

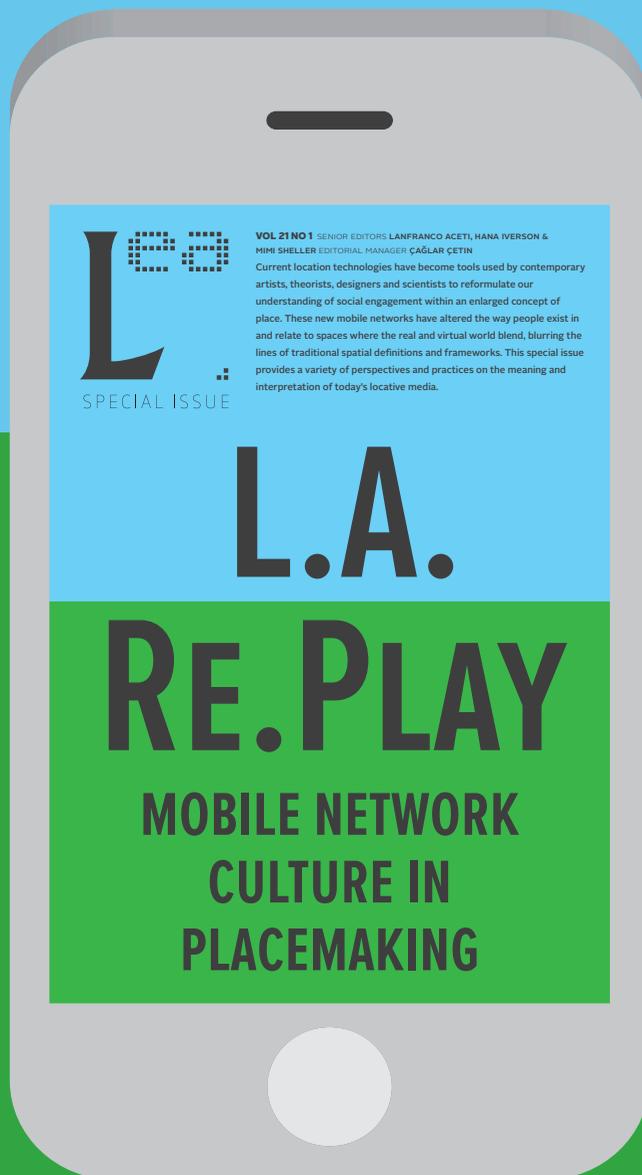
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Current location technologies have become tools used by contemporary artists, theorists, designers and scientists to reformulate our understanding of social engagement within an enlarged concept of place. These new mobile networks have altered the way people exist in and relate to spaces where the real and virtual world blend, blurring the lines of traditional spatial definitions and frameworks. This special issue provides a variety of perspectives and practices on the meaning and interpretation of today's locative media.





RESTLESS

Locative Media as Generative Displacement

by

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INTRODUCTION

My work begins with an invitation. Take a walk or a ride. Get out and explore the everyday environment in a new way, using the movement of the body as a means of releasing the mind, allowing it to wander – and to wonder, critically and aesthetically.

In these works participants explore a site while carrying a portable computer or cell phone equipped with a global positioning satellite (GPS) receiver. The GPS tracks the participant's movement and the resulting data is used to activate sound playback in response to their changing position in the landscape. Each work is a composition of geolocated sound regions specified in software that runs locally on the device, coupling virtual and physical space at the scale of landscape.

Figure 1. *Drift*, Teri Rueb, 2004. Walker on the tidal flats. © Teri Rueb, 2004. Used with permission.

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a practice-based conceptual framework for imagining locative media as a form of generative displacement. Weaving concepts drawn from process philosophy and affect theory through an account of my own locative media practice as it has evolved over the past fifteen years, I aim to reveal locative media as a form of generative displacement where the body is reconfigured in its relation to itself, to the environment, and to others, including human and non-human agencies and subjectivities.

Participants literally bring the work into being through the physical action of walking, bicycling, driving, etc. Through kinesthetic engagement, body and environment come into contact as if in a dance composed of everyday movements. The sound overlay in each work brings attention to the physical and social contours of the natural and built environment even as it challenges participants to unconventional habitations – a kind of reading against the grain of the physical text and context of the environment.

Through the sound overlay I seek to tease out, highlight, and choreograph a sampling of physical and social elements, itineraries and events that are inherent to a site. However, the primary structure of the work emerges from the unpredictable actions of the participant herself who performs in dialogue with variable social and environmental conditions. This interaction of site and subject, where each emerges through the confluence of physical, social, cultural, and technological forces acting upon each other in situ, is a defining aspect of “locative media.”

The term “locative media,” coined by Karlis Kalnins,¹ emerged around 2002 as a way of distinguishing cultural uses of mobile media which critiqued the notion of “space” as an a priori or absolute abstraction and reinscribed “place” as a culturally specific and historically grounded concept. In this chapter I use the term ‘mobile experience’ to refer to the broad domain of everyday experience that is mediated by location-sensing technologies, including commercial and industrial productions. ‘Mobile experience’ encompasses the full spectrum of technologies that wed physical and virtual spaces to each other geospatially via software, regardless of their claim to the more specific designations of ‘locative media.’

Mobile experience involves the use of mobile media which engender a shifting of the sensorium that emerges as a result of our habitual use of these technologies in everyday life. Marshall McLuhan is credited with first observing that our interactions with media, as extensions of the body, have the effect of altering the perceptions and sensitivities of the human sensorium.² For example, one effect of this shifting sensorium in response to the proliferation of mobile

media is a heightened awareness of the reception quality of GPS, WiFi, and cellular networks (and their combination) as they relate to our perception of the built environment and our movement within it. Hence, mobile experience, not exclusive to the domain of locative media, is composed of a constant flux of physical, cultural, and psychological displacements where the hybrid physical and virtual contexts in which we increasingly interact create a third space, or what Sabine Breitsameter (2003) has called a *hybrid space*.⁵ This hybrid space can be disorienting, destabilizing, and decentering of the body as well as our sense of place and cultural identity.

Rather than seeing these frictions as a negative effect of mobile media – something to be ‘designed away’ or mitigated, I argue that acknowledging and embracing such instabilities actually forces us to productively negotiate what are always-already shifting dimensions of a hybrid spatial condition vis-à-vis our perception and experience of place, and thus cultural identity. This constant process of negotiation underscores the inherently unstable condition of subjectivity which, while a given in all cultural contexts, may be exercised as a critical design agenda in highly technologized, mobile, and multicultural societies.

Just as an increasingly technologized and global society entails increasingly complex collisions of cultures and identities, mobile experience compounds these effects not just at the level of the physical sensorium, but also at the level of cultural identity and subjectivity. Technologies, bodies, and subjectivities are inseparably intertwined in everyday experience, and mobile technologies further intensify these entanglements. Mobile interfaces couple bodies in motion with places in motion – as process – blurring local with global, public with private, physical with virtual, and the proverbial ‘here-and-now’ with ‘there-and-then’. In this way they contribute to and intensify the constant dis-

placement of bodies, sites, and subjectivities in highly mobile technologized society.

Inherent to the condition of mobile subjectivity, such displacements frustrate constructions of place, subjectivity, or the body as stable or fixed entities. This instability extends to authorship, too, which becomes a shared act in locative media works, not just at the level of interpretation, but in the very physical process of bringing the work into being. Authorship, like meaning, becomes emergent, contextual, and *kinesthetically* inflected, especially in locative media works that tend to exploit the indeterminate conditions of moving bodies in hybrid spaces. In all mobile experience, whether acknowledged or not, displacements of bodies and meanings unfold like constantly shifting horizons of context, meaning, and interpretation. In locative media such displacements are embraced and indeed emerge as unique qualities of this new form, medium, and genre. Through elaborating these effects as they generate and complicate meaning in artworks taken from my own practice, I present a position from which locative media may be understood as holding the potential for a kind of generative displacement.

This article presents a practice-based conceptual framework for imagining locative media as a form of generative displacement. Weaving concepts drawn from process philosophy and affect theory through a narrative of my own locative media practice as it has evolved over the past fifteen years, I will aim to reveal locative media as a form of generative displacement where the body is reconfigured in its relation to itself (the sensorium), to the environment (through both physical and cultural perception of place), and to others, including human and non-human realms. Through Elizabeth Grosz’s reading of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari⁶ I will trace the ways in which emergence, embodiment, and the affective come together in the experience of the ‘sensory-sensual body’⁵ as it moves

through and produces variously politically and culturally charged landscapes. Four projects that engage collisions of bodies and landscapes will be addressed: the shifting sensorium itself as a kind of landscape (*Drift*, 2004); the affective experience of post-industrial waste landscapes (*Core Sample*, 2007); perception and representation of landscape and cultural identity in globalized media culture (*Elsewhere: Anderswo*, 2009); and the contested meanings of place and identity in post-colonial discourses about ‘wilderness’ as it relates to landscapes of the Southwestern United States (*No Places With Names*, 2012).

A LANDSCAPE APPROACH TO LOCATIVE MEDIA

Having made interactive public art installations in outdoor settings since 1990, I draw upon landscape as a first framework for understanding mobile experience. Landscape and the body are mutually constituted in mobile experience. A continuing point of reference for this is found in the history of sculpture, performance, and installation, all of which engage the body in spatial interactions writ large at the scale of landscape. The performative role of the participant is essential to the production of meaning in mobile experience. Minimalism recognized this, especially in the context of large-scale outdoor sculpture and land art, drawing attention to the phenomenological experience of the viewer as performer/participant. In particular, Robert Smithson articulates this aspect of his work as the critical unfolding of view upon view through the actions of a walking participant-observer who perambulates around the space of the sculpture, which itself functions as a kind of landscape.⁶ Smithson was among the first artists to create earthworks such as *Spiral Jetty* (1970), an enormous raised earth form shaped like a spiral that extends into the Great Salt Lake in Utah. He argues that the kinesthetic mode of consumption required in experiencing this work

from the ground is essential to comprehending, understanding, and appreciating it. The scale of the work in relation to the body distinguishes it from traditional sculpture which was conventionally presented on a pedestal in a gallery or as a bounded and contained object in outdoor settings, viewable within the scope of a singular static sweep of the gaze. Earthworks such as Smithson’s can be seen as providing an historical precedent and theoretical lineage to locative media especially as the performer/participant is framed as a kinesthetic agent in the construction of the work and its meaning.

Yves Alain Bois presents this argument succinctly, comparing Robert Smithson’s (1979) and Richard Serra’s (1982) writings about their early land art and earthworks in his essay “A Picturesque Stroll Around Clara-Clara.” Richard Serra, best known for his enormous steel sculptures, is quoted. Speaking of his work *Rotary Arc* (1980), Serra writes: “The site is redefined, not represented [...] the placement of all structural elements in the open field draws the viewer’s attention to the topography of the landscape as the landscape is walked.”⁷

Echoing this emphasis on the walking viewer, Smithson relates Serra’s work to the notion of the picturesque, which he defines in relation to Heidegger’s notion of a ‘thing-for-us’:

The picturesque, far from being an inner movement of the mind, is based on real land; it precedes the mind in its material external existence. We cannot take a one-sided view of the landscape within this dialectic. A park can no longer be seen as a “thing-in-itself,” but rather as a process of ongoing relationships existing in a physical region – the park becomes a “thing-for-us.”⁸

In each case the emphasis is on the actual land and the experience and perceptions of the walker/viewer as she traverses it. In mobile experience site functions in

a similar manner as a “thing-for-us,” yet perhaps even more so as the site of mobile experience is a flux of physical and virtual spaces and times that are experienced both individually and collectively as unique itineraries through matter and media.

Through my work I critically reconfigure relationships of place and subjectivity through drawing attention to entanglements of context, movement, and perception as processes through which places, subjectivities, and identities emerge. My practice participates in these entanglements, seeking to expose or bring to critical consciousness their various permutations and cultural effects, including the ways in which space, place, and cultural identity are ineluctably bound to each other in mobile experience.

The word itself

The concept of landscape complicates distinctions between the proximal and distal, urban and rural, developed and undeveloped, local and global, the human and non-human, nature and culture, thing and process. Thus it provides an especially useful conceptual pivot around which very different ways of knowing and doing may come together and be used to reveal the operations of mobile network culture and society.⁹

The very word landscape has multiple, and often contested, meanings. It productively opens on to an expansive and inclusive field of inquiry and practice around questions of space, place, environment, and subjectivity. Any attempt to locate the meaning of the word reveals not only its extraordinary polyvalence, but also the reflexivity of landscape itself as a contextualizing function. Depending on how it is defined, landscape may be understood to provide the backdrop for the environment in which humans dwell, or as the environment itself. Whether understood as biophysical, perceptual, cultural, or political, it indicates a set of relationships between humans and envi-

ronments, a play of human and non-human forces that ultimately suggests a process approach to the design space of mobility. Indeed, the very notion of what this ‘space’ implies is of concern here as this paper seeks to assert a critical design agenda. The normative design space of mobile media is often limited to the screen of the mobile device itself, as information overlays are registered against maps or other interfaces reflecting feedback from real-time location tracking. In suggesting a ‘process’ approach to the design of mobile media, I aim to shift the extent of this design space to explicitly include the whole space of body-site-movement interaction, not just on-screen interaction, with location-sensitive information or responses.

Across languages, cultures, and disciplines, *landscape* has strikingly different meanings, or may resist translation entirely. For example, landscape has a long history in the West of being associated primarily with the specular or objectifying gaze and the picturesque, in the sense of the pictorial. It has been objectified as resource for exploitation, object of the patriarchal or colonial gaze, and framed as feminized ‘nature’ when treated as the passive ‘background’ for human activity, rather than as active social, cultural, or material process.¹⁰ Throughout these varying contexts, however, the concept of landscape both explicitly and implicitly serves to frame and ground our understandings of place, culture, and identity. In this it performs as an active and contextualizing function that, like the physical form of landscape itself, is fundamentally temporal and constantly in flux. For example, in the American West, landscape is less operative as a cultural idea associated with a picturesque thing ‘out there’ to behold. Instead, it is more commonly understood as ‘land,’ as in the materiality of the land as resource, as territory, as property, as physical obstacle or threat, and indeed, more holistically as climate, weather, and environmental condition. In such environments scale relationships alone, immediately evident to the casual observer, reg-

ister and precisely locate the proper proportion and place of human and natural processes.¹¹

As a means of suggesting that landscape might be understood more as process than artifact we might look to the medieval Germanic term *Landschaft*. In contrast to the pictorial or visual emphasis of the sixteenth-century Dutch term *landskip*, *Landschaft* suggests an active tense in its connotation of social process. John B. Jackson, the historian of vernacular landscape, suggests that the component “land” once signified “a defined space, one with boundaries, but not necessarily one with fences or walls.”¹² “Schaft” or “scape,” he writes, “is essentially the same as *shape*, except that it once meant a composition of similar objects, as when we speak of a fellowship or membership . . . the word *scape* could also indicate something like an organization or system.”¹³ As landscape itself is inherently temporal, unfolding with and over time, it can be seen as constituting a social process, rather than as social product. The Germanic echoes held within this concept of ‘landscape’ offer a model for thinking landscape as more verb than noun.

Yet the image of landscape as an organization or system evokes a structuralist notion of landscape as artifact that can be understood through rational analysis of its various knowable parts. Thus, ultimately a more temporal image is necessary to account for a landscape approach to mobile media – something more fluid and process-oriented that suggests a becoming or unfolding, rather than a visual image (including the conventional notion of the picturesque, or the Dutch *landskip* or *landskap*) or fixed ontological entity expressed as a relatively stable social-spatial system (the positivist school of landscape that trace their foundations to the Germanic *Landschaft*). In contrast to architecture, for example, or the association of landscape with cartographic imagery, landscape is first and foremost the expression of biological and geo-

logic process. Thus, landscape must be understood as fundamentally defined by its biological form as physical processes unfolding in time. Complexity theory provides the basic reference for this emergent view of landscape. If we understand landscape as the complex interaction of subjects, technologies, and spaces produced through biological, social, neural, physical, and anthropological processes, then we suddenly find ourselves moving beyond the ocularcentrism of an art historical view or the historically positivist or structuralist reductions of social science. Mobile media, too, as I have argued above, are inherently more temporal and fluid than media environments tied to fixed or moving images on ubiquitous screens – media contexts that are explicitly designed to be used everywhere and nowhere in particular.

A process approach to landscape and mobile media can accommodate the heterogeneous scalar, temporal, material, biological, social, and cultural qualities that are suggested by the mobilities and subjectivities produced through and with mobile media. In this model, landscape as process can be seen as the ground from which mobile experience emerges as ‘becomings’ of heterogeneous sites, subjectivities, and materialities. Landscape and mobile experience are thus ultimately performative in the sense of action and participation of the subject, as well as biological and social processes.

Yet for all its rich potential, a landscape approach to mobile media must take an even more radical leap in order to embrace the fullness of a temporal and process-based model. The cultural term *locative media* or industry labels “location-aware” or “location-based” designs and services still suggest a location or position-bound model of space haunted by a latent Cartesianism. Other models of spatiality that acknowledge the shifting *relations* of bodies, sites, and subjectivities must be called upon in order to affect this conceptual

leap. Elsewhere I have articulated a similar ‘space-time’ of sound installation and mobile media; ¹⁴ however, in developing this notion more critically I have more recently looked to Deleuze and Guattari.

The writings of Deleuze and Guattari, with their emphasis on a temporally and materially articulated spatiality, lend themselves to imagining a project of “becoming” landscape. ¹⁵ The notion of *haecceity*, in particular, evokes this conception of space, as described by Mark Bonta and John Protevi:

In [A Thousand Plateaus], a body taken as a haecceity is defined in its cartography by its longitude (the “speeds and slowness” of its material flows) and by its latitude (its set of affects) (260–261). An environmental assemblage, a “set of relations” defined as a haecceity (382), treats spatio-temporal relations not as predicates of a thing (Aristotle’s categories include “where” and “when”) but as dimensions of multiplicities, components of the assemblage (262). ¹⁶

In addition to the notion of *haecceity*, the by now widely familiar concepts of “smooth” and “striated” space developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) offer a further image for thinking mobile media and space according to a temporal model. As just one example, the notion of smooth space as it pertains to the musical model implies a constant motion where there is continuous variation and continuous development of form, as opposed to striated space, which develops linearly and produces order and a succession of distinct forms. ¹⁷

Additionally, drawing upon the concept of “becoming-animal” or “becoming-woman” as developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, we might imagine a “becoming-landscape” where landscape ceases to be “other” in a binary opposition and is instead seen as an entangle-

ment of various forces, human and non-human, that are constantly in process of becoming one another, rather than existing as ontologically stable categories. Mobile media, and the mobilities they engender, make legible such spatialities and temporalities. Far from the romantic notion of landscape as a sweeping view, or the positivist or structuralist reduction of landscape to terrain or system, the image of landscape as spatial-temporal process reveals mobile experience and post-human mobilities as complex entanglements of bodies, materialities, temporalities, and subjectivities. Viewed from this perspective, locative media may be seen to challenge the totalizing view of GPS or surveillance technologies as the solely instrumental apparatus of control societies that would employ them as tools of oppression in the regulation of power and knowledge via language, code, and prosthetic agency.

DISPLACEMENTS

Places have agency; they work upon us as we work upon them. Discovering this agency and engaging it through shaping lively interactions between bodies and environments is fundamental to my practice. The feedback loops created in these exchanges effect displacements of various kinds. In thinking about how these displacements function at the level of mobility and perception, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology emerges as a useful theoretical framework. ¹⁸ In this model the subject is seen as inextricably linked to environment as affect, climate, attitude, or mood. Emphasis on the kinesthetic foregrounds movement as fundamental to perception, from the smallest and most subtle movements of the body, to the tiniest shiftings of the gaze, the rise and fall of the breath, and the subtle response to vibrations felt as touch, sound, and other sensations. In locative media body, mind, and environment are entangled in the circum-ambient sphere of embodied kinesthetic perception,

as well as the physico-sensory realm. Here we might look to the work of Elizabeth Grosz ¹⁹ whose discussion of landscape places it squarely at the confluence of phenomenology and process philosophy, especially as articulated in the work of Straus as compared to Deleuze and Guattari (1988) – who by the time they published *A Thousand Plateaus* had departed significantly from the lineage of phenomenology and its emphasis on the subject of lived experience versus the neuro-physiological subject:

Straus illustrates the distinction between perception and sensation in terms of the opposition between geography and landscape. Geography is the space of the map, that which is regulated by measurable coordinates, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as striated or sedentary space, a space whose location or region is abstracted from its lived qualities. Landscape, by contrast is that space revealed by sensation, which has no fixed coordinates but transforms and moves as a body passes through it. ²⁰

In each of my works extensive interaction with sites unfolds through inviting participants to engage the simple act of walking. Both in making my work and experiencing it, walking is the ground from which each piece emerges. Through walking, responsive sounds, both ambient and composed, are coupled to the proprioceptive sensation of the participant’s body in motion, giving rise to emergent invisible acoustic architectures that bind body and environment in a fluid feedback. Since the beginning I have used sound as the primary media overlay in my works, eschewing the screen in the interest of drawing the eye to the surrounding environment, as well as allowing the body to freely explore this novel spatiality.

I am intrigued by the aesthetic and kinesthetic qualities of GPS as a spatial medium and its capacity to

enhance and intensify the coupling of movement and meaning in site-specific works. Through sculpting sound to site, as if it were a garment made to fit the landscape, these works unfold as a series of shifting thresholds that blur physical and virtual, organism and environment, body and technology, sound, sight, and touch. Through slowing down and becoming sensitive to thresholds of site and signal as structured through spatialized sound, I hope that participants may begin to feel a reconfigured relationship of the body in space as mediated by mobile technologies. Ultimately my work is an inquiry into the transformation of perception, cognition, and consciousness as technologies reshape our sense of place, identity, and embodied interaction. Cultural identity then, becomes a central question as these couplings and entanglements become evident at the level of representation and mobile experience. Toward elaborating these colliding forces, I use examples from my own works created over the past decade.

The work itself

Forms and modes of displacement engaged in my practice express differently in each work, but all of them bring the body into tightly coupled dialogue with the physical contours of a site, as well as the social, cultural, and historic continuities and contradictions inherent to sites as processes in time.

Drift (2004) is a site-specific responsive sound environment set along the tidal flats of the Wadden Sea in Northern Germany. ²¹ Visitors are provided with headphones connected to small computers equipped with GPS and custom movement tracking software. As they explore the environment of the tidal flats, sounds play in response to their movement through regions of sound that drift with the tides. Absolute position and relative movement are explored as visitors discover they may experience this work by simply standing still, allowing the drifting sound regions to “wash” over them in time.

With *Drift*, displacement occurs in multiple domains. Sound regions are displaced with the tides, the body becomes displaced in an isomorphic landscape of shifting sand, water, wind, and signal, and awareness of nineteenth-century navigation techniques (line of sight as in landmarks, sonic beacons, etc.) blend with the direct engagement and encounter with contemporary technologies including radar, GPS, and GIS. Despite the presence and ubiquity of these artifacts of orientation and navigation, however, displacements of spatial awareness and general orientation in an interactive system occur as participants wander through a seascape unaided by the grounding visual and textual cues of locational technologies such as maps and GPS coordinate output. This short-circuiting of participants' expectations when using locative media frustrates goal-oriented or efficiency-driven modes of navigation and interaction.

As location-aware technologies and conventional modes of geospatial representation (e.g., Google

Earth, GIS, etc.) became more commonly available in the early 2000s, they began to reshape everyday methods and modes of navigation and related spatial perceptions. *Drift* was an attempt to call our attention to these cultural transformations through direct physical engagement with the media in a mode of interaction that ran “against the grain” of these same popular media forms and navigation technologies.

With *Core Sample* (2007) I sought to evoke another kind of displacement.²² On one level, the work was intended to evoke an imaginary displacement of the body through the layers of a metaphoric core sample corresponding to the material history of the site. On another level, the site itself – an island long used as a dump by the city of Boston, Massachusetts – became the symbol of a displacement in the form of the abject or suppressed. As a marginal space, or waste landscape, Spectacle Island was long reviled as an eyesore known for its putrid smell, and toxic emissions of methane and leachate.

Figure 2. *Core Sample*, Teri Rueb, 2007. Visitors in the gallery (left), walkers on the island (right). Sculpture created with Michelle Fornabai. © Teri Rueb, 2007. Used with permission.



The project was born of the question, “How can we come to terms with our own role and place within processes of consumption, waste, and eventually reclamation, not through endless elaboration of the problem, but instead through an experiential encounter in which we feel both physically and symbolically implicated in and empathic to the very ground beneath our feet?” Formally I wondered, “What kinds of relationships to landscape might emerge if one could sink through the earth and *become* the layers of sediment that make up this reclaimed landfill?”

I attempted to create this effect through presenting participants with a layered sound composition that changed as they moved across the shifting elevations of the island, suggesting a metaphoric core sample. Spectacle Island is in large part made up of garbage – over thirty-meter cliffs of garbage in some places – as well as excavation from the Big Dig tunnel project that in some places reaches thicknesses of up to eighteen meters. The island used to be an open landfill where spontaneous methane fires burned out of control, lighting up the night sky.

The island now stands as a showcase for promising and progressive techniques of waste management and landscape remediation, cloaked in the image of a pastoral plain. A completely engineered landscape, Spectacle Island was capped with excavation and completely landscaped with a scientifically formulated loam designed to support over 28,000 imported plants, trees, and shrubs that make up its current park-like facade.

Core Sample sought to reveal these radical physical, cultural, and psychological displacements, as well as evoke more subtle displacements as participants wandered the island and were immersed in sounds that evoked these materialities as well as the island's cultural history and possible futures. Sounds of garbage,

leachate and escaping gases, and radio astronomy transmissions mix with the voices of past residents of the island who describe their experiences growing up on this island or working in its many industries. Over 250 sounds were combined with the voices of landfill technology experts and botanists who study the vibrant and remediating potentials of the botany of disturbed landscapes. Each sound was carefully composed and located in space such that specific elevations and transitions between elevations expressed a sonic stratigraphy of cultural, social, and material history as registered against a metaphoric core sample. In this way the project sought not only to displace participants' sensory and perceptual experience of the island as a material site, but also to displace them in the multiple temporalities and subjectivities suggested by this incredibly lively and resilient landscape.

Elsewhere: *Anderswo* (2009) brings the theme of displacement to the fore through embracing the cultural disorientations and disjunctions that are often felt when traveling to foreign places that confront us with the uncanny experience of being “outsider” to local custom and context.²³ Set across two sites, the project engaged local displacements, as well, as viewers might hear similar sounds – both ambient and recorded – repeated across the two locations. Separated by approximately 100 kilometers, the corresponding installations set in Oldenburg and Neuenkirchen function dialogically as sites punctuated with a patchwork of appropriated audio from popular films, radio, and television that evoke familiar landscape references to both German and American audiences.

The last work I will discuss is perhaps the most complex in terms of addressing themes of displacement. *No Places with Names: A Critical Acoustic Archaeology* (2012) brings the question of displacement in mobile media to the fore as it explores the concept of “wilderness” as its meaning shifts across cultural



Figure 3. *Elsewhere*: *Anderswo*, Teri Rueb, 2009. Walker in the botanical garden. © Teri Rueb, 2009. Used with permission.

and historical contexts.²⁴ The work was created in collaboration with local artists Larry Phan (first generation Vietnamese-American) and Carmelita Topaha (Navajo) and included interviews with over thirty-five local residents of the Santa Fe area in New Mexico including artists, farmers, and scientists, acequia major-domos, arts writers, and activists. Nearly a third of the interviewees were members of over a dozen different Native Americans tribes from all over North America. The project itself was sited on the campus of the Institute of American Indian Arts, just south of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The piece was developed over an eighteen-month period of residency in New Mexico and while it deeply engaged local sites and communities, the primary audience is often a tourist or short-term visitor to this highly trafficked travel destination, bringing another dimension of displacement and mobility to the work.

The question of wilderness in the cultural context of the Southwestern United States is first and foremost one of displacement. The Southwest is home to one of the densest populations of contemporary Native Americans living on and off reservations and in this context they live alongside significant populations of descendants of Spanish colonial settlers dating back nearly 400 years. This mix is complemented by modern and contemporary waves of immigration to the area including members of the scientific elite in the 1940s and 1950s at Los Alamos Labs and counter-culture radicals of the 1960s and 1970s. This cultural milieu makes the Southwest an especially charged environment in which to raise questions regarding the notion of wilderness, an idea that has historically been invoked to promote religious, environmental, and colonial agendas since the earliest colonial period in the Americas. The idea of wilderness as the place of no people, a pristine refuge, or a natural resource that must be preserved are all reflections of contested ide-

ologies that often had the impact of displacing people and natural habitats in the name of 'progress.'

Thus, to ask the question, "What does wilderness mean to you?" in these interviews and to present the fragmented narratives that emerged in response to this question in locations that have historically typified the cultural imaginary of 'wilderness' effects an odd kind of double operation of displacement. In most cases interviewees responded that the word held little meaning as it was seen to create false binaries of nature and culture, or was seen to have deliberate connotations of erasing the 15,000 year history of indigenous habitation of the area prior to colonization. Some interviewees saw environmental groups and government agencies misuse the word in the interest

of reappropriating ranch and farm land to 'preserve' it as designated 'wilderness' areas. These are only a few of many different responses that became the sonic fabric of the final work which was presented in situ as a site-specific sound walk on the campus of the Institute of American Indian Arts, itself a parcel with a long history of having been used for grazing, short-term habitation, and, more recently, suburban development, including the campus itself. Each of these historical moments was marked by displacements of native peoples, plants, and watersheds and ultimately the reclaiming of the site from cattle grazing uses to the reconsecration of it as the site of an institute dedicated to the advancement of native arts. Onto this palimpsest of spatial and social displacements the piece *No Places With Names* introduces yet another layer



Figure 4. *No Places with Names*, Teri Rueb and Larry Phan with contributions from Carmelita Topaha (Diné), 2012. Walker holding sculpture. © Teri Rueb, 2012. Used with permission.

of displacement in inviting people, most of whom will be visitors or 'outsiders' to the campus community, to walk the trails and reflect on the complex spatial and social ramifications of landscape imaginaries, including the virtual overlay of the mobile sound walk itself – an art form that while readily embraced by students and faculty, is still nevertheless considered a distinctly unconventional or alien art form in this context.

In closing, it should be said that while I certainly remain an outsider to indigenous and Nuevo Mexicano cultures, it was clear to me that among the important differences in their world views regarding landscape was the sense that landscape is produced through cultural action and use in both cultures. For indigenous peoples this is intrinsically tied to their oral history, origin stories, and moral code. Like Australian aboriginal songlines, Native Americans have elaborate stories that are tied to landforms and itineraries connecting landforms. It is believed that actually visiting those sites reveals those stories and renews their power as catalysts in organizing human society and its balance with nature. Bruce Chatwin (1988), Keith Basso (1996) and Steven Feld (Feld and Basso 1997) have all written works that have illuminated these various cultures and their conceptions of space, place, and landscape from the perspective of situated ethnography.²⁵ While their works have profoundly influenced my practice since 1996, I had an even more powerful encounter recently as I lived in New Mexico for a year and had the privilege of collaborating on a project with ceramicists Carmelita Topaha (Diné) and Larry Phan, a first generation Vietnamese-American, both of whom lived in Farmington, New Mexico. This experience has left me both grateful for the deeper perspectives gained, and humble at the thought of speaking with any authority about these cultures which I now appreciate as even more complex and elusive to my understanding than I ever imagined. Nevertheless, I will try to evoke something of their significance to my argument.

Distinctions of nature and culture are much more blurry in the cosmology of Native American cultures, perhaps suggesting a model of 'becoming-animal' or 'becoming-landscape.' For Nuevo Mexicanos landscape seems to be understood in relation to cultivation and sustenance. Rather than thinking of distinct categories of 'wilderness' and 'civilization,' their world view

sees the land as a resource that must be managed collectively as a framework for governance. In fact the acequia, or irrigation ditch systems, they brought to the new world from Spain define a unique social contract organized around a shared resource. To this day, the acequia 'majordomo' holds an important role in overseeing the relationship between people, resources, and the law. The majordomo is much more than a symbolic leader. He or she is tied to the land and to the watershed as a manifestation of another order, that of nature and the precious resources provided by nature to sustain a people. In the harsh desert climate of the Southwest, water is everything. It defines the relationship between people and the environment at the most profound level. Take for example the fact that Hopi way of life is so intrinsically defined by the need to supplicate the spirits or 'kachinas' in the interest of calling forth rain to sustain crops the even artesian water on Hopi land (discovered in modern times) is still not drawn upon as a resource to water crops. These ruminations are certainly limited in their understanding of Native American and Nuevo Mexicano ways, but still I find in them the promise of a fruitful way to think landscape newly as a 'becoming land' – even a 'becoming-environment.' Perhaps this constant becoming – a constant displacement – holds a way forward and an opportunity to deeply rethink our responsibility in relation to environmental crisis.

CONCLUSION

Much more might be said about the various displacements effected by this final work, but in conclusion I would like to invoke the overarching displacements that have become apparent to me over the past fifteen years of creating works in locative media. There is a reductionist function of GPS and location-sensing technologies and interfaces that would represent us as tiny dots moving about the flattened plane of an abstract projection of three-dimensional space. In our entanglements with these technologies we are simultaneously in a first and third person subject position – registering our presence 'here,' but from a position outside our corporeal being.

Similarly, yet in a different historical moment, seeing the image of the Earth from outer space represented

a kind of mirror stage in human consciousness akin to the emergence and proliferation of Google Earth and Google Maps as commonplace modes of representation and enactment of our daily 'here-ness' and mobility. I often wonder what the equivalent auditory moment is to the visual mirror stage described by Lacan. What would a sonic 'mirror stage' be that precedes the visual as we hear acutely even when we are still in the womb, our eyes sealed? How does this sonic sense of proprioception relate to our proprioceptive awareness of here-ness as thrown back on us in a double first person/third person coordinate reference translated as dot on a Cartesian map, the cognitive awareness that haunts nearly every moment of our interface with location-sensing technologies? Perhaps more disturbing, especially as it lingers even deeper in our subconscious awareness, is the fact that this image holds within it the sense of a self moving in relation to the planet(s) – a movement that is sensed by satellites that are themselves moving in relation to the planet(s). The scale and significance seems nothing short of the intimate immensity that Blake speaks of when he describes seeing the world in a grain of sand, and holding infinity in the palm of your hand. A strange new 'unhomeliness' seems to characterize the current moment of 'i-' and 'my-' everything, intensified by mobile technologies that suggest that anything we desire is magically at the tip of our fingers, under our thumbs, or already in the palm of our hands. But these new formulations are intrinsically complicated by the fact of their temporal scale – one in which constant fluctuations and movement force us to understand our existence as more motion than stasis, more fluctuation than consistency, more indeterminate than determinate. In this state of constant (dis)orientation, how can we find a reference point against which to define ourselves and the places that define us? I would argue that the very desire for such fixity is an unnecessary source of frustration. If we could find our peace in the current, the flow, the constant change, we might be released from the fiction of fixity which leads us to think of subjectivity as objective, unchanging, constant, and consistent – indeed this false image underlies the hegemonic logics that fuel racism, sexism, species-ism, and countless other instances of exploitation and a mistaken sense of superiority. Designing for a constantly shifting point of view that challenges the centrality of any singular subject position may lead us to embrace our mobile

subjectivity as a form of productive displacement. A decentering that engenders landscapes of becoming in which radical subjectivities may be realized within and across human and non-human domains. ■

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