatar & Edwige tries to be me' (2010; [fig. 18](#)) is a short video piece, accompanied by a series of still images, which document the experiences of becoming Edwige. It demonstrates my self-analysed inability to be either a sophisticated avatar in Second Life or to adopt a role other than my disguised self. However, when in character I was recognized as an avatar and in particular, during the performance outside the MoMA, I attracted a crowd of onlookers with one mother telling her son: "Look! it's performance art!" and other people stopping me in the street to say "I know who you are." Which in itself left me baffled. Who could they identify me with, other than a generic contemporary character?

With the advent of cosplayers, or costume players, performers who develop their characters from manga, anime, or video games to graphic novels increasingly grace the streets, and the public has begun to accept a folding over of space; a hybrid experience of the real and the digital persona. What was a virtual character completely separate from one's physical real-life and perhaps even social sphere, is now recognizable within the public realm. On her website, artist Cao Fei discusses her photographic research on 'COSPlayers' (2004). She establishes that the cosplayers' ambition and aggression to be the most outrageous/beautiful/imaginative character can be counterproductive to achieving a sense of identity when the role actually lends itself to becoming alienated from reality because the players' emotional outlets must mimic those of their characters. Their need for attention through public appearance and their inability to 'shut

off' even within the home leaves them little space to grow up. However, the major adoption of these roles addresses a significant generational cultural shift. Children are accepted when they dress like super heroes or princesses, but why are adolescent or adults so fixated on re-creating the doomed activity of trying to carryout the lifestyle of a character?

I think this reaction stems from the rich narratives they have received and continue to receive through daily engrossment in video games, anime and through their participation in online forums, which further embeds and secures their interests. Cao Fei, speculates "...though entertainment for adolescents normally takes place in a relatively confined space, the culture of the cosplayers [has] brought this group of young people out of the cyber community and into everyday life in the real world. As they emerge from their digital, cyber communities, they begin to appear in various public activities, showing their faces in trendy residential communities. Using the surrealistic fantasy image of their game characters they provoke a new aesthetic sense for the public"⁴⁷(2007).

⁴⁷ For the full reflection and her 'COSPlayers' work, see the artists website. Available from: <http://www.caofei.com/works/photography/> Accessed 15/06/10.

This was also the reaction I recognized while in character. I drew a crowd because I was a symbol of personal augmented experience or what Barry Bergdoll, Chief Curator of Architecture and Design for the exhibition *Design and the Elastic Mind*, refers to as "...the blurring of boundaries between the real and the virtual" (2008, p. 9). My movements were recognized as being embedded in a situation that exists on the web and while I could not entirely physically embody my role, the ambition to articulate a space that no longer only exists behind a screen was welcomed and understood. Hall says that: "Today we tend to think of the Internet as something that enhances or augments the physical world, something we encounter everywhere we go" (2008, p. 122).

Unlike the cosplayers, who evidently must un-disguise, breaking from their illusion of being a part of their game and retreat to real life, my simple humanity was constantly manifested in my disregard for precise costume, the inability to hold a pose for very long, through social exchange with my audience, and the appropriation of items such as a winter coat to stay warm.

Furthermore, Cao Fei suggests that: "It is perhaps no longer important to draw the line between the virtual and the real, as the border between these two has become blurred. In virtual reality we are not what we were originally, and yet we remain unchanged... At the actual end of this extended reality, there is still the love of simplicity, and the pursuit of freedom" (2008, p. 21). With my final piece, involving Edwige, I altered my formula by visiting the physical place as my avatar and then I entered Second Life as my 'virtual' avatar to make the work, 'Edwige_and_Megan_at_Barkston_House_Leeds' (2009; fig. 19). It became an installation that relayed multiple layers of digital information on a projection screen, which reflected a layered canvas of Edwige and my identities on Twitter, Facebook, and Second Life, combined with footage of my physical journey

through the building as my avatar. Using a live webcam feed, I was able to broadcast the layered situation onto the internet, which contributed to leaving a trace of my journey via the IP address sourced from Barkston House's internet service. Additionally, I had one lone television set sitting on its side broadcasting a live CCTV feed of the space outside the installation. This pointed to the death of the analogue system of surveillance, it having been replaced by IP tracking and the voluntary contribution of identity into social media which creates a place within the network where one has difficulty completely going unnoticed and where it is even more challenging to disappear⁴⁸. The folding of my identity and that of Edwige became a visual articulation of the hybrid narrative structure. It illustrated the technical complexity of the networked system in which we were based, while commenting on the situation of the social seduction that pressures people to take part and contribute a voice to the system. This new networked structure is a permeable space, which simultaneously empowers people while they lose control of their journey. The result is, after the advent of networked digital systems, a new rendering of reality.

48 The programmer, cartoonist and writer known as why the lucky stiff abbreviated to _why disappeared from the web in August of 2009. Several of his sites were deleted and there still remains a mystery as to what happened to him. He was best known for his contribution to the Ruby programming language and his illustrated teaching guides. His work has been archived by his followers in an attempt to both preserve his valued research and to ensure his identity or persona is remembered. (DJWM, 2009) In this situation _why has actually managed to collapse his public identity. However, his presence online is upheld by the people around him who appreciate his work. This is also a situation that occurs when someone dies, often a fan site will be set up in their honour, which is maintained by a friend or relative, as eventually the deceased social media accounts will become defunct. <http://www.h-online.com/open/news/item/why-the-lucky-stiff-Vanishes-743021.html> Accessed 15/06/10.



fig. 19
Megan Smith,
'Edwige_and_Megan_
at_Barkston_House_
Leeds'
(2009)
installation shot,
United - ESA,
Barkston House.

Our City, Our Music/ tagging place/

'Our City, Our Music' ('OCOM') was an interactive geo-located album showcasing Leeds-based emerging musicians and filmmakers in 2009. It was a collaborative project initiated and managed by Ben Dalton⁴⁹, Ben Halsall and myself. It was awarded £10 000 in seed funding from Hewlett Packard's Media Lab and in-kind support in time and equipment loan from Leeds Metropolitan University. In the Spring of 2008, after a successful written brief submitted in open competition to HP Labs and the company Just.b, we obtained an initial grant of £1 000 and specialized training with the mscape software from the Media Lab. We then further developed the project and pitched a more formed concept at the ICA in London to an audience of media specialists and then again in May 2008 at b.TWEEN08; a conference designed to connect indie-creatives with major corporations, held at MOSI in Manchester. 'Our City, Our Music' concept won the *Exploding Narratives* grant through both the online public voting system and with the internal judges.

⁴⁹ See biographical details on collaborator Ben Dalton at the end of the document.

The aim of the *Exploding Narratives* prize was to fund a project that would experiment with location-aware devices as tools for delivering engaging narratives using the mscape software, which combines audio and visual content on several GPS enabled mobile phones and SatNav devices. Our vision was to use our skills as artists to breathe creative content into the media capable devices. The goal of 'Our City, Our Music' became to support emerging musicians and filmmakers to create the content of an album, to create an archive of local talent, and to encourage people to explore the city through new technology, music and narration.

The participants in the project were selected by a panel of judges including BBC presenter Alan Raw, Will Massa, who at the time ran Digital Shorts at Screen Yorkshire, Tim Garbutt of Utah Saints, Ash Kollakowski from Bad Sneakers Records, Pier VanTijn of Big Red Button, Nicola Greenan from Arts-Stra and 20202, Mark Hubbard of Old Chapel Rehearsal Studios, and Rebekka Kill aka DJ The Duchess. An open online call was set up and over 80 applicants applied to take part. The final decisions were reached through drawing fifty percent from the online call and the other half through nomination from the panel.

Eleven bands and ten filmmakers made it through the selection resulting in a group of approximately 50 people involved in the project. During the Spring of 2009, we shot 11 music videos in locations around Leeds city-centre and recorded 1 video and 3 additional sound tracks as 'hidden tracks' on the album. In addition to the opportunity to make a live video, we

ran a Professional Development programme for all our participants. It provided new skills and hands-on experience to the team of artists, by offering video production workshops, face-to-face introductions to industry experts and assistance with solving creative and technical objectives. The artists were granted freedom to distribute their videos at their discretion and the compositions are now hosted across a number of websites.

'Our City, Our Music' launched Saturday 20 June 2009 at Leeds Metropolitan University's Students Union with a preview of the album and live performances from some of the participating bands. On Sunday 21 June, based at NTI Leeds, we offered the opportunity to go on the walk by lending pre-loaded devices to visitors. Over 80 people tested the mediascape on that day and subsequently we have run several walks with more than 200 people taking part.

At the core of 'Our City, Our Music's' success in recruiting musicians and filmmakers from across Leeds was an intelligent use of social networks like MySpace, Leeds Music Forum, Leeds Visual Arts Forum, Facebook, and Twitter, alongside the project website which is a blog. With a clear focus on the creation of music videos for release on small screen devices and the ambition to make the technology delivering the content invisible to its audience the result was an immersive audio/visual located journey through the streets of Leeds.

The project became an invisible festival across the city (fig.21, 22 + 23) that documented some of its best kept secrets, highlighted overshadowed locations and social landmarks, and told stories through the eyes of the people who drew inspiration from the place. It left behind a visual and audio trail of a cultural scene in Leeds. The album features talented performers from across Leeds, including experimental music group Chops, Ellen & The Escapades, Eskimo Twins and MTV *Soundbites* Competition winners Superpowerless.

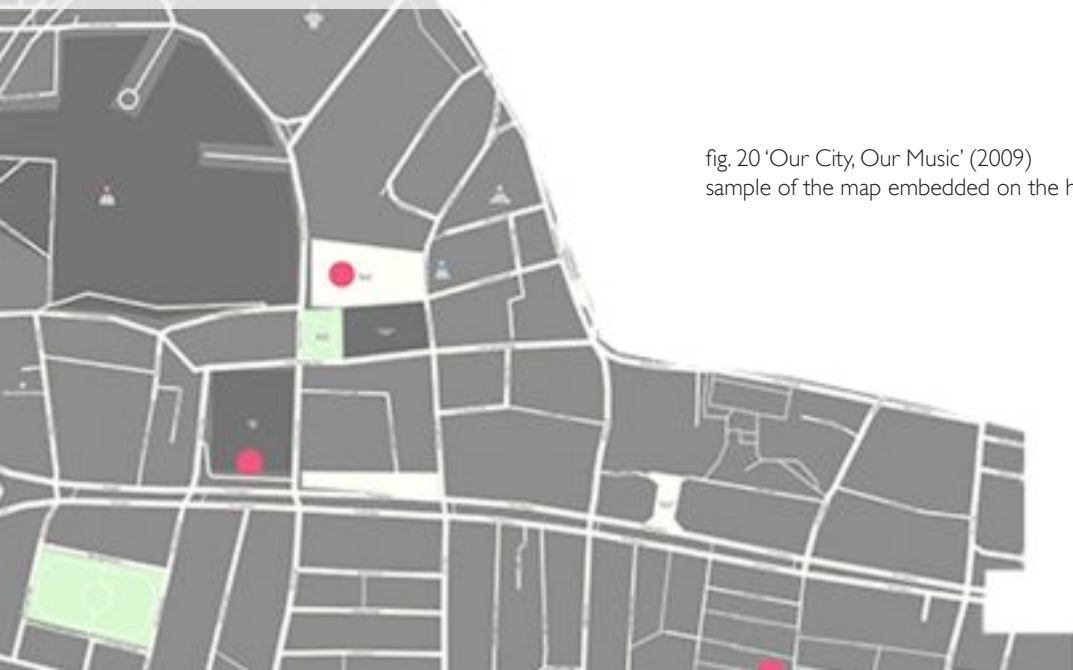


fig. 20 'Our City, Our Music' (2009)
sample of the map embedded on the handheld devices.



fig. 21 (2010) + fig. 22 (2009) 'Our City, Our Music-Leeds' (2009) images taken during public tours. Photos by Ben Halsall. This was the location of the *Ellen and the Escapades* video, shot by James Rhodes & animated by Niki Naroz.. The geo-located video is situated between Briggate Street and Lands Lane, in an unnamed ginnel.

'Our City, Our Music' was the largest project I had worked on to date and, though the product was limited by the reliability of the device, the opportunity to work collaboratively with Halsall and Dalton helped push my research further in the direction of making work that was *socially useful* and with an open source agenda. Between us our duties overlapped though we also played larger independent parts in specific areas. I ran most of the administration and coordination of location permissions for the shoots, designing and making the map (fig.20) and the interface menu layouts, organising and coordinating the professional development sessions, and speakers, and the launch events. Halsall organized the shoot equipment and was responsible for all the sound and video compression for the small screens. He also shot and edited the CHOPS video with the aid of filmmaker Dave Lynch. He managed the budget, which was held within the then Faculty of Innovation North. Dalton managed the binaural sound recording system and taught the filmmakers how to use it. He was primarily responsible for the coding involved in making the mscap. He was also present at several shoots. We all shared the responsibility of contributing papers and public speaking about the project.

50 Both Halsall and Dalton presented the project in lectures for both Leeds Metropolitan University and for external contacts such as the Arts Council of England and Leeds College of Art Creative Networks, their talks are not listed here.

Public contributions in which I was involved are as follows⁵⁰:

2009 *Light Night Leeds* participant, October.

Project presentation, BarCamp Leeds, May.

'Our City, Our Music' launch events, June.

Awarded Northern Design Competition Finalist in 2 separate categories:
New Media & Product Design, June.

'Our City, Our Music' team workshop with Alfie Dennen on the development of the project and New Media - b.TWEEN09, FACT, Liverpool, June.

2008 Recipient of the *Exploding Narrative* development grant from the b.TWEEN08 conference. The project pitch was screened at the ICA London, Manchester Art Gallery, and at FACT, Liverpool, June.

Hewlett Packard mscapFest08, Belfast, UK, December
Paper: 'Our City, Our Music': Case study

Handheld Learning , London, UK October
Paper: 'Our City, Our Music': using mScapes to map new narratives

Throughout the project, there was a strong emphasis, on the part of the 'OCOM' team, to share content and knowledge. The early stages of the research were made public as they developed on a WordPress Blog⁵¹, and our participants were encouraged to talk about the project as well. One motive for maintaining a public research discourse about our progress was to extend our knowledge on the subject by making contact with other artists working with locative media and to enable the prospective audience to comment and be involved. Often, when describing the project our audiences were hearing about geo-locative technology and binaural sound recordings for the first time so it became essential to develop a new language to explain the project.

The potential of wrapping up an audio and visual story based on a community and sharing it through a mobile device is not uncommon. Many museums partake in audio services where portable audio sets enable visitors to hear about displays by pressing the appropriate buttons when they arrive at the corresponding location. The artist Janet Cardiff is one of several artists

51 Our City, Our Music research blog: <http://ourcityourmusic.wordpress.com>

52 Cardiff made several audio walks between 1991 and 2006. Go to her website for details on each walk in this series. <http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/index.html>

53 Statistic supplied by Foursquare as of August 2010. <http://foursquare.com/about> Accessed 05/09/10.

who have recorded narrative audio walks and then invited guests to listen to them via CD or tape as they meander a mapped path through a city⁵². Blast Theory, who develop multi-user geo-located games, are trailblazers in the area of engaging communities with handheld technology. However, the number of people who have experienced this new form of storytelling is probably still relatively small, with the museum audio model more than likely coming out ahead of everyone else so far. From our background research on locative games and from speaking with participants and audiences we established that even with the use of a SatNav device, which a growing number of people possess, the concept of located audio and video content in the form of a narrated journey was still a complex scenario. I believe the only reason for this is that people were not, as of yet, accustomed to their personal handheld devices delivering geo-located entertainment. Since the 'OCOM' launch in 2009 this has begun to change, the social media application Foursquare,, which launched 3 months before 'Our City, Our Music', now has 3 million users worldwide⁵³. This application allows people to 'check in' to places they have been with their GPS enabled mobile devices, which in turn records a trace of their daily journeys. Facebook is also currently rolling out a feature, called Places, that allows users to tag where they are using GPS. There is a heated debate about the pros and cons of marking one's territory publicly on social media applications, in particular in relations to public safety and how the act of placing oneself could feed personal information into a public system which could then result in becoming a target of identity fraud. However, I predict that this tagging of place will only become more popular and that more sophisticated uses for it will develop over time. 'Our City, Our Music' tried to demonstrate the potential of this technology by working with a team of local people to relay a contemporary story. A year on since the 'OCOM' launch, it is now relatively easy to explain the

concept of geo-located community narrative, even to those who are not at ease with the use of new technology.

By speaking publicly across various forms of social media and at conferences, workshops and events 'OCOM's aim to involve a large public and introduce them to new forms of narrative accessed via mobile devices was a success. Neither did the project become pigeonholed within a closed network of artist aficionados, film or music groups or gamers. The demographic of those who have experienced the tour ranges from children to old age pensioners. The artist Jeremy Wood who has been relentlessly chronicling his life using GPS over the last 10 years, to draw symbolic patterns (fig.24) across immense geographical and political spaces has also been contributing to the new geo-tagged culturescape by demonstrating the potential of GPS to relay stories. Furthermore, Dennen, who publicly speaks out about the benefits of tagging place and who helped provide accessible and attractive social media tools so that more people could take part in the activity, is helping to drive the interest of geo-tagging among the general public. 'Our City, Our Music' tried to build on those two facets in order to contribute a new approach to participating, making and involving community. Furthermore, the productive 'hacker' approach by the 'OCOM' team, and artists Dennen and Wood is helping to push this area of creative practice forward, by sharing research and work beyond academia and the arts to a broad public via the web.

fig. 23 'Our City, Our Music-Leeds' (2009) image taken during public tour. Photo by Ben Halsall. This was the location of the *CHOPS* video, shot and edited by Ben Halsall, assisted by Dave Lynch. The geo-located video was made prior to the demolition of the Leeds International Swimming Pool. It is still standing in this image.



Traverse Me
warwickcampus
map for pedestrians



fig. 24 Jeremy Wood, 'Traverse Me' (2010) The University of Warwick. Drawn on foot. 238 miles of GPS tracks. 17 days. Image courtesy of the artist.

SocialMoment + Pst!//

hacking as a method of practice//

To accomplish the objectives of the research I used tools such as digital video, blogging and Second Life to make work that extended the self and placed identity into new spaces within the *digital domain*. However, in order to fully challenge the project it was necessary in the final stage of the research to push the practice beyond the 3rd aim in order to creatively look at how the *critical mass is extending to reach others via the digital domain*, a topic which artists like Jer Thorp is researching in his practice as well. In order to do this I specifically looked at how personal identity is showcased in the social media community and how I could use this identity to make work that demonstrated the effects of networked community.

I came to the conclusion that it was essential to use syndicated public content to produce two final pieces of work. These pieces would narrate effects of social media and form or draw attention to narrative structures that have not been told or visualized before. I chose Twitter as the aggregation source because I was already familiar with it, it is a *socially useful* tool and its geocode possibilities made it the logical platform for responding creatively to the social situation of the web culture of 2010. I also was of the opinion that, despite its constant flow of user generated content from around the globe, the U.S. Library of Congress deeming the content to be valid enough to include in its archive⁵⁴, and the numerous applications established to allow readers to source what they need from it, there were still relatively few people actually critically exploring the media to bend it into new narrative structures beyond the obvious marketing solutions.

54 On April 14, 2010 the U.S. Library of Congress officially acquired the Twitter archive dating back to March 2006, and it will continue to digitally house all new tweets in the future. (Raymond, 2010) <http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2010/04/how-tweet-it-is-library-acquires-entire-twitter-archive/>

Blogs are practical ways of learning and keeping up to date with interests but they are numerous and time-consuming to read. The introduction of Twitter as a social media tool in a sense allowed for some freedom of space by reducing the content of a blog to a 140 character summary that directs readers to a blog with key words or hyperlinks, should they want more information. With the proliferation of information available to each web user every day, Twitter has become a crucial method to efficiently spread information to people worldwide within minutes. A fact that has led it to make history as a system that allows for citizen journalism to report quickly using web-enabled mobile technology. While the content of a tweet may not always be credible the fact is that it allows a flow of information that is public and this content is repeated, discredited, valued, and discussed at an equally rapid pace as it is posted. What is most important about this speed is that it enables news to proliferate the net.



fig. 25 Janis Krums [@jkrums], (2009)
digital image taken 15 January.
Image courtesy of the photographer.

55 Stephanie Busari (2008) *Tweeting the terror: How social media reacted to Mumbai* <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/11/27/mumbai.twitter/index.html>
Accessed 19/06/10.

56 Lev Grossman (2009) *Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement* <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1905125,00.html>
Accessed 19/06/10.

In cases like the Mumbai attacks in 2008⁵⁵ and the Iranian election in 2009⁵⁶ where the amount of web traffic reporting violence was inconsistent, it was still surfacing on Twitter in such abundance that the world understood there was a serious problem.

One of the most significant tweets to alter the perception of social media was sent by Janis Krums (@jkrums) on 15 January 2009 when a plane crashed and landed in the Hudson River, in New York (fig.25). Krums tweeted image circulated the world in seconds alerting of the crash and safety of the passengers before any main news broadcasters could report the story. This act in turn boosted the number of Twitter users and prompted a global conversation about the importance of citizen journalism and the changing news broadcast situation.

The 'SocialMoment' series/

While 'Edwige Selflessly Caged in the Web' was my first attempt to hack a Twitter experience, it was a playful illustration of a conceptual problem and, for future work I aimed to literally push the social impact that tweeting can have. The 'SocialMoment' (2010)

series, an ongoing project, grew out of this goal. It draws iconic instances from Twitter during surges of topic-centred emotional activity online. The individual micro-narratives point to shifts in social perception and the use of new media. By isolating public reflections from the perspective of the writer, a short but important narrative is revealed. While Twitter is most known for the copious amount of content it can provide, it is important to understand the way that people are choosing to articulate themselves on it and how some of these status updates can have a transformative effect on society.

@jkrums ironically asked his followers to wish him luck within his tweet, and in a twist of fate that is what he received, not for his request to get through the traffic but instead landing him one of the most viewed images of all time. This image will go on to be used for years, if not to remember historical moments in Twitter's history, which may as an application fade from popularity over time, but because of the emotional stir that rippled across the world of the pilot's success. Most importantly, in terms of empowerment,

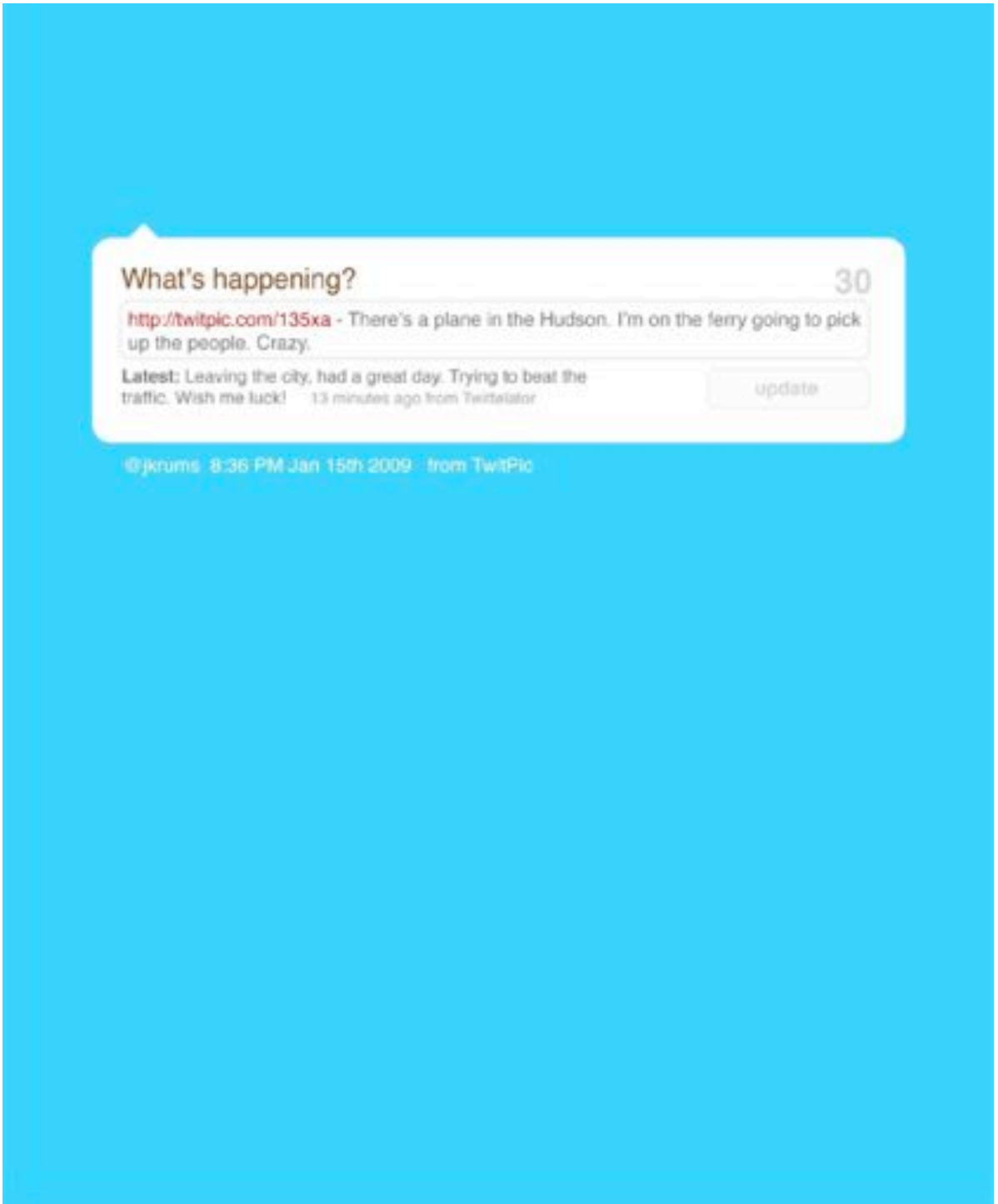


fig. 26 Megan Smith, 'Social Moment: @jkrums Jan 15 2009' (2010) 8" X10" digital print.

the image came from a mobile phone, a tool that increasing numbers of people are owning across the globe. Within minutes the act to document the situation and share it on a social network had aided in transforming the world emotionally and technically.

⁵⁷ Hillary Clinton. (2010) *Remarks on Internet Freedom*. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135519.htm> Accessed 28/06/10.

The format in which a tweet is written and later read is also contributing a new code or new form of language. The structure of the message is formed of memorable patterns and identifiable symbols. For those accustomed to reading tweets or web content, simply looking at the 15 January 2009 message by @jkcrums invokes the image of the plane crash because the hyperlink acts as a trigger for their memory (fig.26). When swiftly reading the text and link close together, it is possible that people automatically conjure associated images, if for instance the subject is highly publicised or of a personal nature, pointing to the adoption of new methods of reading brought on by web-based data structures.

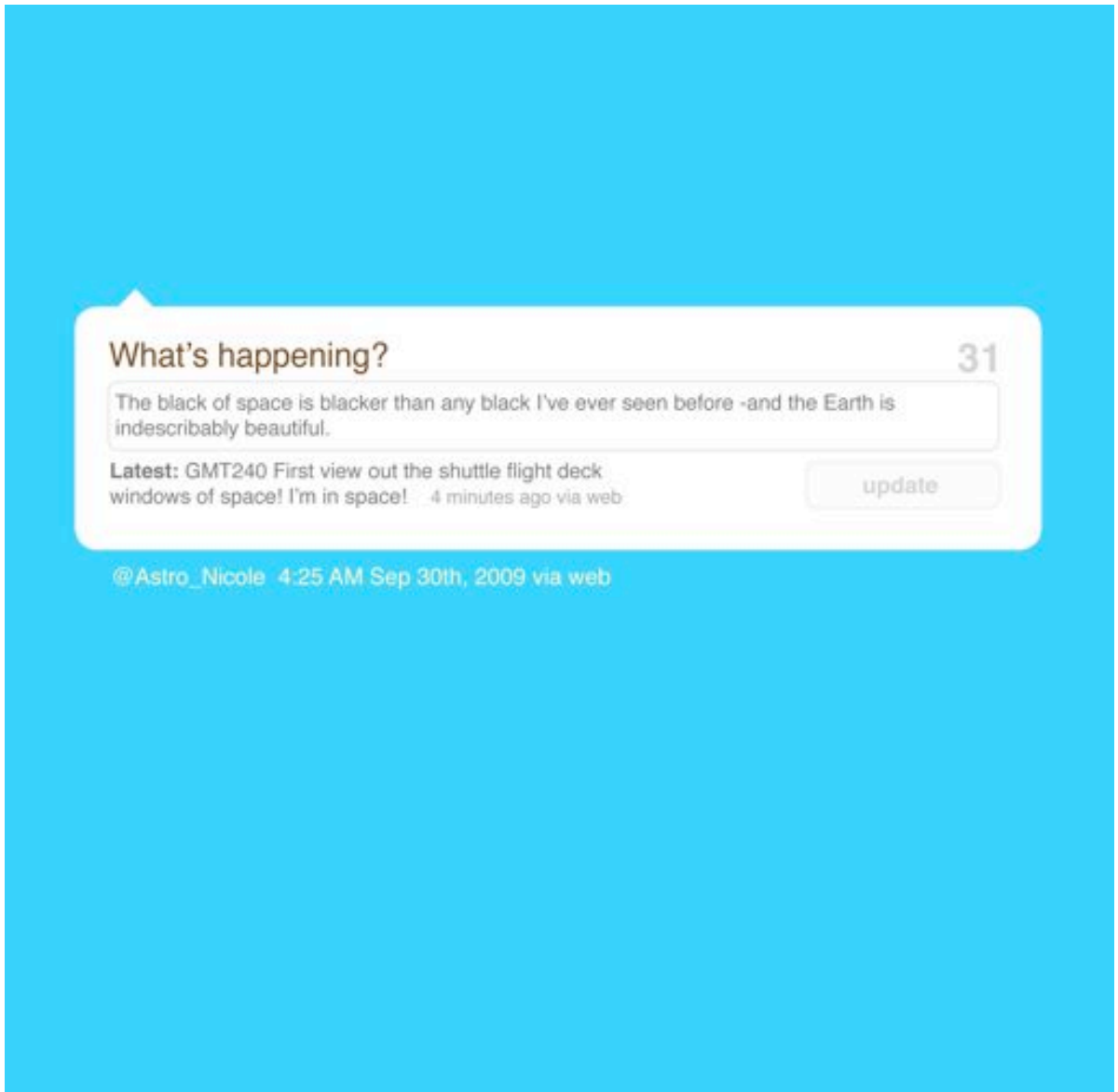
The @iranabad print (fig.27), in the 'SocialMoment' series, discusses the challenges with the police and the volatile and politically complex situation at hand. By contributing to a public space online the individual citizens of Iran are able to tell the world a story of panic and corruption and this act then incites other countries to scrutinize the political system that allows for these situations to continue. The United States Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton said in her 'Remarks on Internet Freedom' (2010): "The spread of information networks is forming a new nervous system for our planet. When something happens in Haiti or Hunan, the rest of us learn about it in real time – from real people. And we can respond in real time as well"⁵⁷. She then goes on to say: "Now, in many respects, information has never been so free. There are more ways to spread more ideas to more people than at any moment in history. And even in authoritarian countries, information networks are helping people discover new facts and making governments more accountable"⁵⁸. In situations like these, and in other extreme events such as natural disasters, networked communication and services like Twitter are now playing critical parts in enabling aid response and global scrutiny.

fig. 27 Megan Smith, 'Social Moment: @iranabad Jun 20 2009' (2010) 8" X10" digital print.



On a lighter note, but a no less incredible situation, @Astro_Nicole describes the pure exhilaration of an almost unique moment allowing her followers to imagine the instant with her, in real-time; an activity that is completely new (fig.28). It is the build up of these small events that are telling a global story, one that the U.S. Library of Congress has deemed important enough to store for eternity for scholarly and research reasons, while placing emphasis on the query of “what [will] we... be able to learn about ourselves and the world around us from this wealth of data... I’m certain we’ll learn things that none of us now can even possibly conceive” (Raymond, 2010).

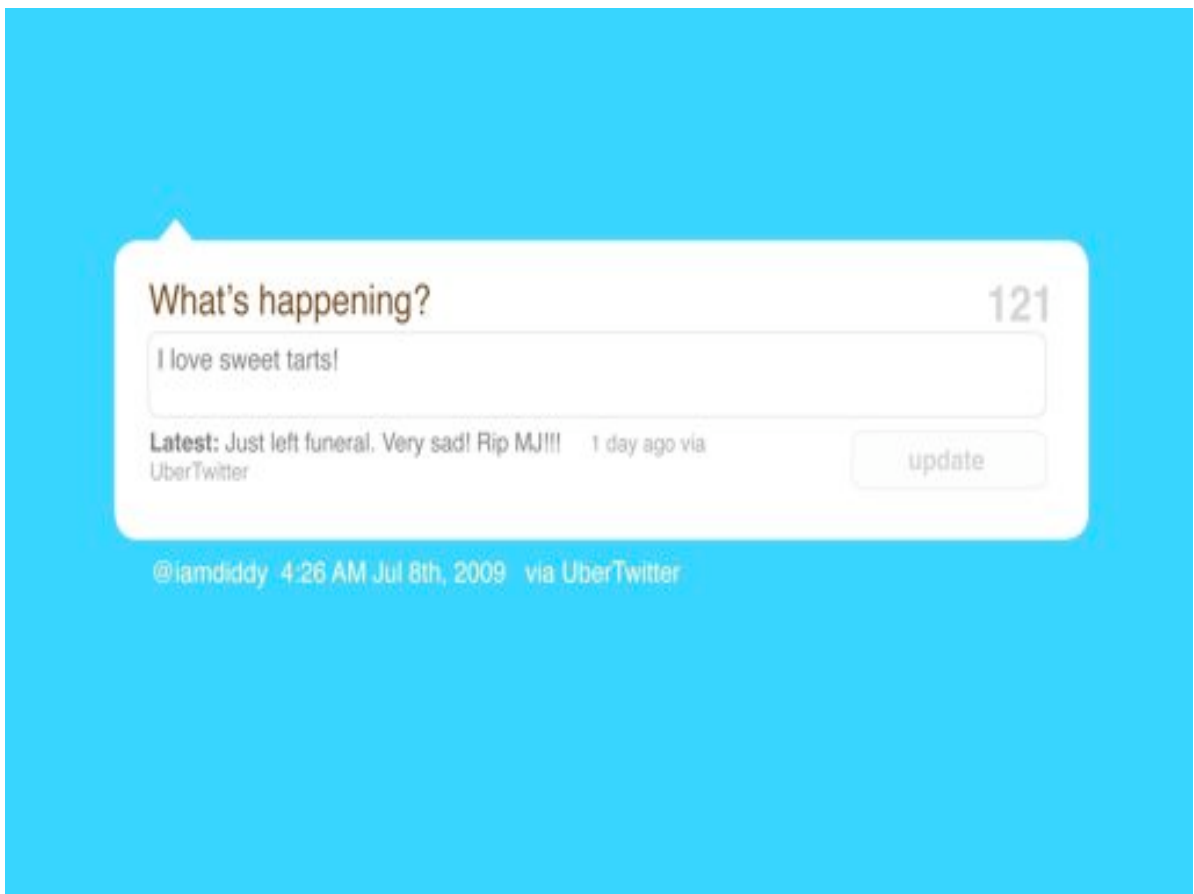
fig. 28 Megan Smith, “Social Moment: @Astro_Nicole Sep 30 2009” (2010) 8” X10” digital print.



@iamdiddy's tweets (fig.29) can be seen in two different ways. First, from a cynical perspective where this person does not emotionally value the situation and, second from the angle of a person who does not place emphasis on the way the information is read. Either way, this ordering of personal information points to the importance of trying to understand the stories people are relaying in this medium and also to the changing nature of communication towards possibly a more inclusive and democratic space where a person like @iamdiddy can ethically place these two facts side by side with no social retribution.

In the 'SocialMoment' series I was able to place emphasis on how the language used in social media tools, like Twitter, is affecting and shifting the global concept of identity and personal potential. The web is enabling a social and political revolution, through digital and networked methods of communication. Tweeting, micro-blogging and other forms of status updates are demonstrating that people are talking now more than ever and it is important to look into the narratives that are being formed so that we can understand our future communities.

fig. 29 Megan Smith 'Social Moment: @iamdiddy Jul 08 2009' (2010) 8" X10" digital print.



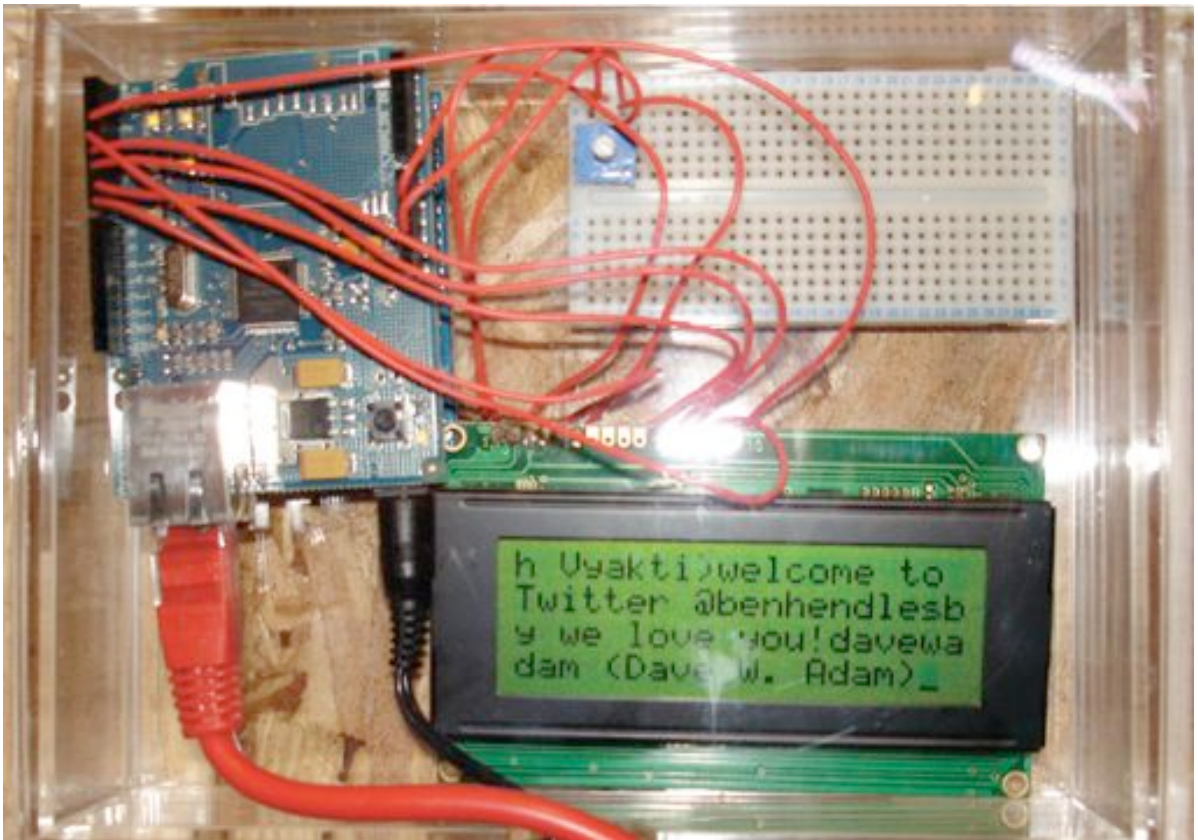


fig. 30 Megan Smith, 'Pst! Physical Space Tweets' (2009) digital image, ESA Leeds Pavillion Amsterdam Biennale

Pst! Physical Space Tweets + Pst! **micro**CONTROL/

'Pst!' is the surreptitious beckoning of attention and the acronym for Physical Space Tweets. It is a small storyteller installed in public space that gives the audience a glimpse into a geo-tagged community's topic feed (fig.30). For the Leeds Pavillion at Mediamatic's *Amsterdam Biennale* (10/09-01/10), 'Pst!' chronicled life in Leeds through its twitter feed, aligning itself with the Biennale's aim to showcase a city's local cultural scene.

'Pst!' physically and geographically locates a public social narrative. It does this by aggregating syndicated data from Twitter profiles geographically aligned to a city using Twitter's geo-code API, the open source Arduino electronic platform and the internet. The devices visually chirp out 140 character Twitter feeds onto small LCD screens. The screen and hardware allude to miniature advertising billboards but discuss and distribute life feeds. This project situates verbal content and technology into a new place and relays the data in a new narrative format.

In the case of the Leeds-based device, watching the stream at different times of the day or the week rendered a picture of the city's community and activity. There was a pronounced distinction between the feed on a Tuesday evening when the Yorkshire Post announced a new job call and people discussed the latest Dr. Who episode and the Friday and Saturday night feeds when Leeds, a city known for its wild nightlife, articulated across the screen a colourful and engaging drama documenting the happenings in the city - from bears in tutus spotted outside the Corn Exchange to a mad rush for a secret gig at the Brudenell Social Club. By removing the peripheral of the computer and the profile windows associated with looking at a Twitter feed, a 'Pst!' device can be placed anywhere. It provides a focus on a single message that changes with each update, slowly threading a local narrative together and hence becoming a direct porthole into a geo-located public space.

After the *Amsterdam Biennale*, the project was expanded to display 5 devices at once under the title 'Pst! **microCONTROL**' (fig.31), a term adopted in reference to the bottom-up approach that is becoming an increasingly successful model for social information distribution made possible through the current internet and supplemented by the open source culture. The shift to a larger installation allowed the piece to touch on the nostalgic iconographic images of the 'Western Railway Time Reference System', that display city times side by side on clocks, but it took that visual symbolism into the present by using social media and new-media tools to reveal world events. Each device was assigned a specific geo-coded area and displayed twitter streams from the local source. In this way a device set up to capture the stream from New York narrated the current situation from the voices of its inhabitants. The case was the same for devices set for Los Angeles and London. The installation became most interesting by aligning the remaining two devices to Kabul and Beijing, where information can fail to reach the Western World or is censored for political or safety reasons. Interestingly, while some countries such as China and Cuba operate strict internet censorship, a stream of twitter feeds occasionally get through to the world from these last two localities, further reinforcing the title of the installation, 'Pst! **microCONTROL**', by providing examples where people make unusual and extreme efforts to tell stories. In the case of the Beijing device, its failure to activate among the other nations was simply evidence of a global political situation that is not ready to completely share and it furthers the notion that failure of a process can also be a significant element. The technology used to make this work is only a tool and though there is a sense of awe with social media, it is not magical, but as stated above, it is the cross-fertilization of art, technology and the study of society that allow stories to surface.

'Pst! **microCONTROL**' was made through the support of the open source community. The code is a hacked patchwork of multiple projects re-modeled by friends, people I have met online, and myself. A long-term goal for the installation is to continue to share the code and DiY instructions for making the devices. The installation was shortlisted for a [Continuum Commission](#). I received

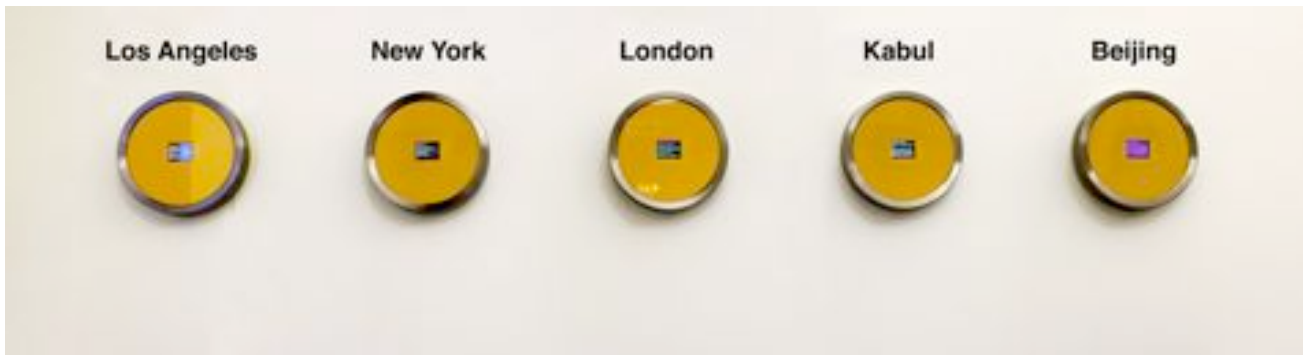


fig. 31 Megan Smith,
'Pst! microCONTROL' (2010)
installation shot, *Unleashed Devices*, Watermans, London, 10' X 6'.

a Grant from Arts from Arts Council England to improve the piece from its earlier incarnation as 'Pst!' and to include it in *Unleashed Devices* at Watermans Art Centre, in London. The work is also being shown at *Invasion of Privacy*, at Notfamouslyet Art Consultancy in Oxford.

The project situates itself within the current practice of the artists Sep Kamvar and Jonathan Harris and their live work 'We Feel Fine' (initiated 2005); an ongoing web-based programme which draws public content from blogs by pigeon-holing a harvest criteria on the words 'I feel' and 'I am feeling'. 'We Feel Fine' relays a narrative through combining parameters such as location and weather with sentiment-tied search tags. 'Pst!' however, has a more biased approach by seeking only Twitter users within a specific geo-located boundary, and the result is a community tale. It also situates itself within the work of statistician Mark Hansen and sound artist Ben Rubin. In particular it builds on a similar inquest into web information chatter demonstrated in their piece 'Listening Post' (2003; fig.32): "an art installation that culls text fragments in real time from thousands of unrestricted Internet chat rooms, bulletin boards and other public forums"⁵⁹. Peter Eleey wrote in *Frieze Magazine* that: "At a stroke 'Listening Post' fulfils the promise of most Internet-based art, affecting a simultaneous collapse and expansion of time and space with implications ranging from notions of private and public space to individual thought and its role in group dynamics - and it advances all of this within a form that finally allows net art to compete with the more sensual pleasures we associate with sculpture" (2003). Furthermore, while participating in online forums, microblogging and sites such as Facebook the user is always surrounded with noises that link them to their physical space be it their home, their office, a café, or a bus. However, 'Listening Post' offers a different experience because it emits into the room the sounds of the rambling voices sourced from the content, which allows the audience to feel part of the mass communication that is taking place online. It provides a sensorial foothold into the networked system, be this in the role of an eavesdropping

⁵⁹ For further description of the work see: <http://www.earstudio.com/projects/listeningpost.html>
Accessed 20/06/10.

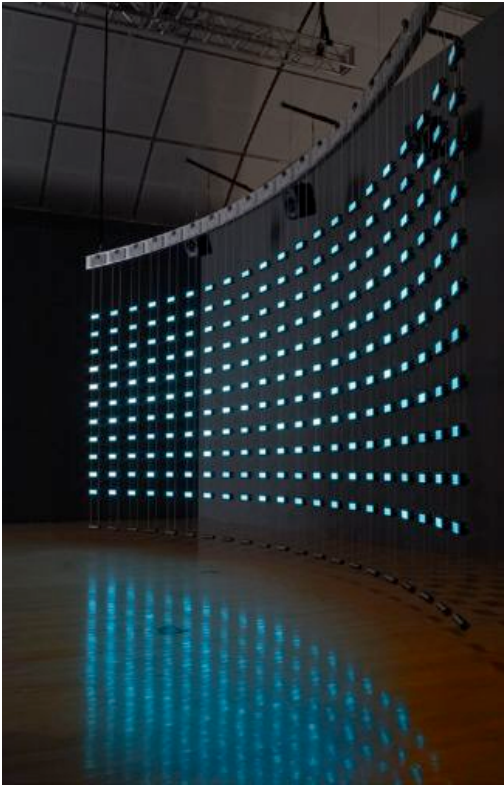


fig. 32 Ben Rubin & Mark Hansen,
'Listening Post' (2003).
Image courtesy of the photographer Ken McCown.

voyeur or through an empathetic encounter with the public narrative. The writer Rita Raley suggests that 'Listening Post' is an example of a piece that "... fundamentally violates the top-centric and left-centric orientation of print" (2009, p. 25). The piece, though is widely accepted as an important contribution to new media and most importantly has captivated the attention and respect of thousands beyond the art world. This means, in part, that though it is a complex installation the visualization is understood by a critical mass, which re-enforces the point that information, data, and user generated content is being effectively communicated in new ways. I speculate that works of this kind, which capture the popular language of the moment and successfully broadcast them in this manner with layers of real-time information, may in fact be helping to expose new methods for the emergent behaviour of learning language and other cognitive processes that are yet to be discovered.

Raley says, that 'Listening Post', "...is a provocative visualization of a collective, of community, on the one hand, and individual affect on the other. It may intuitively seem to be the case that large-scale, multi-

user SMS works evoke or produce the more powerful notion of community,..., but in fact [it is] the unsolicited messages in 'Listening Post' that give us something larger - more hopeful and possibly more disturbing all at once." (p.30) The challenge that arises within this work is that it is hard to identify the community in the piece, other than being sourced primarily from English speakers, because the content streams from such a disparate array of locations on the web. Raley comes to the conclusion that 'Listening Post' is in fact the crowd; a representation of the community on the web and hence the gathering of the global nation. In that sense, 'Pst! **microCONTROL**' is a showcase of the communities that make up the crowd, it tells the story of what happens within specifically placed centres of population. The disparate information seen in 'Listening Post' becomes a more defined culturescape in 'Pst! **microCONTROL**'. The contribution of 'Pst! **microCONTROL**' to this area of new media is important because it not only provides a new structural narrative, brought about by the advent of the web, it also discusses space in terms of one community made up of many cultures and then it places these communities side by side to see their similarities and their differences. As the world becomes more transnational, both through human displacement and through networked connection, it is important to

ensure that social exchange is taking place and that this exchange is continuously nurtured. 'Pst! **microCONTROL**' allows the narratives to unfold and it helps to understand the new communities. In a sense, it acts as a seismograph of a 'new' place. Hanru states that: "This multi-directional movement of people certainly prompts unprecedented exchange between various cultures. Consequentially, it provokes profound changes in different local cultures. Ultimately, it produces new localities, and hence new globalness... this new condition of culture leads to a new understanding of the notion of identity" (2006, p. 11).

In 'SocialMoment', and 'Pst! **microCONTROL**' I have drawn on syndicated content to articulate social situations. The projects became hacks of technology, location, art and society. The results are visualizations of narrative structures that tell the stories of a current globalized community. 'SocialMoment' draws attention to language and emotion that was not broadcast publicly to such masses before. It demonstrates a new pattern of information relay that will potentially shift social behaviour. 'Pst!' and 'Pst! **microCONTROL**' concentrate on the individual publisher of content while constraining them to a place. Over time, the work showcases community life streams in the public domain. These projects provide a glimpse into the current human voice across the planet.

They are moving forwards/

There is a rich and sophisticated history of artists working with networked communication, and researcher Edward Shanken, provides a thorough overview of this practice in the chapter *Survey*, within *Art and Electronic Media* (2009). Among them is 'Send/Receive Satellite Network' (1977)⁶⁰, a piece initiated by several artists working under the collective title of Colab, and enabled by the

60 Liza Bear's blog, one of the projects' main artists, discusses the process of setting up and delivery as well as hosts press clippings from the 'Send/Receive Satellite Network' artist event:

<http://sendreceivesatellitenetwork.blogspot.com/>

61 "In transmedia storytelling, content becomes invasive and permeates fully the audience's lifestyle,..., A transmedia project develops storytelling across multiple forms of media in order to have different "entry points" in the story; entry-points with a unique and independent lifespan but with a definite role in the big narrative scheme." (Jacobacci, 2008)

Accessed 01/10/10.
<http://www.lunchoverip.com/2008/05/from-crossmedia.html>

Centre for New Art Activities and the Franklin Street Arts Centre in New York, Art Com/La Mamelle Inc. in San Francisco and NASA. This work delivered a two-way interactive, visually-networked conversation between people on either side of the U.S.A. over a two-day period. A split screen was used to relay feeds from each city through cable television. It is estimated that the artists' event drew a trans-continent audience of 25 000 people (Shanken, 2009, p. 33). In 1980 Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz made 'Hole-in-Space', a satellite networked public performance between New York and Los Angeles. The artists did not broadcast their plans to set up audio and visual feeds and instead left the event as an open platform. Over three evenings, chance encounters foretold user-generated narratives. The result is described as an "...evening of discovery, followed by a mass migration of families and trans-continental loved ones, some of which had not seen each other for over twenty years" (Zimbardo, 2008, p. 140). This new genre of telecommunication practice became known as *Telematic Art*. The term was established by the artist Roy Ascott as an area of practice that "...permits the artist to liberate art from its conventional embodiment in a physical object located in a unique geographical location. Telematics provides a context for interactive aesthetic encounters and facilitates artistic collaborations among globally dispersed individuals. It emphasizes the process of artistic creation and the systematic relationship between artist, artwork, and audience as part of a social network of communication... [A] distinctive feature of telematic art is

the capabilities of computer-mediated communications to function asynchronously" (Shanken, 2003, p. 53). It placed technology into a new space and allowed future artists to imagine the use of networked technologies to relay new forms of *transmedia*⁶¹ narrative that could marry art, technology/science, tele-communicated stories, experience, behaviour, and geography.

However, artists working within these constraints are still relatively underground and commonly most appreciated within academic education and new technology environments and less so within the arts. This is primarily due to a lack of crossover between subjects. Shanken writes:

“Contemporary art practice and writing are remarkably rich but often lack understanding of science or technology and the interdisciplinary artistic practices and critical discourses that are co-extensive with them. Art-science and new media art offer valuable insights into the implications of science and technology and expand the possibilities of art. However, these discourses often display an impoverished understanding of aesthetic and theoretical developments in contemporary art, resulting in work that fails to resonate in that context”⁶² (2010). While I consider that this has been the case, there are growing numbers of successful artists, several of whom are mentioned in this paper, whose practices do sit on the borders of research between science, physics, engineering, new technologies and contemporary arts. These practitioners are now being supported by an increasing number of curators, galleries, writers and organisations who are advocating the value of new media art. Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham have recently published *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media* (2010). This is an important book that addresses a shift in curatorial practice brought about by the artists’ gained power to self-promote on a large scale via social media, and the issues curators face with the instability, short life and possible immateriality of some new media works. It also aids curators to address the challenges of interpreting this new form of working by providing troubleshooting advice for exhibiting complex technologies. These are methods that will help the underground new media artist to rise up beyond their own efforts of self-promotion. Curators like Shanken and Hanru are spearheading the support of new practices within large cultural centres like San Francisco MoMA and MoMA New York. Rhizome⁶³ and Eyebeam⁶⁴, both based in New York; Furtherfield⁶⁵, British Computer Society in London, and Ars Electronica⁶⁶ in Linz, are among a few supportive organisations who are catering to the creative cross-fertilization through commissioning projects, promoting ideas in early stages of development as well as final works,

62 This is drawn from the introduction to Shanken’s talk for the ‘Transforming Culture in the Digital Age’ conference (2010) <http://www.transformingculture.eu/keynote-speakers/edward-a-shanken>

63 “Rhizome is dedicated to the creation, presentation, preservation, and critique of emerging artistic practices that engage technology. Through open platforms for exchange and collaboration, our website serves to encourage and expand the communities around these practices... We support artists working at the furthest reaches of technological experimentation as well as those responding to the broader aesthetic and political implications of new tools and media. Our organizational voice draws attention to artists, their work, their perspectives and the complex interrelationships between technology, art and culture.” <http://rhizome.org/info/>

64 “Eyebeam is an art and technology center that provides a fertile context and state-of-the-art tools for digital research and experimentation. It is a lively incubator of creativity and thought, where artists and technologists actively engage with culture, addressing the issues and concerns of our time. Eyebeam challenges convention, celebrates the hack, educates the next generation, encourages collaboration, freely offers its contributions to the community, and invites the public to share in a spirit of openness: open source, open content and open distribution.” <http://www.eyebeam.org/about/about>

65 “Furtherfield.org believes that through creative and critical engagement with practices in art and technology people are inspired and enabled to become active co-creators of their cultures and societies. It provides platforms for creating, viewing, discussing and learning about experimental practices at the intersections of art, technology and social change.” <http://www.furtherfield.org/>

publishing peer-reviewed journals and hosting exhibitions and conferences which address the arts, technology and society in one space. Ars Electronica initiated a new prize in 2010 to deal directly with this issue, calling the category ‘Hybrid Art’, which they describe as work that is “... dedicated specifically to today’s hybrid and transdisciplinary projects and approaches to media art. Primary emphasis is on the process of fusing different media and genres into new forms of artistic expression as well as the act of transcending the boundaries between art and research, art and social/political activism, art and pop culture”⁶⁷.

Several universities are also taking active steps towards ensuring that faculties reflect this shift by forming strong ties with neighbouring subject areas that should complement research. Leeds Metropolitan University’s own approach to establish the new Faculty of Art, Environment and Technology, is a step in this direction, and a more specific and non-traditional approach is the one found at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology which does not have faculties at all but

66 “It’s part of Ars Electronica’s nature to constantly seek out what’s new,..., attention is never on art, on technology or on society singly while excluding the other two. Instead, the focus is always on complex changes and interrelationships at the nexus of all three. For three decades now, Ars Electronica has been living out this curiosity, a sense of inquisitiveness that is constantly manifesting itself in new and unexpected ways—as speculative futuristic scenarios or provocative actionism, philosophical debates or analytical scrutiny of current developments. At all times, Ars Electronica defines its artistic-scientific mission as working together with the public as well as working to educate the public. Regardless of periodic changes in content and inevitable structural updates, the fundamental orientation remains the same—the focus is constantly on the issues of critical importance to our society.”
http://www.aec.at/about_about_en.php

67 See: Prix Ars Electronica Hybrid Art available from: http://www.aec.at/prix_categories_en.php?cat=Hybrid%20Art
Accessed 27/07/10.

a series of project-based labs which allow for experts in different subjects to work together. Most importantly, it is not the geographical neighbour that is the most crucial collaborator to liaise with but instead, through the internet, appropriate partners can be identified, and this is the method that Rhizome, Eyebeams and Furtherfield are working progressively forward with.

Among other forms of research, artists are harnessing the opportunity brought on by the advent of new media and networked culture to adapt to new methods of practice that involves working collaboratively across the disciplines of art, technology and social science. By connecting through the internet and social media as well as by using new tools, they are able to make new projects, share knowledge, build partnerships and, in a sense, use hacking as a method of practice. My own practice would

not have become international if it had not been for this network, which allowed me to find like-minded artists and curators who were interested in new media art and experimental methods of making. Neither would I have been able to develop work with the open-source electronic platform Arduino, used to make Pst! **microCONTROL**, if I had not had access to a wealth of shared knowledge online in the form of blogs, tutorials, image databases, published projects, and

meetups⁶⁸. Hanru discusses his interpretation of the new connected artists in this way: “New media – electronic communication and pop cultural events, etc. – have provided them with the perfect means to construct such an ‘underground’ but limitless community. Mobile phones, emails, blogs and online games comprise their fundamental tools, while keeping up with global cultural fashions is the way they nurture their bodies and minds” (2008, p. 46). Furthermore, Hanru goes on to label artists working in this way with terminology that Cao Fei also uses, that of *New New Human Beings*. He states, “they align themselves with completely new forms of living, believing and behaving. At the end, they never hesitate to merge themselves into the new globalised world driven by consumerism and technology, and thus declare a trans-national and ever-changing identity, a kind of multi-cultural and multi-functional identity that always evolves toward plurality and multiplicity” (2008, p.46).

Among the underground are organisations such as New Media Scotland⁶⁹ who have recognized the creative potential of social media and host a *Twitterist in Residence* programme where artists take over their stream for 6 weeks to broadcast anything from stories to snippets of code. TINT⁷⁰, an interdisciplinary media arts organisation, and curators of Unleashed Devices at the Watermans Arts Centre in London (01/09-22/10/10) are spearheading collaborative initiatives not only for artists currently versed in technology but artists who wish to break in to new media. Artists’ like Wood and Dennen are actively contributing to the new geo-tagged culturescape. The artists Marissa Olson and Rachel Perry Welty have embedded themselves into the socially networked system in their respective performances, ‘Marisa’s American Idol Audition Training Blog’ (2005) and ‘Rachel is’ (2009). Olson religiously updated a public blog about the ins and outs of the American Idol process allowing her followers to participate in the process by voting on her attire and to leave their opinions on her status in the competition. Her real reason for participating in the competition was to encourage people

68 A meetup is a term used for “...an online social networking portal that facilitates offline group meetings in various localities around the world. Meetup allows members to find and join groups unified by a common interest, such as politics, books, games, movies, health, pets, careers or hobbies. Users enter their ZIP code (or their city outside the United States) and the topic they want to meet about, and the website helps them arrange a place and time to meet. Topic listings are also available for users who only enter a location.”

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meetup.com>

Accessed 20/06/10.

69 “New Media Scotland is a national development agency fostering artist and audience engagement with all forms of new media practice.”

<http://www.mediascot.org/about>

Accessed 20/06/10.

70 “TINT is an UK based interdisciplinary media arts organisation dedicated to art which is derived from, and reflects upon the intersections of technology and culture. As an artist run organisation our core intentions are concerned with the support of artistic collaboration, acting as a point of juncture for artists working within the fields of science and technology. We assist in pursuing and establishing collaborations with scientists, theorists, artists and other practitioners. Our program of exhibitions and events support an experimentation of media and interactive arts, encouraging audiences to participate, explore and create!”

<http://tintarts.org/about/>

Accessed 20/06/10.

to become interested in blogging and social media and to voice opinions. Welty updated her Facebook profile every six seconds for 15 hours, both garnering a large following by creatively pushing the purpose of the media and making a social critique by exaggerating the popular obsession to regularly update one's status.

The artist Jer Thorp applies himself in the area of visualization with a work ethos that reads "there is an art to evolution"⁷¹. His piece GoodMorning⁷²(2009), uses the social media tool Twitter to relay his narrative; a simple friendly message that thousands of people contribute to the application every day. Using an API, Thorp aggregates the messages based on their location and time of day and the result is a visual indicator of the effort people are giving to social media and to each other. Furthermore, it simply illustrates the enormous potential for narrating culturoscapes using the data found online when a standard regularly broadcast salutation upon rising in the morning is mapped so well.

It is the work of the above curators, writers and artists who are allowing for the creativity in datasets and networked communication to finally surface by recognizing their part in the current culturoscape. They are collectively enabling practices to cross disciplines through collaboration and are hence augmenting the potential for transmedia storytelling. This shift in global behaviour and activity is leading to the creative chronicling of social place that narrates a new form of participation and perception.

⁷¹ See his website: <http://blprnt.com>
Accessed 20/06/10.

⁷² Jer Thorp
<http://blog.blprnt.com/blog/blprnt/goodmorning>
Accessed 20/06/10.

Concluding on Collaborative Practice/ an evolving transformative process/

By late 2005, the web had become an important new creative medium. Artists could simultaneously use the available technology, within it, to make art and to broadcast their practice with increasing ease, no longer remaining dependent on galleries and institutions to promote them. I took part in this space and have contributed to this new genre of art-making by staging performances, designed journeys, and collaborative events within the *digital domain*. My practice projects shifted in dramatic ways in order to demonstrate, actions of extending the self to others to carve out a socially networked space, which exposes personal identity. In doing so, I embarked on a consistent progression towards work that identified extension into the networked *digital domain* as a method for storytelling, which had the necessary outcome of art works that responded to social collaboration and also saw me orchestrating and actively participating in collaborative practice. This process of becoming involved with online and participative space started moderately with 'Child' and 'My Portable Home' and then became more involved with 'The DoGoSee Project'. Consequently, this approach to working enabled much larger and complex projects like 'Our City, Our Music' and 'Pst! **microCONTROL**' to take shape and it enabled my exhibition profile to grow to international status.

In order to achieve this it was imperative to step beyond the body, or what was generally identified in the aims and objectives as the study of the self within the *digital domain*, while continuing to source the intimate situation of operating within this new culturescape. To do so, I explored how social media was enabling original methods of storytelling to pervade, in particular into the area of formed communities, and I focused on social moments that could not have been told before the advent of networked technologies. Furthermore, I looked at how social media stories could be told through geographically defined spaces in an attempt to develop and narrate acts of placemaking within a culturescape.

Collaboration affected my practice-based artistic research outcomes in two ways, one by grounding open source culture and methods of working into my routine, and two, it allowed for a shift from an autobiographical perspective ('Child' & 'Edwige' projects) towards a more expanded practice that investigated extension into and creative reflection on community through narrating social situations. Though some pieces did not involve working with other people, such as the 'SocialMoment' series, nevertheless their critical exploration still contributed to visualizing

the current social shift, to what I see as, a more empowered, collaborative and communicative culture.

This shift occurred as my tools changed from analogue to digital and then to networked devices and social platforms. In an age where technology is being re-imagined, and flooding the western world with attractive consumables, and new web applications that connect people, it is important to understand that these systems are only tools. However, some tools are transformative. The printing press, the telescope, and the screen have socially changed civilization, as has the internet which in turn has contributed to shifts in social media which have indirectly started to empower people the world over. In a sense, these new tools have facilitated a new behaviour and a new form of democracy where action, evaluation, critique and response have become public, obtainable and instantaneous, but most importantly the open source culture's sense of duty to release control to the people enables tools and character to evolve at a more rapid pace. boyd says: "New technologies will continue to emerge and the ways in which they are adopted and integrated into everyday life will reshape practice. There is no linear progression to development and other forces may dampen technological and cultural innovation (Zittrain 2008), but the structural conditions of public life will likely evolve" (2008, p. 302). While Bourriaud specifically discusses that New Media artists are making attempts "...to be contemporary of the production system in which we are in, ..., and that technology, and new possibilities of communicating or producing are actually indirectly influencing the arts. The computer and [the] internet [have] an indirect impact on the artists' way of working and producing. Which is that, any new technology, any new tool opens a new frame of mind, a new possibility of thinking and representing the world"⁷³ (2010). This social and conceptual shift directly influenced how I was able to explore the claim and perception of space within the socially networked *digital domain* because it enabled a new area of practice whose agency was to use, gather and mash-up web content in order to illustrate the potential of the new space where networked stories lie.

73 Contemporary Art and New Media: Towards a Hybrid Discourse (2010) [internet video]. Art Basel. 19 June. Available from: <http://www.art.ch/go/id/mhv> Accessed 27/07/10.

On the whole, the works produced aimed to generate, locate, and situate the self within the technology mediated physical and emotional environment of the *digital domain*. However, using myself as the case study, as a 'trans-individual', actively carving out a home within the *digital domain*, was key to develop the narrated methodology of my research. This practice spread across sketchbooks, Flickr, Twitter, my research blog and on Delicious, and used available tools and systems to relay the information to the public, while it archived the research path. The compilation of my Twitter feed, 'Cultural Probe: 8 July 2008 – 8 July 2010', forms part of the research trajectory. It is written with the current instant and autobiographical social language, which encourages users of social media to intermingle their previously separated identities. Hence my home life, and extensive travel for pleasure and work aligns with workshops I have reviewed and pieces I have made, because these elements inform each other and are reliant

on each other in order for my practice to take shape and for my online identity to form. This layered and networked manner of identifying myself places me within current practice as an artist working with transformative methods.

I have been able to detect absences and to showcase the shift, gaps and failures of information flow. I have permitted myself the freedom to hack syndicated information flow and social media tools in order to repurpose or re-order them to tell new structural narratives. By understanding GPS, IP addresses and API's, I have been able to dig deeper into the technology so that I could reveal the potential of these products to tell human stories. In a sense, these new tools have virtually become invisible and what has surfaced to the top is a new broadcast system that chronicles global identity. This network can be self-curated to relay information in transformative ways. I have latched on to this shift by allowing myself the liberty to become irrational and to dream, as I played with creative attempts to become a part of the system in order to develop imaginative spaces, or to placemake within it. This was essential in order to achieve my aim and objectives to embody the *digital domain* through performance by living vicariously through Edwige Pronovost, to analyse how humans as characters appropriate and make social or structural claims on space, in particular in the effort to form a home, and to document the physically immersive and augmented situation encountered within digital space. This is also how I investigated embodiment within technology enhanced environments as one hybrid functional/dysfunctional operating space. The Edwige pieces failed to make one believe I was part of a computer programme's space but yet I was readily recognised, even with limited cosmetic effort, in act as a virtual world character. I was able to place myself into a new space by challenging the dated pre-conceived notion that what is held within the computer is impenetrable to the physical. In fact, what exists is a new social space that provides augmented storytelling possibilities and a new chronicling of place.

In 1997, Aaron Betsky curator of *Icons: Magnets of Meaning* wrote in the exhibition catalogue:

In a world of urban sprawl, we are increasingly nomads who alight in one spot only momentarily. Once there, we couple ourselves to a place, and to a sense of belonging, through signs, ciphers, or figures. Our telephone number, our street address, our various account numbers, our social-security designation, and the street signs that tell us where we are – all of these contain, in both a direct and a symbolic manner, the information that tells us we are at home. The @ symbol is the most recent of such designations, and perhaps the most mobile. Through this sign, we couple ourselves, not to a location, but to a system of information. We can take our address with us no matter where we are, but it defines us as a member of either an institution (a company or a government agency) or a service. With the @ symbol we are both someplace very specific, where any computer in the world can find us, and nowhere at all. (p. 222)

I argue that since 1997 the @ symbol has developed into a placemaker through actions of extending identities online; grounding people, places, events and objects within the internet. This development allows any voice to permeate a social and political structure that was previously curated by the media moguls, large companies, fame and politics. The location of this voice informs the identity of the individual or situation, which can, for instance, help society to understand

74 The MoMA declared on 22 March 2010 that is had acquired the @ symbol into its collection of priceless artefacts. For the web announcement and a short history of the symbols relevance in social history see this post by Paola Antonelli: http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/03/22/at-moma Accessed 29/09/10.

a persons' methods and reasons for storytelling. The symbolic acquisition of the @ symbol by the MoMA in 2010⁷⁴ further points to the importance this icon has had on social culture by recognizing the transformative effects it made on forming a place for people within new networked space. This action conceptually recognizes that those attached to an @ symbol, through email or a twitter name for example, are in fact individual participants in a cultural shift.

The embodiment of location sets the context for '647 days 18 hours' and 'My Portable Home', which are not just about relaying a place or networked conversation between two loved ones, but instead about

how the transnational can make a home wherever they are, and how independently each piece "...maintains a productive tension between the local and the global, the concrete and the conceptual... [Furthermore, it] ...counters a significant and fundamental assumption – that the strength of our homes, our nations and our identities rests on our ability to provide unyielding foundations." (Meskimmon, 2010, p. 15).

By using the locative aspects of the @ symbol, GPS and storytelling combined with working with collaborators, the art works I have made, not only showcase individual stories, they enable community narratives to surface upon a network. Importantly, the later projects draw attention to situation within the new culturescape as an iconic social shift, by chronicling markers of important points in time when society stopped and listened more intently and occasionally changed their behaviours as a result of what they had just learned. By sharing my methods and my research practice I am an equal participant in the networked space. Perhaps 'Pst! **microCONTROL**' will allow a greater conversation to surface on how societies that are censored from the Western world are still able to circulate information and that their commitment to communicate is a political change that is shifting society now more than ever. The obstruction of feeds from China and Cuba allow the global society both to imagine a communication space that is freed and it also allows Western Society to imagine a closed space or censored space and how that imposition would extremely disrupt their lives. Importantly, conversational spaces enabled by social media can place people of all walks of life and nationality side by side. In particular, 'Pst! **microCONTROL**', allows for a democratic method for local voices to be broadcast. Hanru claims that "...the social and political claims of different "new" and "foreign" communities must be heard, and cultural differences must be accepted and even promoted as a key element for the society to adapt to the global change and hence become more "social(ist)" (2006, p. 13).

I do not have a grand vision of what society could become because of this social shift but I do recognize that the tools that are available now allow a level of user control, engagement and creativity that has not been there before. This is enabling society to imagine and create within a new framework and is most definitely changing perspectives and communication. While the open source culture, and in particular artists and designers working with these methods and new tools, are not the only area pushing society forward in positive directions, by being a part of this collaborative philosophy of practice and community I am able to contribute my research to an area of new thinking. The tools at my disposal have affected my practice outcomes as they have enabled me to make art work at an increased rate of production and complexity. They have eased the exchange of information with my peers and fellow researchers by countering the time lost by travel to speak to someone in person or to set up a conversation. This has allowed me to engage more fully with global conversations as I have been able to share in multiple locations at once. This is a benefit that other users of social media's attributes of collaborative practice experience as well. As these tools evolve and society becomes more accustomed to working collaboratively across digitally networked space I can see how the rate of production, complexity of research achievements, and attainment of solutions will be uncovered at a more rapid and productive pace.

Mahatma Ghandi said: "We must become the change we want to see." By engaging with new technologies, I and other artists working within new media practices, are able to express our politics and our situations while remaining grounded in transnational spaces. This was predicted by Elizabeth A. T. Smith, who writes that Holzer's work is in part responsible for paving a path for current artist practice, stating that her, "...past and present work stands to prefigure that of a new generation of artists whose engagement with the politics of the world around them reveal in the making of a complex, multivalent art that operates on the level of affect and emotion and, ..., unleashes unconscious processes and imaginative scenarios" (2008, p. 31-32). By telling location-based stories through the visualization of the situation of syndicated identity I am a contributor and participant in an innovative form of art making. The works produced imaginatively repurpose common social tools and public content to draw attention to the new culturescape, and by continuously broadcasting and archiving my discoveries and contributions to new media practice throughout the research project, I have shared my practice within the system it documents. This positions my work in an area of new media practice that no longer just resides with China's generation of young artists; it globally encompasses Tapscott's Net Generation as well. These works, and the practices of those artists mentioned within this document, are a part of an original and current wave of art practice where the focal point is to produce work that is *socially useful*. This practice is built on the emergent network to demonstrate the potential of a geo-located community as a narrator of public space. Bourriaud says that "...[by] manipulating the shattered forms of the collective scenario, that is, by considering them not indisputable facts but precarious structures to be used as tools, ...artists produce singular narrative spaces of which their work is the *mise-en-scène*. It is the use of the world that allows one to create new

narrative” (2002, p. 46). As a result of my research practice, I can acknowledge that new tools open new frames of mind, and that by pushing their potential further within my practice, I have made work that “...produces relationships to the world and in one form or another makes its relationship to space and time material” (Bourriaud, p. 94).

Beyond the PhD research project I intend to progress my practice and actions to take a deeper look at how mapped storytelling through the visualization of syndicated data can affect learning. In particular I'm interested in how web-based social sharing is affecting localized behaviour. As an initial step, I will contribute my research methods for 'Pst! **microCONTROL**' to the open-source community in a more formal manner by submitting it for inclusion in relevant journals. However, beyond publishing, and continuing to exhibit my work, I want to start exposing creative DiY and hacking practices that use the emergent system to relay *socially useful* narratives. New media artists' work is still under represented within the contemporary arts. As discussed within the '**They are moving forwards**' section of this document, technical difficulties with presenting new media art hinder its showcase. Archiving or collecting it is also a challenge as these works of art are often delicate and have a limited lifespan due to the shifting system on which they are built. Another reason for under-representation is that these artists are not necessarily working within the arts sector. Within universities I will continue to advocate the importance of trans-disciplinary practices and the need to share with an open-source agenda. It is important in the new globalised and instant environment of social exchange to boost collaborative models as they will ultimately challenge research outcomes to become more democratic. More ambitious goals can be reached in this method. Artists working in this area are showcasing and uncovering newly discovered stories that discuss and critique the very cusp of information available. I intend to build collaborative partnerships with these thinkers and in doing so will build my own practice.

Within the emergent network I hold the roles of participant and creative contributor. While I have simultaneously been placemaking through storytelling within the networked digital domain, my work has formed part of the culturescape that defined and broadcasted my research. With the acquired methodology to produce to a socially useful agenda I take my practice forward to uncover original detail within the cosmopolitan space and to push new media, DiY, and creative hacking culture forward. It is by emotionally engaging with this new manner of communicating and creating art works, and through technically using the emergent system to develop original methods of practice that I have been contributing, to my obligation, as an artist, to challenge the status quo and to make work of a transformative nature.

Research Practice Outcomes///

Exhibitions/

2010

Over Yonder

'Open Window in City'*

networked installation between Zweites Büro Dortmund, Germany and ESA Leeds, UK,
8-12 November.

Exhibition website: <http://wygoveryonder.wordpress.com/>

Short Listed for: *NorthernNet Creative Commissions*, August.

Invasion of Privacy

'Pst! **micro**CONTROL'

Notfamouslyet, Oxford, UK. 22-31 October.

Exhibition website: <http://www.notfamouslyet.co.uk/home/2010/9/9/invasion-of-privacy.html>

Bring the Happy

'The DoGoSee Project - Leeds'

Invisible Flock - The Light, Leeds, 15/10 - 22/11.

Exhibition website: <http://www.bringthehappy.co.uk>

Unleashed Devices

'Pst! **micro**CONTROL' (with support from Arts Council England)

Watermans Art Centre, London, 01/09 – 22/10.

Exhibition website: http://www.watermans.org.uk/exhibitions/unleashed_devices/

Catalogue: http://issuu.com/tintarts/docs/unleashed_devices_catalague/3

Press Reviews:

'Hackers tackle domestic devices'

by: BBC

1 October 2010

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-11444695>

'Robot creates graffiti sketches of toilet users'

by: Olivia Solon

28 September 2010

<http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2010-09/28/robot-creates-graffiti-sketches-of-toilet-users>

'Art and games: three intriguing exhibitions you should try to see'

by: Keith Stuart

Tuesday 24 August 2010

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/gamesblog/2010/aug/24/games-art-robots>

'Unleashed Devices at Watermans'

by: Katharina Hetzeneder

23 Sep 2010

<http://londondesignfestival.com/blog/unleashed-devices-watermans>

Twitter/Art+Social Media

'SocialMoment'

Diane Farris Gallery, Vancouver, 01/04 – 01/05.

Exhibition website: <http://www.dianefarrisgallery.com/exhibit/twitter/index.html>

Press Reviews:

'Art tweets in blips and bleeps in Twitter/Art + Social Media'

By: Alexander Varty - Georgia Straight/Visual Arts Reviews

April 15 April 2010

<http://www.straight.com/article-302823/vancouver/art-tweets-blips-and-bleeps>

'Twitter takes a bow: Vancouver gallery explores the fine art of tweeting'

Vancouver Sun

By: Gillian Shaw

7 April 2010

<http://tinyurl.com/3xxmgwo>

'Twitter/Art+SocialMedia Show at Diane Farris Gallery'

By: Jonathan Hanley - VO, Vancouver Observer

5 April 2010

<http://tinyurl.com/3y9sdbw>

'Getting the art world a-Twitter:

Ambitious exhibition to probe effects of social media on artists'

By: Hans Ongansoy - THE PROVINCE

1 April 2010

<http://tinyurl.com/3y8ya2o>

'Art exhibit all a twitter about social media'

By: Vancouver Courier

26 March 2010

<http://tinyurl.com/3ydclrk>

'Gallery Exhibition Preview: Questions, not answers'

By: Adam Cristobal - The Peak

date unknown

<http://www.the-peak.ca/article/21258-gallery-exhibition-preview-questions-n>

Arts Birthday,
 'Cyber Party'* Live streaming of exhibitions and events around the world.
 ESA, Leeds, 17 January.
Stream Archive: <http://www.justin.tv/artsbirthdayleeds/videos>

2009

Amsterdam Biennale 2009
 'Pst - Physical Space Tweets'
 Mediamatic, ESA Leeds Pavilion, 16/10/09-3/01/10.
Exhibition website: <http://www.mediamatic.net/page/97484/en>

'Our City, Our Music Launch'
 Leeds Met Students Union & NTI Leeds, June.
Project Website: <http://www.OurCityOurMusic.com>

United

'Edwige_and_Megan_at_Barkston_House_Leeds'
 East Street Arts, Leeds, 26-27 June.
Exhibition website: http://www.esaweb.org.uk/page.asp?sectionIdentifier=2009323_32922000

2008

Ours: Democracy in the Age of Branding
 'The Ottawa River/La riviere des Outaouais'*
 Vera List Center for Art and Politics, New York, 16/10/2008 – 30/01/2009.
Exhibition website: <http://www.branding-democracy.org/>
Installation image: <http://tinyurl.com/32p6kl4>

VIDEOCRACY-REBRANDING ACTS TINA B.
 'The Ottawa River/La riviere des Outaouais'*
 Prague Contemporary Art Festival, Czech Republic, 25/09 - 15/10.
Archive website: <http://www.videoartworld.com/data/bulletins/TINA-B-08.html>
Screen grab of event: <http://tinyurl.com/2wove9y>

The Mirror Stage - NeMe International Video Exhibition,
 'Child'
 Lanitis Foundation & IMCA, Cyprus, 17-29 September.
Exhibition website: <http://neme-imca.org/category/themirrorstage/>
Catalogue: <http://tinyurl.com/36myw4d>

The Travellers Box (The Sandwich Box)
 'My Portable Home'
 ICA Overgaden, Copenhagen, June.
Exhibition website: <http://www.thetravellersbox.org/>
Installation image by Lars Vilhelmsen: <http://tinyurl.com/3yfe9w7>

The Travellers Box (The Sandwich Box)
'My Portable Home'

WOOLOO New Life Berlin, June.

Exhibition website: <http://www.thetravellersbox.org/>

Journey - Departure Lounge

'The DoGoSee Project - Leeds and Berlin Interviews'

East Street Arts, May 8-10.

Exhibition website: http://www.esaweb.org.uk/page.asp?sectionIdentifier=2007821_50709170

2007

Odoocurrent

'Child'

Genghis Gallery, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 10-30 April.

Catalogue: Available upon request.

Exhibition Blog + PDF: <http://odooocurrent2007.blogspot.com/> + <http://tinyurl.com/32toqgd>

Installation image by Juliet MacDonald: <http://tinyurl.com/2wc2ugj>

Leeds Artists' Open Show

'The DoGoSee Project - Leeds map'

Leeds City Art Gallery, UK.

2006

Situation Leeds

'The DoGoSee Project - Leeds'

Leeds Met Gallery, UK 2006.

Exhibition Brochure: <http://tinyurl.com/39otnaf>

Project link: <http://www.dogosee.com/nfblog/?cat=7>

'The DoGoSee Project - Highbury'

Hope Gallery, London, UK.

Project link: <http://www.dogosee.com/nfblog/?p=70>

Testbed 4

'The DoGoSee Project - Leeds'

Leeds Met University Gallery, UK.

Project link: <http://www.dogosee.com/nfblog/?cat=5>

'The DoGoSee Project - Berlin'

Live Project based throughout the city of Berlin.

Project link: <http://www.dogosee.com/nfblog/?cat=1>

2005

SightSonic 05 Festival

'Beat'

York City Centre, UK.

Festival Site: http://music.york.ac.uk/sightsonic/archive/2005/programme_sat.html

From the Ordinary

'Stairs'*

Leeds Met University Gallery, UK.

Exhibition Brochure: <http://tinyurl.com/39lj4qy>**Installation image:** <http://tinyurl.com/36u6xlf>*Immediate 3*

'The Ottawa River/La riviere des Outaouais'*

Site Gallery, Sheffield, UK.

Catalogue: Available upon request.*Testbed 3*

'Stairs', 'Beat' and 'Beach Chair & Window'*

Leeds Met University Gallery, UK.

'Beat' Installation: <http://tinyurl.com/38ne2bk>**'Beach Chair & Window' Installation:** <http://tinyurl.com/358jnsr>*** Works listed with this symbol did not receive a mention within this document.**

'Open Window in City' is a new commissioned installation and it forms the first piece in the post-PhD practice. It is both a homage to 'Hole-in-Space' (1980) by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz and it is an indicator of how much technology has progressed since the 1980's. 'Open Window in City' will allow for a public to interact with people in another city, placing importance on human contact, through live feed audio/visual display.

For 'Cyber Party' I was asked to interpret the *ESA Arts Birthday*. I liaised with other events happening around the world and developed a live stream that featured interaction between parties in Swansea, New York, Winnipeg, Kingston, and Tokyo.

'The Ottawa River/La rivière des Outaouais' was made in 2004 during my MA at Winchester School of Art-Southampton University. This piece has helped build my practice internationally and it was used in my application for the PhD. The work points to the complex experience of transnational identity and fragile political environments.

It can be viewed here: <http://www.wooloo.org/exhibition/entry/107530>

'Stairs' was part of the *From the Ordinary* exhibition. It used CCTV to document the journey of gallery visitors from the main gallery space to the upstairs space by projecting the movement of their feet in front of them as they moved through the space.

'Stairs', 'Beat' and 'Beach Chair & Window' were made during my the *Testbed 3* residency using CCTV. This research led to the expansion of 'Beat' for *SighSonic05* and the remake of 'Stairs' for *From the Ordinary*.

Speaking at conferences/

2010

TEDxLeeds 2010

'Embedding Narrative/Extending Social Space: Our City, Our Music'
The Mint, Leeds, 10 November.

Conference Website: <http://www.tedxleeds.com/>

Place, Space & Identity, Faculty of Arts & Society

'Placemaking in the Networked Digital Domain'

Leeds Metropolitan University, 22 June.

Conference Programme: <http://tinyurl.com/3xfokwj>

O'Reilly's Ignite Leeds

'Pst! the surreptitious beckoning of attention'

Rose Bowl, Leeds, 19 May.

Press Review:

'Leeds' bright sparks ignite for evening of geekery'

Guardian Leeds

By: Sarah Hartley, 20 May.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/leeds/2010/may/20/leeds-ignite-digital-internet>

2009

B.TWEEN09

'Location-based Narrative Workshop - Alfie Dennen & Our City, Our Music'

FACT, Liverpool, June

Conference Programme: <http://www.btween.co.uk/pages/thursday-11th-june>

Conference Promotional Video: <http://tinyurl.com/3ylcovl>

BarCamp

'Our City, Our Music'

NTI Leeds, 14 May.

2008

Hewlett Packard mscapeFest08

'Our City, Our Music: Case study'

Belfast, UK, 02/12 - 03/12.

Handheld Learning 2008

'Our City, Our Music: using mScapes to map new narratives'

London, UK. The Brewery, Barbican, 13/10 - 15/10.

Conference Website: <http://www.handheldlearning2008.com/home>

EVA London: Electronic Information, the Visual Arts and Beyond

Research Workshop Programme participant

British Computer Society, London, July.

Awards/

2010

Shortlisted Artist in NorthernNet Creative Commission.
'Open Window in City'

Recipient of Grant for the Arts - Arts Council England
'Pst! **microCONTROL**'

Selected for ARTiMELT Academy - The Culture Company & Arts Council England supported programme for arts organisations and individuals based in Yorkshire. Providing mentoring, training and financial support to develop a creative project.
'Pst! **microCONTROL**'

Shortlisted Artist in Continuum Commission.
'Pst! **microCONTROL**'

2009

Northern Design Competition Finalist in New Media and Product Design, June.
Catalogue: <http://tinyurl.com/2w2sd4w>

2008

Recipients of the Exploding Narrative development grant from HPLabs and Just.b at b.TWEEN08 conference. Total prize £11 000 + travel to Bristol and Belfast for training and publicity. The project proposal was screened at the ICA London, Manchester Art Gallery, and at FACT, Liverpool.

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Notes on images/

fig. 1 Megan Smith, 'Beat' (2005) installation shot, *Testbed 3*, Leeds Met Gallery.

fig. 2 Megan Smith, 'Child' (2007) digital still from video.

fig. 3 Barrett Lyon [The Opte Project] 'Mapping the Internet' a.k.a. 'Day in the life of the Internet' (2003) digital image. Creative Commons Image.

Reproduced under the creative commons license: Attribution NonCommercial ShareAlike 1.0 GenericImage.SourceAvailablefrom:<http://blyon.com/blyon-cdn/opte/maps/static/1069524880_LGL2D.2048x2048.png> [Accessed 27 June 2010].

fig. 4 'Adam Stacey, London, 07/07/05' (2005), on a tube train between King's Cross and Russell Square, London, July 7. Creative Commons image.

Reproduced under the creative commons license: Attribution 2.0 Generic Image. Source Available from:<<http://moblog.co.uk/view.php?id=7757>> [Accessed 10 May 2010].

fig. 5 The DoGoSee.com Project, 'Leeds Map' (2007) digital print. 2378mm × 1682 mm.

fig. 6 Aaron Koblin, 'Flight Patterns' (2005) digital image. Image courtesy the artist.

fig. 7 Aaron Koblin, 'New York Talk Exchange' (2008) digital image. Image courtesy the artist.

fig. 8 Megan Smith, 'My Portable Home' (2008) digital still from video.

fig. 9 Megan Smith, 'Cultural Probe' (2008) digital collage made for the launch of the experiment.

fig. 10 Megan Smith, 'Cultural Probe: 8 July 2008 - 8 July 2010' (2010) sample from early book design.

fig. 11 Megan Smith '647 days 18 hours' (2010) 2008-08-28 16:33:48 - 2010-06-07 11:16:54 Distance: 46015.0 km - Avg speed: 3 km/h - Max speed: 23592 km/h, digital image.

fig. 12 Megan Smith, 'Playground/Play Ground/Ground Play/Lay Round PG' (2009) screen grab from blog.

fig. 13 Megan Smith, 'Edwige_and_Megan_at_H-Building_Leeds' (2008) digital collage.

fig. 14

Megan Smith, 'Edwige_and_Megan_at_CNTower_TO' (2009) digital image.

fig. 15 + 16

Pipilotti Rist, 'Selbstlos im Lavabad' [Selfless In The Bath Of Lava] (1994) audio video installation (installation view at SFMOMA, San Francisco; photo by Ian Reeves). Images courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

fig. 17 Megan Smith, 'Edwige Selflessly Caged in the Web' (2009) digital reconstruction of web-based piece originally created 23/01/09.

fig. 18 Megan Smith, 'As I try to be an avatar & Edwige tries to be me' (2010) digital still from video.

fig. 19 Megan Smith, 'Edwige_and_Megan_at_Barkston_House_Leeds' (2009) installation shot, *United - ESA*, Barkston House.

fig. 20 'Our City, Our Music' (2009) sample of the map embedded on the handheld devices.

fig. 21 (2010) + fig. 22 (2009) 'Our City, Our Music-Leeds' (2009) images taken during public tours. Photos by Ben Halsall.

fig. 23 'Our City, Our Music-Leeds' (2009) image taken during public tour. Photo by Ben Halsall.

fig. 24 Jeremy Wood, 'Traverse Me' (2010) The University of Warwick. Drawn on foot. 238 miles of GPS tracks. 17 days. Image courtesy of the artist.

fig. 25 Janis Krums [[@jkrums](#)], (2009) digital image taken 15 January. Image courtesy of the photographer.
Image available from: <<http://janiskrums.com/miracle-on-the-hudson/>> [Accessed 20 June 2010].

fig. 26 Megan Smith, 'Social Moment: [@jkrums](#) Jan 15 2009' (2010) 8" X10" digital print.

fig. 27 Megan Smith, 'Social Moment: [@iranabad](#) Jun 20 2009' (2010) 8" X10" digital print.

fig. 28 Megan Smith, 'Social Moment: [@Astro_Nicole](#) Sep 30 2009' (2010) 8" X10" digital print.

fig. 29 Megan Smith 'Social Moment: [@iamdiddy](#) Jul 08 2009' (2010) 8" X10" digital print.

fig. 30 Megan Smith, 'Pst! Physical Space Tweets' (2009) digital image, *ESA Leeds Pavillion-Amsterdam Biennale 2009*, Mediamatic.

fig. 31 Megan Smith, 'Pst! **micro**CONTROL' (2010) installation shot, *Unleashed Devices*, Watermans, London, 10' X 6'.

fig. 32 Ben Rubin & Mark Hansen, 'Listening Post' (2003). Image courtesy of the photographer Ken McCown.

Image available from: <www.flickr.com/photos/kenmccown/237411404/> [Accessed 20 June 2010].

Hyperlinks included within the document/

- p. 4 <http://www.megansmith.ca/PhD>
- p. 10 Megan + Edwige/ the bending of space but not me **links to:** p. 43
Cultural Probe/ a method for tagging space **links to:** p. 33
- p. 13 Megan + Edwige/ the bending of space but not me **links to:** p. 43
- p. 14 (Fake, C. 2005) **links to:**
<http://blog.flickr.net/en/2005/03/20/yahoo-actually-does-acquire-flickr>
(Abram, C. 2006) **links to:**
<http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=2210227130>
(Arrington, M. 2006) **links to:**
<http://techcrunch.com/2006/07/15/is-twtr-interesting>
The Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation **links to:**
<http://www.transnational.org.uk/about>
- p. 15 Virtual Revolution **links to:** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/virtualrevolution/>
- p. 18 <http://georgekhut.com/artworks/cardiomorphologies/cardiomorphologies-v1>
- p. 19 The Mirror Stage **links to:** <http://neme-imca.org/category/themirrorstage/>
Tacita Dean **links to:**
http://www.mariangoodman.com/exhibitions/2009-04-02_tacita-dean/
Bill Viola **links to:** <http://www.billviola.com/>
Darren Almond **links to:** <http://www.whitecube.com/artists/almond/vii/>
- p. 20 <http://www.megansmith.ca/child/child.html>
- p. 21 Raymond, E. (2001) **links to:** <http://www.catb.org/esr/faqs/hacker-howto.html>
Raymond, E. (2003) **links to:** <http://catb.org/~esr/jargon/html/meaning-of-hack.html>
- p. 23 Infinite Canvas Idea **links to:** <http://scottmcccloud.com/4-inventions/canvas/index.html>
- p. 24 'Mapping the Internet', also known as, 'Day in the life of the Internet' **links to:**
<http://blyon.com/blyon-cdn/opte/maps/static/1069524880.LGL.2D.2048x2048.png>
- p. 25 <http://www.danah.org/papers/TakenOutOfContext.pdf>
- p. 26 'The DoGoSee Project' (DoGoSee) **links to:** <http://www.DoGoSee.com>
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0985850#m_en_gb0985850
- p. 27 Emotional Cartography **links to:** <http://emotionalcartography.net/>
- p. 28 <http://www.flickr.com/photos/yeoaaron/5000000000/>
<http://www.bigartmob.com>
- p. 29 Flight Patterns **links to:** <http://www.aaronkoblin.com/work/flightpatterns/index.html>
- p. 30 'New York Talk Exchange' **links to:** <http://www.aaronkoblin.com/work/NYTE/index.html>
Design and the Elastic Mind **links to:**
<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2008/elasticmind/>
- p. 31 Thinking Digital **links to:** <http://www.thinkingdigital.co.uk/newcastle10/>
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- p. 78 [They are working moving forwards links to: p. 68](#)

Collaborator biographies/

Ben Dalton is a Principal Lecturer and Researcher at Leeds Metropolitan University. He has a background in experimental physics, electronics, art and design. He earned a Masters with the Object-Based Media group at the MIT MediaLab, where he conducted research into how machines can determine acoustic and spatial context from the sounds of our every-day lives and the ways distributed acoustic sensing can enrich human interaction.

Ben Halsall is Senior Lecturer of digital media at Leeds Metropolitan University. He has a background in Fine Art and worked collaboratively with The Leeds 13. He is co-founder of www.DoGoSee.com. He studied at The University of Leeds under Terry Atkinson and Ken Hay with a brief escapade abroad to Finland to study at the Kuvataideakatemia in the Time & Space department.



Acknowledgements/

To my Supervisor Dr Åsa Andersson for immeasurable support and meticulous dedication at every stage of this project and for commuting from Sweden for too long.

To my Director of Studies Dr. Liz Sterling and my Research Advisor Ian Truelove for their guidance and support through the journey.

To the artists, researchers, and creative thinkers, I have discovered and met over the course of the research project, for stimulating my practice and my mind.

To the many arts organisations who have shown my work. In particular, thanks to Karen & Jon at ESA Leeds who are always pressuring me into exciting and complex projects.

To Ben Dalton for opening the door to what became Our City, Our Music and for tireless days and evenings helping me to crack Arduino code.

To my high school guidance counselor who was incredibly unclear about what I would have to achieve after I ambitiously, but naively ticked all the boxes on her survey.

To Christine for being an excellent sounding board, great friend and a fantastic proof-reader but above all for sharing the delight in living abroad.

To my mom, dad and grandparents who year upon year have supported me as I kept climbing to this summit, and have taught me how to work my fingers to the bone.

To my husband and creative partner, Ben Halsall, who has become an invaluable research assistant. For helping me to achieve bigger and better through 'The DoGoSee Project', 'Our City, Our Music', the editing of the 'Edwige' projects, and for enduring support with all the other creative tasks I have asked for assistance with. For manning the ship while I've been engrossed in my work, loving me for my eccentricities, and above all for being an incredible parent to our daughter.

And, to my daughter for being patient with me, and loving me endlessly.

