Digital Culture & Heritage
Patrimoine & Culture Numérique

Haus der Kulturen der Welt, BERLIN
Aug. 31st - Sept. 2nd, 2004
31 Août - 2 septembre 2004

A MAP LARGER THAN THE TERRITORY

Karen O'Rourke

Université Paris 1 (Paris), France

http://www.mapterritory.com

Published with the sponsorship of the French Ministry of Culture and Communication

Actes publiés avec le soutien de la Mission de la Recherche et de la Technologie du Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, France

Interprétation simultanée du colloque et traduction des actes réalisées avec le soutien de l'Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie

Abstract (EN)

For Australian Aboriginals territory is not a plot of land enclosed within borders but an interlocking network of paths or 'ways through'. To survive in the city, as in the Outback, we tend to spend much of our time moving from one place to another. As psychogeographers studying "the effects of the geographical environment ... on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Debord), we can use our moving bodies to deconstruct the city-space. What subliminal messages are conveyed by urban planning? In what ways is our experience shaped by environmental factors, weather conditions, passers-by or random incidents? If memory and consciousness are an important part of what it means to be human, can we remember where we went just yesterday? *A Map Larger Than the Territory* is a web-based application that enables participants to reactivate memories of place and space by representing their paths across the city. The project aims to build experiential topographies based on such notions as marker, rendezvous, obstacle, path-building block. To rezalize this project it was necessary to develop a method of notation for participants to mark up their paths, a database of urban intineraries and a web interface to search, sort and display this data.

Keywords: Map, territory, web, intercultural, multilingual, negotiation, space, psychogeography..

Resumé (FR)

Le territoire des Aborigènes d'Australie n'est pas un lopin de terre enfermé dans des frontières, mais un réseau interconnecté de "chemins qui traversent". Pour survivre en ville, comme dans le désert, nous passons beaucoup de notre temps à nous déplacer. En tant que psychogéographes étudiant "les effets de l'environnement géographique...sur les émotions et le comportement des individus" (Debord), nous pourrons utiliser nos corps en mouvement pour déconstruire l'espace urbain. Quels sont les messages subliminaux véhiculés par l'urbanisme? De quelle manière notre expérience est-elle modelée par des facteurs environnementaux, des conditions météorologiques, des passants ou des incidents aléatoires ? Si la mémoire et la conscience jouent un rôle important dans le fait d'être humain, nous souvenons-nous de ce que nous faisions hier encore? *Une carte plus grande que le territoire* est une application Web qui permet aux internautes de réactiver des

souvenirs de lieux et d'espaces par la représentation de leurs chemins à travers la ville. Le projet vise à construire des topographies expérientielles basées sur des notions telles que repère, rendez-vous, obstacle, brique-à-construire-un-chemin. Pour le réaliser il a fallu développer une méthode de notation pour permettre aux participants de rendre compte, tracer leurs voyages, une base de données d'itinéraires urbains et une interface Web qui leur permet de visionner, trier ces données.

Mots-clefs: Carte, territoire, web, interculturel, multilingue, negociation, espace, psychogéographie.

Zusammenfassung (DE)

Das Territorium der australischen Aborigines ist nicht ein Stück Land, das zwischen Grenzen eingeschlossen ist, sondern ein ineinander greifendes Netzwerk von querenden Wegen. Um in der Stadt wie auch im Busch zu überleben, tendieren wir dazu, viel von unserer Zeit damit zu verbringen, uns von einem Ort zum anderen zu bewegen. Als Psychographen, die „die Auswirkungen der geographischen Umgebung (…) auf die Emotionen und das Verhalten von Individuen“ (Debord) untersuchen, können wir unsere sich bewegenden Körper dazu benutzen, um den Stadtraum zu analysieren. Welche unterschwelligen Mitteilungen werden durch die Stadtplanung transportiert? Auf welche Weise prägen die Faktoren der Umgebung, ob dies nun Gegebenheiten, Passanten oder zufällige Vorfälle sind, unser Erleben? Wenn die Erinnerung und das Bewusstsein einen wichtigen Teil von dem bilden, was einen Menschen ausmacht, können wir uns dann erinnern, wohin wir gestern gegangen sind? *Eine Karte größer als das Territorium* ist eine Webbasierte Applikation, die es den Teilnehmern ermöglicht, ihre Erinnerungen an Ort und Raum zu reaktivieren, indem ihre Wege durch die Stadt grafisch dargestellt werden. Ziel des Projekts ist es, basierend auf solchen Begriffen wie Wegweiser, Rendezvous, Hindernis, Block für die Erbauung einer Straße, empirische Topographien zu konstruieren. Für die Realisation des Projekts war es notwendig eine Methode für die Aufzeichnung der Wege der Teilnehmer zu entwickeln. Eine Datenbank von städtischen Straßenkarten sowie ein Web-Interface wurden entworfen, mit der diese Daten gesucht, sortiert und angezeigt werden können.

Schlüsselwörter: Karte, Territorium, Web, interkulturell, mehrsprachig, Raum, Psychogeographie.

A Map Larger Than the Territory is a web application that enables participants to re-activate memories associated with place and space by representing their urban travels online. To realize this project has meant developing :

1. A web-based method of notation for participants to mark up their journeys,
2. A searchable, modifiable database of participants' urban itineraries,
3. A multi-layered, re-scalable map interface that allows one to visualize, search and sort the itineraries on file.

If territory is defined as an interrelated network of paths or 'ways through', the map materialises and connects individual trajectories, individual memories, while the database offers the means to explore them.

I. Territories, maps and databases

Lewis Carroll invented several memorable maps: from the Bellman's map in the Hunting of the Snark -- "a perfect and absolute blank"-- to "the grandest idea of all", a map made "on the scale of a mile to a mile". Although the latter could never be spread out, because the farmers feared it would "cover the whole country and shut out the sunlight", the idea was not abandoned: "We now use the country itself as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well" (Carroll, 1893). Borges (1975) describes a similar one: "of the same scale as the Empire", the map "coincided with it point for point". Recently Lev Manovich has used the image to describe online "indexes and the data they index", only now the map is even greater in size than the territory it represents (Manovich, 2001).

For Australian Aboriginals, territory is not a piece of land enclosed within borders but "an interlocking network of 'lines' or 'ways through'" (Chatwin, 1986)---the Songlines, sung into being by their ancestors. They don't use any of the navigational instruments we have come to rely on, not even the stars. Even today, they find their way in the desert by constructing cognitive maps rooted in myths, songs and graphic representations that depict their ancestors' Dreamtime tracks, the paths they made across the continent as they shaped the world out of chaos. Each clan is responsible for one part of the Songline, its own totemic ancestor's "footprints", but through exchange, negotiation, singing and storytelling, the paths of the different families can be connected to form a network. Just as Ptolemy's "Geographia" was a system that enabled maps of

individual countries to be coordinated into a single, unified map of the world, so too the Aboriginals have established conventions that link up individual Songlines into a coherent "map" of Australia. To a certain extent, this means that for them the landscape is indeed a map of itself (Turnbull, 1989).

As this example shows, maps are not just tools we find helpful in organizing, elaborating or conserving knowledge; they are significant components of our perceptual world and of our perception. The same is true of databases. As generally understood, cartographic mapping involves representing a three-dimensional, continuous space in two dimensions, assigning fixed correspondences between abstract symbols and experiential points of reference. Furthermore, as Carroll's and Borges' examples illustrate, we expect maps to be selective. The database would seem to be at odds with the map in several respects. Firstly it is inclusive: it can incorporate different, conflicting or even mutually exclusive selections. Secondly it allows users to rearrange information in patterns that no longer bear any relation to a particular origin or point of reference. Using a database, one can reorganize toponyms in radically different ways. In an alphabetical sorting, for instance, a small town in Florida can sit next to the Iraqi capital some 7,000 miles distant. Although modern maps have long been searchable by index (street maps would be difficult to use without this feature) the database reverses their relationship. Geographical location thus becomes just one of the ways of ordering relevant information. Instead of merely representing the territory, the database-as-map becomes a territory to explore in and of itself, allowing us to gather and search greater amounts of information, to sort, visualize and scale it to fit particular needs, and to make new correlations (Daniel & O'Rourke, 2004).

II. Story exchanges

Much of the Aboriginals' very extensive geographical knowledge, their "bush erudition" (Upfield, 1947), comes from conversations with fellow travelers who describe the trails, camps and sacred sites they have encountered on their way. My hypothesis is that, street maps and GPS-enabled devices nonwithstanding, today's city-dwellers develop their mental maps in much the same way: through conversation and social interchange. Internet and portable telecommunications have just extended the scope of these conversations: now we phone or e-mail our street directions. The

recent flash mob phenomenon illustrates how we use mobile phones to improvise gatherings "on the fly".

In his seminal text, "The Author as Producer" (1934, 1983), Walter Benjamin claimed that new forms of mass communication - cinema, radio, advertising, the press - were breaking down traditional artistic genres and blurring professional distinctions. He held that as the arts are firmly grounded in the material structure of society, artists must aim at revolutionizing the means by which their work is produced and distributed. One way this can be accomplished is for authors to become involved in publishing. To a certain extent one could say that Benjamin's wish has been fulfilled on the Internet. Blogs and personal home pages have become a means for unprecedented numbers of authors to self-publish their works. But in the hubub of the online world where everybody is talking at once, is anyone listening? *A Map* offers a context for "listening" that brings together mappers and travelers, writers and readers, photographers and viewers. It is an occasion to develop a cross-cultural database, where someone else's story can jog my memory, calling up places or events I had long forgotten. Following others' paths encourages me to observe my own surroundings, it gives me things to look for. From landmark to path, from itinerary to story, from narrative to network, we witness the creation of an emergent system: a dynamic, collectively drawn city map, a city which is firmly embedded both in the streets of Kreuzberg or Barbès, and in the nebulous Cyberspace.

III. Trajectories and perspectives

A Map arose out of several earlier telecommunications projects, *City Portraits* (1988-1990), in which participants in 11 locations in Europe, North and South America, used documents sent by their correspondents to construct itineraries in cities they had never seen (O'Rourke, 1991), and *Paris Réseau/Network*, a series of projects that began in March, 1994 as the moving bodies of Art-Réseaux group members drew a virtual map of the city in real time (or almost). The map showed their paths as they left the Paris Video Library in the center of Paris to return home: to the south of Paris, the suburb of Les Lilas or the city of São Paulo, Brazil... The "artist-reporters" used cameras to chart their trips; upon arrival, they sent the pictures by modem to the "ground crew" at the Video Library, who integrated them into an interactive animation (O'Rourke, 1996, 2000).

The first working version of *A Map*, realized for the workshop "Mapping the Database" in November 2002 at the Université Paris 1, was a series of questionnaires and a database (Daniel & O'Rourke, 2004). The latter contained textual descriptions culled from responses to the on-line questionnaires and interpretations of these texts by others. The questionnaire itself was envisaged as a symbolic form, in perpetual re-negotiation as the questions themselves were modified in response to the replies they attracted. For instance, when respondents proposed tongue-in-cheek itineraries --from classroom to classroom "in search of (a) chair" or from mattress to floor and back again-- I introduced some more specific questions. Several very different questionnaires were developed, which parodied archetypal question-and-answer situations, from parlor games (the famous *Proust questionnaire*) to administrative forms, each bearing a distinctive tone and style. At one point participants could choose from : *Fill in the Blanks, Interrogation, Follow the Dotted Line, Tell It Your Way, New York Body 'n' Soul*. The most recent questionnaire includes both multiple choice questions, which limit the number of answers the respondent can choose from, and open-ended questions followed by an expandable text field, which places no limits on answers. The first option is useful for making correlations, showing the different ways in which people's paths intersect (both literally and figuratively) by matching responses, while the second allows participants to tell their stories in their own words in texts of variable length. To encourage very specific multi-layered narratives, while building data-objects that can be interconnected, I tried to strike a balance between the two. Although people could contribute and consult all manner of itineraries in far-flung places, Paris, New York, Toronto and New Caledonia among others, I still needed to find ways of mapping their relations.

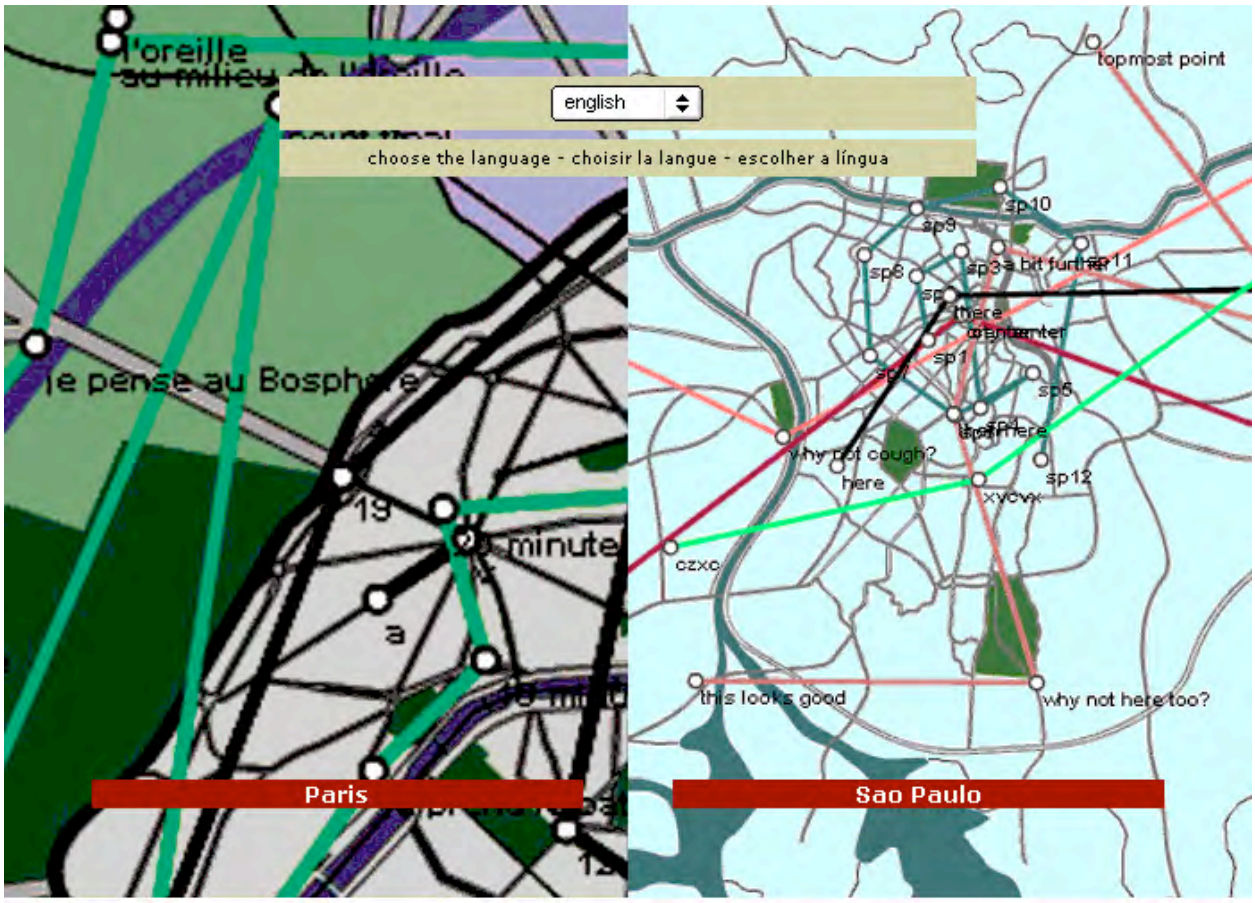

Fig. 1. Splash page. Here the visitor chooses a language and a city.

The graphic, multi-lingual interface I am currently developing with programmer Cesar Restrepo proposes just such a map, or rather a series of interconnected maps. It aims to render the variety and complexity of the narratives people contribute, allowing readers to draw meaningful parallels and make new correlations, while engaging them visually in the map-making process. After choosing a city (for the moment Paris and São Paulo) and a language (French, English, Spanish or Portuguese), the opening screen allows one to view selected itineraries in the database. Information about each itinerary is displayed when the mouse rolls over the name. The only place names on the map are the ones previous users have given to the points on their paths. This screen will allow the viewer to run searches and display results, sorting itineraries by date, place, traveler or keyword, for instance. A click on a previous participant's itinerary will open a window showing a written description and/or a movie.

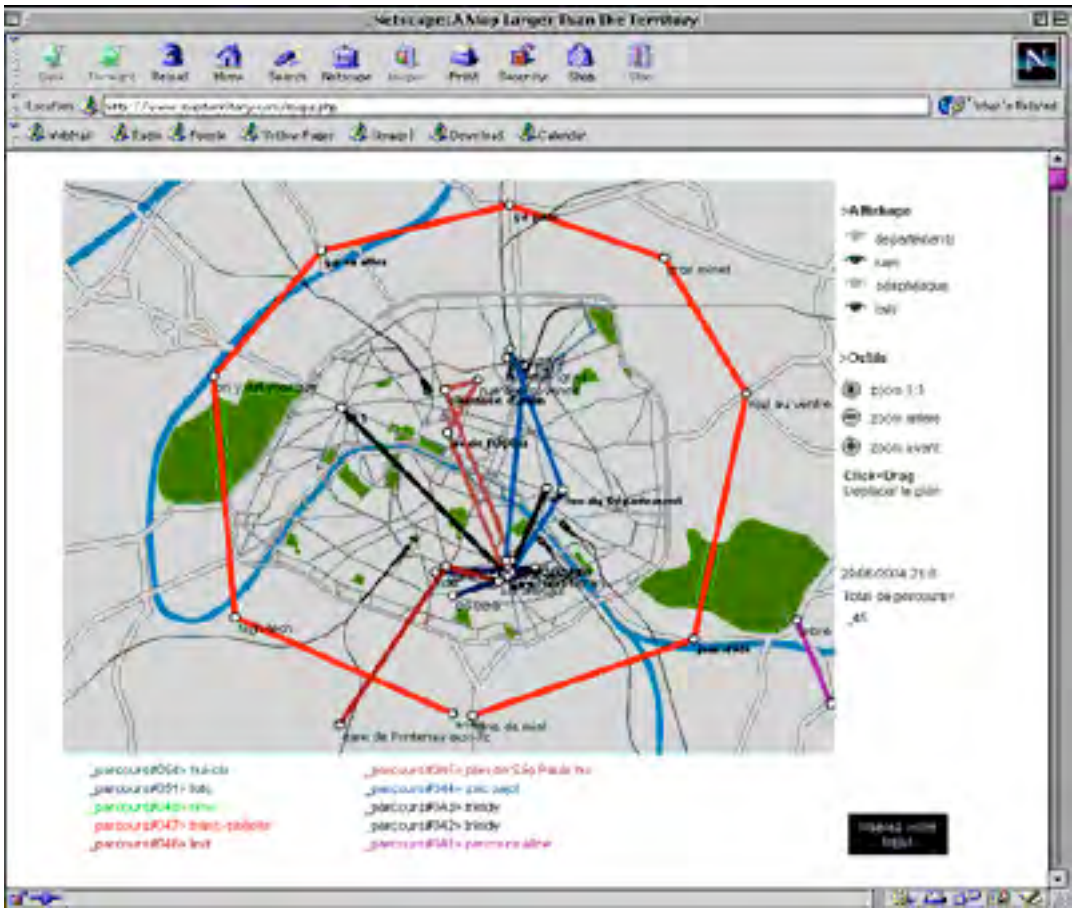

Fig. 2. Map of Paris with previous participants' paths.

Another button sends the viewer to a blind map where she can add an itinerary of her own. To do so, she must first give it a name, a date and a color. She can use the tools provided (zoom button, map mover, place marker) to locate places on the map and define points on her path. Each time she marks a location, a dialog box opens up for her to identify and describe it. At this point she can also follow one of several links to add images or sounds. One of these links will lead to an optional questionnaire for participants who prefer to work within constraints (in the spirit of OULIPO).

Once she has keyed in her text, uploaded a file or selected an object from the database, she can validate the place marker and go on to the next. When she has finished marking up her path, she can view the movie she has made. By default the images and texts are assembled into a simple slide show in the order in which they were entered. Several editing tools will be available for her to modify the soundtrack, the number, order or rhythm of the frames.

Participants are encouraged to design and upload audiovisual "path-building blocks" to picture their travel experiences. The blocks take the form of key-frames, "tableaux" set up in the cityscape, photographs, sounds or very short video sequences. They can label them with a caption or a short commentary and attach one or more keywords from the list provided. The keywords, which will be translated into English, French, Portuguese, German and Spanish, allow people writing in different languages to retrieve each others' images from the database and use them in various contexts. Each image can receive several captions in different languages. These "path-building blocks" thus become a means of linking up itineraries in distant cities. Whereas the map proposes (some would say imposes, and indeed maps carry power) an abstract, overall representation of the city, the photographs bring specific things into closer view, offering a fragmentary, discontinuous experience. Details such as subway entrances, bus stops or traffic signs, while specific to a particular place (Guimard's Art Nouveau cast iron métro kiosks are as much a symbol of Paris as the Eiffel tower), point also to common references (subway entrances in most cities have a similar structure, allowing even strangers to recognize them from a distance). By comparing what they see in the picture with what they know, particpants can fine-tune their perception.

Fig. 3. Path-building block. The iconography is familiar yet this sign is a particular instance.

The database intentionally confronts descriptions of quite different itineraries in several cities: everyday errands, Sunday outings, wrong turns and secret shortcuts, spur-of-the-minute shopping sprees and protest marches, each capable of revealing a specific aspect of our urban imaginary. The infinitesimal details of our individual itineraries, no matter how ordinary they seem, take on significance when we examine them closely, when we confront them with others. In conjunction with a great quantity of other details, unique stories and ordinary trips, they form a new entity, a dynamic whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The *Map* with its marketplace of itineraries and network of links holds up a mirror to the city. The more a city favors diversity, the livelier it is. Versatile, multifarious, abundant, it is a dynamic system that results largely from simple interactions between its inhabitants and their living spaces (Jacobs, 1961). Acting individually, interacting with others at a local level, they produce complex, collective behavior at a higher, global level. The *Map*, like the city as a whole, forms an organized complex system made of "situations in which a half-dozen or even several dozen quantities are all varying simultaneously in subtly interconnected ways" (Weaver, 1958). Rather than creating an object for contemplation, this project focuses on the interconnections, the ways in which data networks "work" (Daniel & O'Rourke, 2004).

References

Benjamin, W. (1983) The Author as Producer; address delivered at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris, on 27 April 1934 from *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock, intro. Stanley Mitchell. Verso 1983

Borges, J. L. (1975) Of Exactitude in Science, in *A Universal History of Infamy*. London: Penguin Books.

Carroll, L. (1893) Sylvie and Bruno Concluded. London.

Chatwin, B.(1987, 1998) The Songlines. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1987, Vintage Classics ed., Random House, 1998, p. 56.

Daniel, S. & K. O'Rourke (2004). Mapping the Database: Trajectories and Perspectives. *Leonardo*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Vol. 37, n° 4.

Debord, G. (1955) Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography. first published in *Les Lèvres Nues* No. 6 (1955). English translation by Ken Knabb: *Situationist International Anthology*, Edited and translated by Ken Knabb, Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981 (third printing 1995).

Jacobs, J.(1961) The Death and Life of Great American Cities. New York: Random House.

Lynch, K. (1960) The Image of the City. Boston, MA: MIT Press.

Manovich, L. (2001) The Language of New Media. Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, p. 225.

O'Rourke, K.(1991) City Portraits: An Experience in the Interactive Transmission of Imagination, *Leonardo*: *Journal of the International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology*, vol.24, no.2.

O'Rourke, K. (1996) Paris Réseau: Paris Network, *Leonardo*, Vol. 29, N° 1. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press,., pp.51-57.

O'Rourke, K. (2000) Paris Réseau/Network, CD-Rom. Paris: Editions du CERAP.

Turnbull, D. (1989, 1993) Maps Are Territories. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 52.

Upfield, A. (1947) The Bone Is Pointed. New York: Scribner.

Weaver, W. (1958) Science and Complexity, *Annual Report of the Rockefeller Foundation*, 1958; quoted by Jacobs [1961] p. 433.

