shadows from another place: transposed space

Paula Levine

Artist - New Media
Associate Professor, Art
Conceptual/Informations Arts, San Francisco State University

If it is true that the grid of 'surveillance' is becoming everywhere more minute and extensive, it then becomes all the more urgent to uncover the ways in which it does not absorb an entire society, what popular procedures … play upon the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to turn them around." [1]

-Michel de Certeau-

1. Background

March 19, 2003

The United States invades Iraq.[2]

I listen to radio voices describing the events from various geographic positions—
from Washington, DC; from Baghdad. At the same time, I am looking at the Middle East from satellite images of the sites being bombed.

I am in San Francisco.

- -

Sometimes when I write and the words are close, very close, I have a strong sensation that I should be feeling the pen's movement on my own skin. The absence of such a sensation is startling, disarming; I feel an unexpected visceral numbness as my pen scratches the paper's surface.

This was the feeling I had during the invasion. I expected to feel the impact, hear bombs, feel shock waves, see bright lights in the sky outside my studio window similar to those described on the radio. I anticipated that each satellite image would bare evidence of the missiles and bombs being levied more than 7000 miles away from where I sat.

But, of course, none were visible. None were felt. None were heard.

The invasion was a distant simultaneous event and, in spite of connections through media that reinforced my own expectation of proximity *and* simultaneity, the physical space between San Francisco and Baghdad remained fixed and sufficient to buffer the impact of the invasion taking place there.

This paper discusses **Shadows from another place** a series of hypothetical mappings, both web based and site specific, that use Global Positioning System (GPS)[3] to imagine the impact of political or cultural changes taking place in one location upon another. These hybrid mappings are created by shadowing distant events, overlaying the impact of political and cultural traumas, such as wars or shifts in borders or boundaries, upon local landscapes. Collapsing "foreign" and "domestic", these maps bridge local and global, and allow walkers/viewers to experience spatial and narrative contiguity between separate and distant locations. The idea for the series arose in response to the estrangement felt as coexisting old and new media each conveyed information about the invasion of Iraq through their own particular relationships to proximity, location and distance.

In this paper, I will focus on one project in this series, **San Francisco <-> Baghdad**, which came from witnessing the invasion of Iraq in March, 2003.
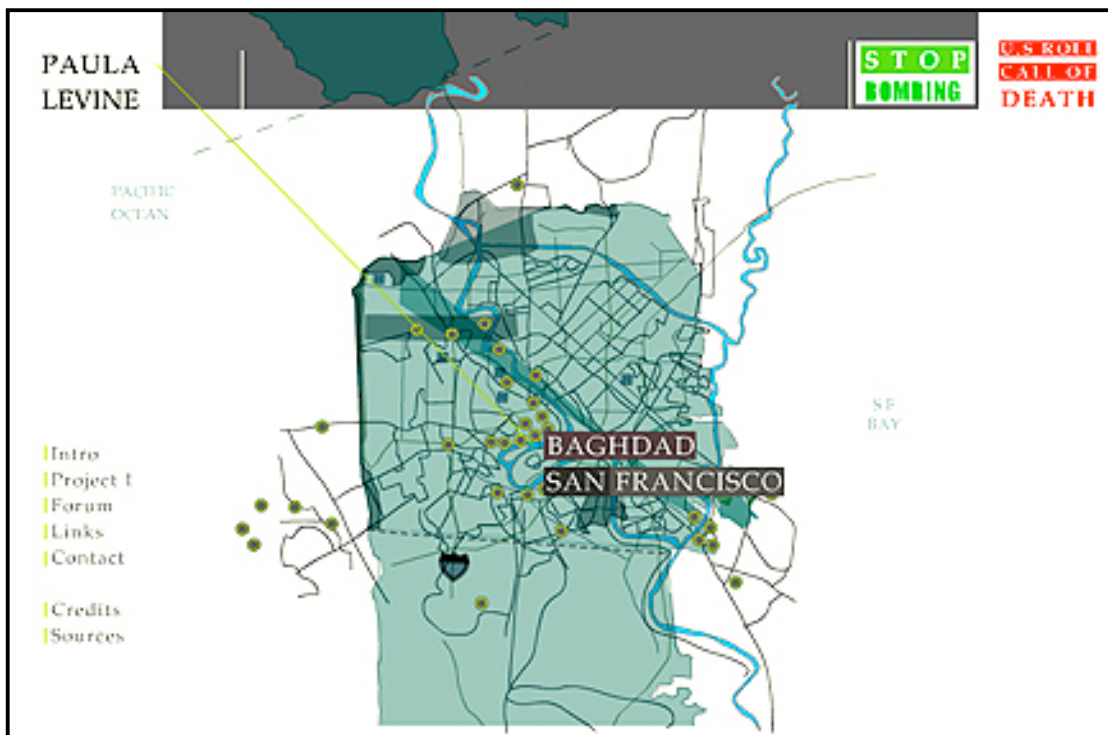
San Francisco <-> Baghdad site is found at *http://paulalevine.banff.org*

2. Media induces trauma

> If television cannot be hooked up to what we commonly understand by experience, and if it cannot communication…a catastrophic knowledge but can only…signal the transition of a gap…a dark abyss…then what is it doing?[4]
>
> -Avital Ronell-

Still from the video recorded by George Holliday of the beating of Rodney King, March 3, 1991
Source: http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lapd/kingvideo.html

As Avital Ronell wrote in her essay on television and the reporting of the beating of Rodney King, "The trauma on television can be experienced either as a memory that one cannot integrate into one's own experience, or as catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate to others." In either case, trauma, which normally lies outside of everyday life, is constantly called back to memory through media; looping, looping, looping the moment of impact -- a beating or a bombing.
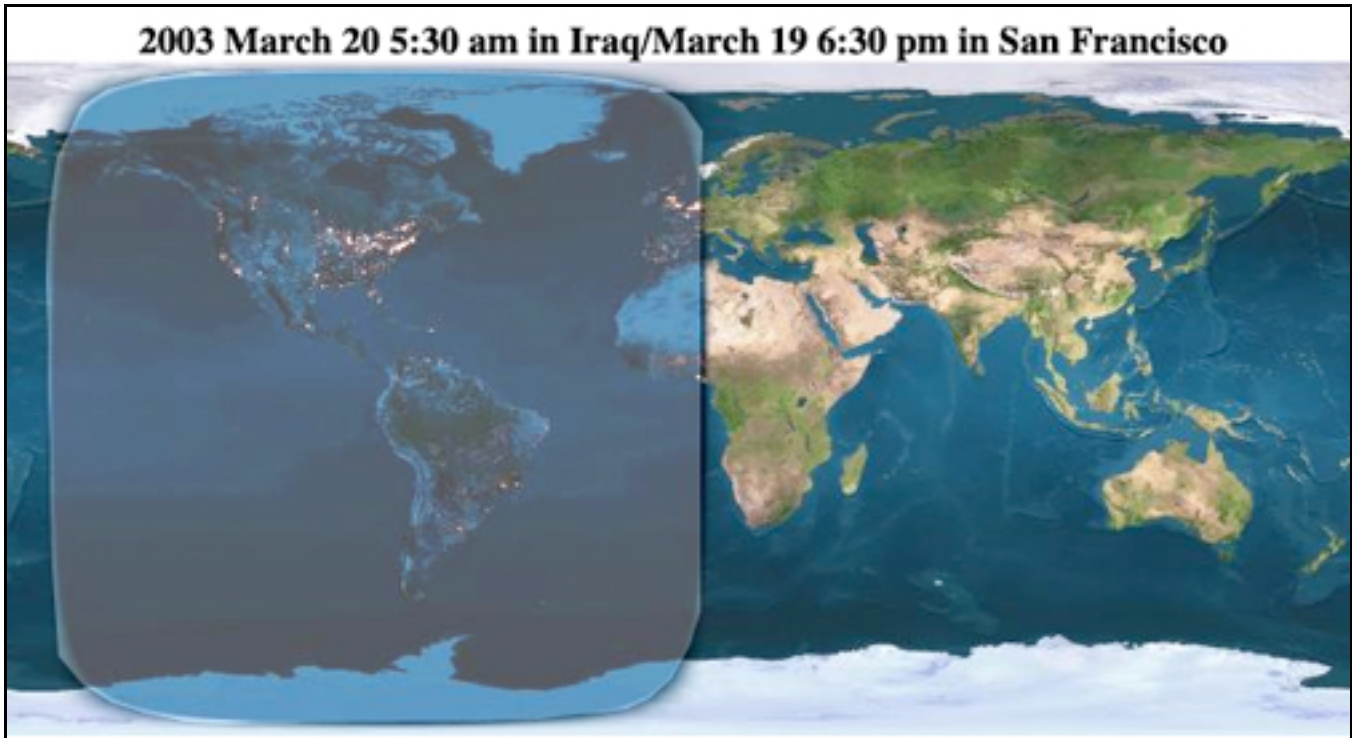
Thousands of miles separated the site of the invasion from where I sat witnessing, and the only things that seemed fixed were the relative positions of perceiver and perceived and the impossible conjunction of both presence and absence. Two things became apparent: First, a spatial fear -- a disjuncture, disorientation, and a sense of being unsettled; having an uncanny feeling of something dangerous and out of control that was simultaneously far away and close at hand. Second, in spite of being immersed in information, I wasn't able to *get it*. I wasn't receiving information in the way I expected and was accustomed to. I was raised on location-based, eyewitness reports; the journalist model of having reporters speak what they see or know. But here was something new: satellites, Internet and other wireless technology, all affording different kinds of information and positions.

I was within an information flow emanating from both old and new media technology, each narrating in its own way; each with its own relationship distance and proximity. The different way that each conveyed information was never addressed. The uncanny feelings that arose were profound – dislocation, information and narrative discord, and palpable sensation of geographic suspension.

Iraq and the Persian Gulf

2003 March 20 5:30 am in Iraq/March 19 6:30 pm in San Francisco

Source: Earth View http://www.fourmilab.ch/cgi-bin/uncgi/Earth

3. Making Sense

> Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling. [5]
>   - Hayden White-

Karl E. Weick wrote that people "don't discover sense, they create it." [6] Narrative is one way by and through which sense-making occurs. Narrative, according to Roland Barthes, is " simply there like life itself…international; transhistorical, transcultural." [7] There is a compulsion to narrate. It is natural, shared and a common experience. Moreover, the word 'narrative' relates to experience, telling what one knows. According to Hayden White, 'narrative' comes from roots in Sanskrit, *gna* which means 'know,' and Latin, *gnarus*, relating to 'expert' and 'skilful' and *narro* meaning 'relate' or 'tell'.[8]

The challenge was how to make sense of the circumstances and experience of geographical estrangement. Since the events were a kind of spatial confluence of sorts—locations, information, points of view, experiences, media—it made sense to use maps. Maps are spatial, they can represent physical and virtual/conceptual/hypothetical spaces, and, in particular, they are themselves a form of narrative: They create continuity, link disparate elements, or in this case events and places, into a cohesive, dimensionally represented whole.

Geographic Information System maps (GIS) became the model for this project.
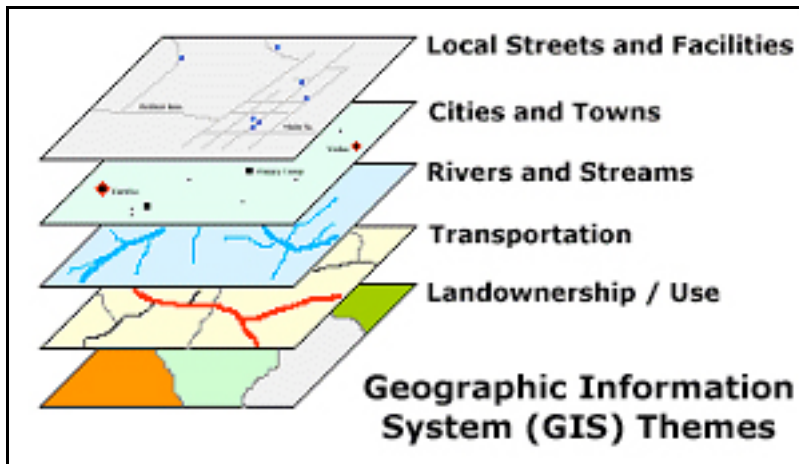
GIS maps combine specific locations, like cities or coastal areas, with other kinds of information such as population distribution, streets, ecological data and transportation patterns. Overlaid, and in combination, they create a rich and valuable portrait of a place.

I used this model of GIS mapping to transpose and combine information from various sources. The idea was to visualize a space that more closely resembled the experience of living within overlapping flows of media technologies, and use this experience as the structure by which to recast the everyday and familiar.
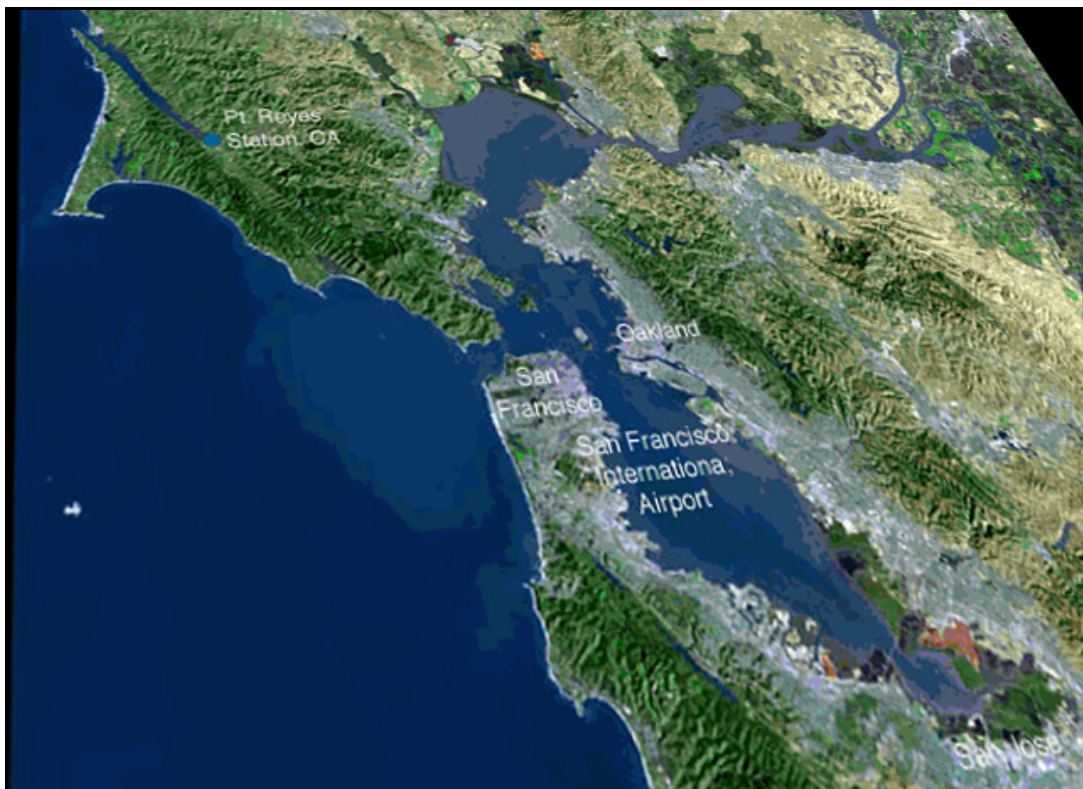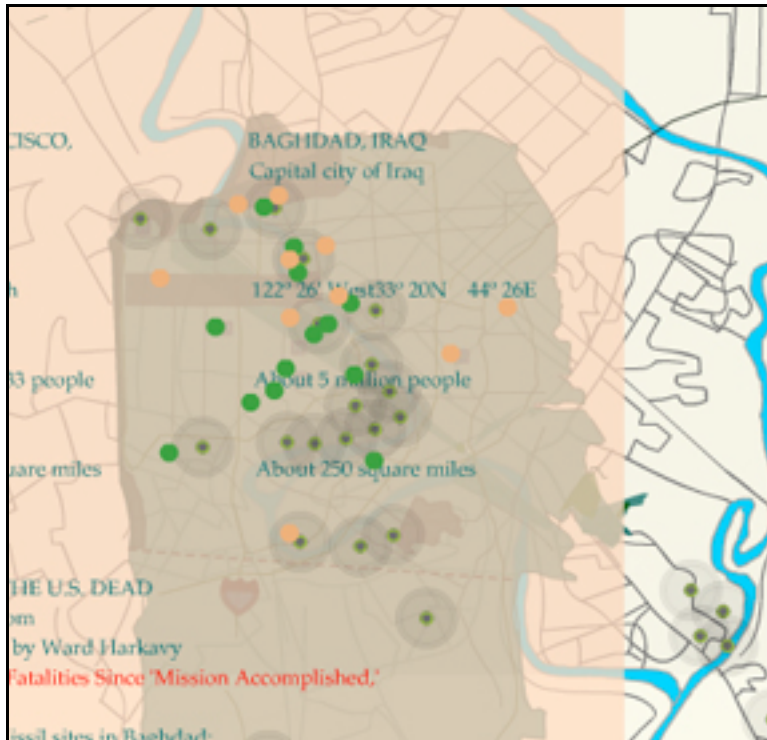

San Francisco Bay area
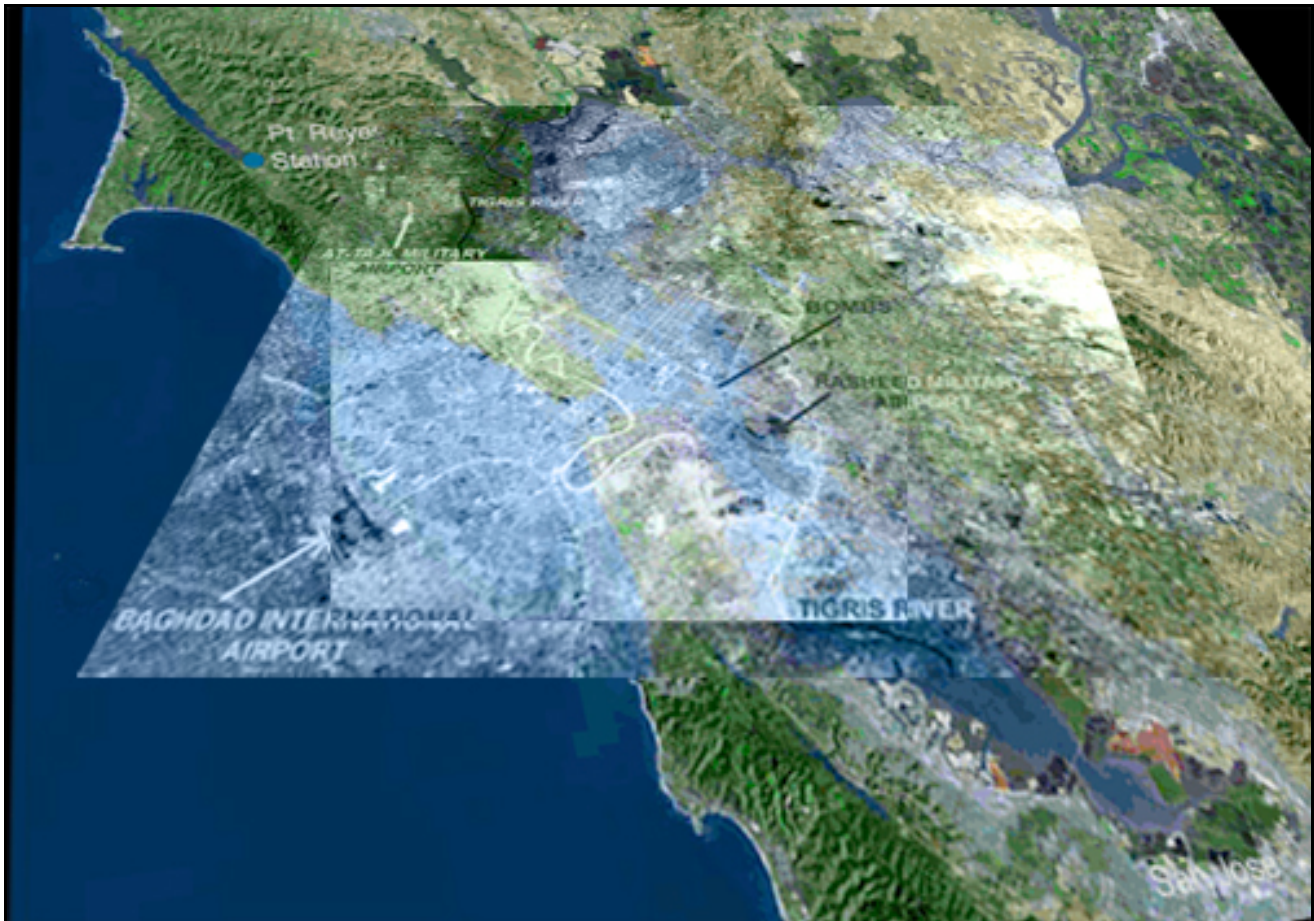
San Francisco Bay area and Baghdad, Iraq (not to scale)

4.   San Francisco ←> Baghdad (Baghdad by the Bay)

San Francisco←> Baghdad is a hybrid map[9] composed by transposing the sites of the first U.S. attack on Baghdad, in March, 2003 upon San Francisco. Mapping information came from many sources, all of which are compiled into a bibliography and reference listing on the website. One main source was the Guardian Unlimited[10], an online edition that published an interactive map showing military targets, areas hit by missiles and bombs as of April 14, 2003, civilian facilities and cultural sites.
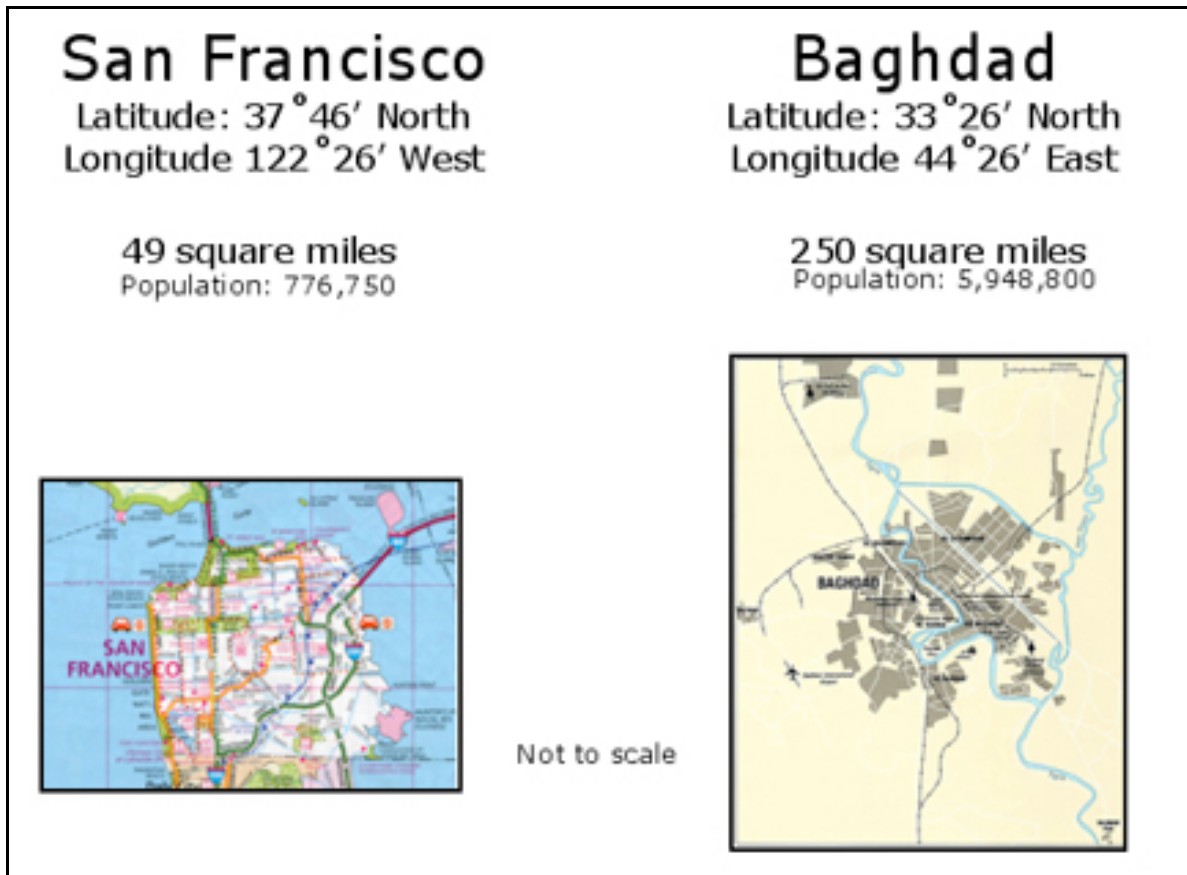
San Francisco
Latitude: 37°46' North
Longitude 122°26' West

49 square miles
Population: 776,750

Baghdad
Latitude: 33°26' North
Longitude 44°26' East

250 square miles
Population: 5,948,800

Not to scale

There were several conceptual decisions that determined the manner by which the overlay took place. Since this hypothetical mapping involved ripping one city out of its geographic coordinates and laying it upon another, I had flexibility, but wanted the system to have a logic that could extent to other similar projects. Baghdad is about 5 times the size of San Francisco, about 250 square miles to San Francisco's 49 square miles. Since I was not limited or restricted by fixed locations, I could chose how to address the discrepancies between the two cities by one of the following methods:

- Shrinking one
- Expanding the other
- Creating a sense of equivalency through matched population distributions, primary cultural sites or comparative land values[11]
- Or making the scale between them uniform, and then overlaying the geographical centers of both cities and allowing everything fall where it lay.

I chose the last option.

The maps from the Guardian Unlimited site were made into one composite and laid over San Francisco. Then, the shadowed bomb and missile sites within San Francisco were located according to their GPS coordinates. Ironically, GPS technology was means by which the military used to target their sites in Iraq.

A site hit by U.S. bombs near the University of Baghdad is shadowed in San Francisco, ironically, not far from the main campus of San Francisco City College. The mirrored site appears on the corner of Ocean and Dorado and bears the local GPS coordinates.

Each San Francisco site has a geocache, a small container that held information about the website, the project and contact information for public commentary. Geocaching[12] is a new international activity that uses the world as a kind of gameboard. There are many variations of collaborative games involving caching. The activity began in 2000 after GPS technology was made available to the general public during President Clinton's administration.

Geocache at Mountain Lake site

Also included in each cache was <u>The Iraq War - Roll Call of the U.S. Dead: Day by Day, Death by Death</u>, a compilation of names of all of the U.S. service personnel who died in the war between May 1, 2003 and March 19, 2004[13]. May 1st, 2003 was the date that President Bush declared,"Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed."[14]

IRAQ WAR: ROLL CALL OF THE U.S. DEAD
A Chronology of U.S. Military Fatalities Since
'Mission Accomplished,'
Part I & Part II: May, 2003-March 2004

Day by Day, Death by Death by Ward Harkavy
Published in The Village Voice
(http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0412/harkavy.php)
PART I: May, 2003-August, 2003
PART II: September, 2003-March, 2004
Total U.S. deaths: 600
* Sources: Pentagon press releases, the Associated Press, militarycity.com,
CBS News, lunaville.org, The Washington Post, The San Diego Union-Tribune,
Chicago Tribune, and other newspapers and websites, including those of military
units. Ranks do not necessarily take account of posthumous promotions.
Many of the deaths are still being investigated or their circumstances are in dispute.
The list is current as of March 22, based on information available to the Voice.

May 2003
1-*President George W. Bush, aboard the U.S.S. Abraham
Lincoln, declares, "Major combat operations in Iraq have
ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies
have prevailed."
*A private first class is killed when a riverbank collapses and
his parked tank falls into the Euphrates River.
[Jesse A. Givens, 34, Springfield MO]
3 - *A sergeant is killed when he falls off a ladder and his M-4
rifle accidentally discharges.
[Sean C. Reynolds, 25, East Lansing MI]
4-*A private first class is killed by a non-combat weapons
discharge in Kuwait. [Jason L. Diebler, 20, Coeburn VA]
8-*A private first class is killed by a sniper while directing
traffic on a Baghdad bridge.[Marlin T. Rockhold, 23,
Hamilton OH]

"Death by Death, Day by Day" published in The Village Voice (http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0412/harkavy.php)

Reporter Ward Harkavy compiled and published the listing in two parts in the The Village Voice. The compilation included the names, ages and cities of origin for each fatality along with a description of how they died. Although Harkavay's listing focused on the U.S. lives lost in the war "Death by Death" also brings to mind Homer's Illiad in which Homer describes the details of the lives and deaths of both Trojans and the Greeks, conveying the ending of individual lives and the death's implications in the unmaking of the larger cultural and social community.[15]

At the time of the project in 2004, the total deaths of U.S. military personnel were 600. As of May, 2005, the total exceeded 2000, although statistics vary considerably, and the method by which figures are calculated is

subject to debate. The statistics for Iraqi deaths also vary. Estimates of about 22,000 Iraqi civilians have died between March 2004 and May 2005[16].

San Francisco <-> Baghdad was launched in April 2004, about 1 year after the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The twinning or mirroring of the two cities also had an interesting mythological connection. While carrying out the research for the project, I discovered an uncanny connection between San Francisco and Baghdad through the writings of Herb Caen, a popular Pulitzer Prize winning local columnist. For about 58 years, Caen wrote his love for San Francisco in a regular column for the San Francisco Chronicle until his death in 1997.

In 1949, Caen titled his first book Baghdad by the Bay, publishing a sequel in 1951 called More from Baghdad by the Bay. The subsequent nickname stuck. The connection between the two cities stemmed in part from both sharing a colorful and mythical past. Baghdad, as told through the stories of Scheherazade in 1001 Arabian Nights, paralleling the history and characters of early San Francisco.
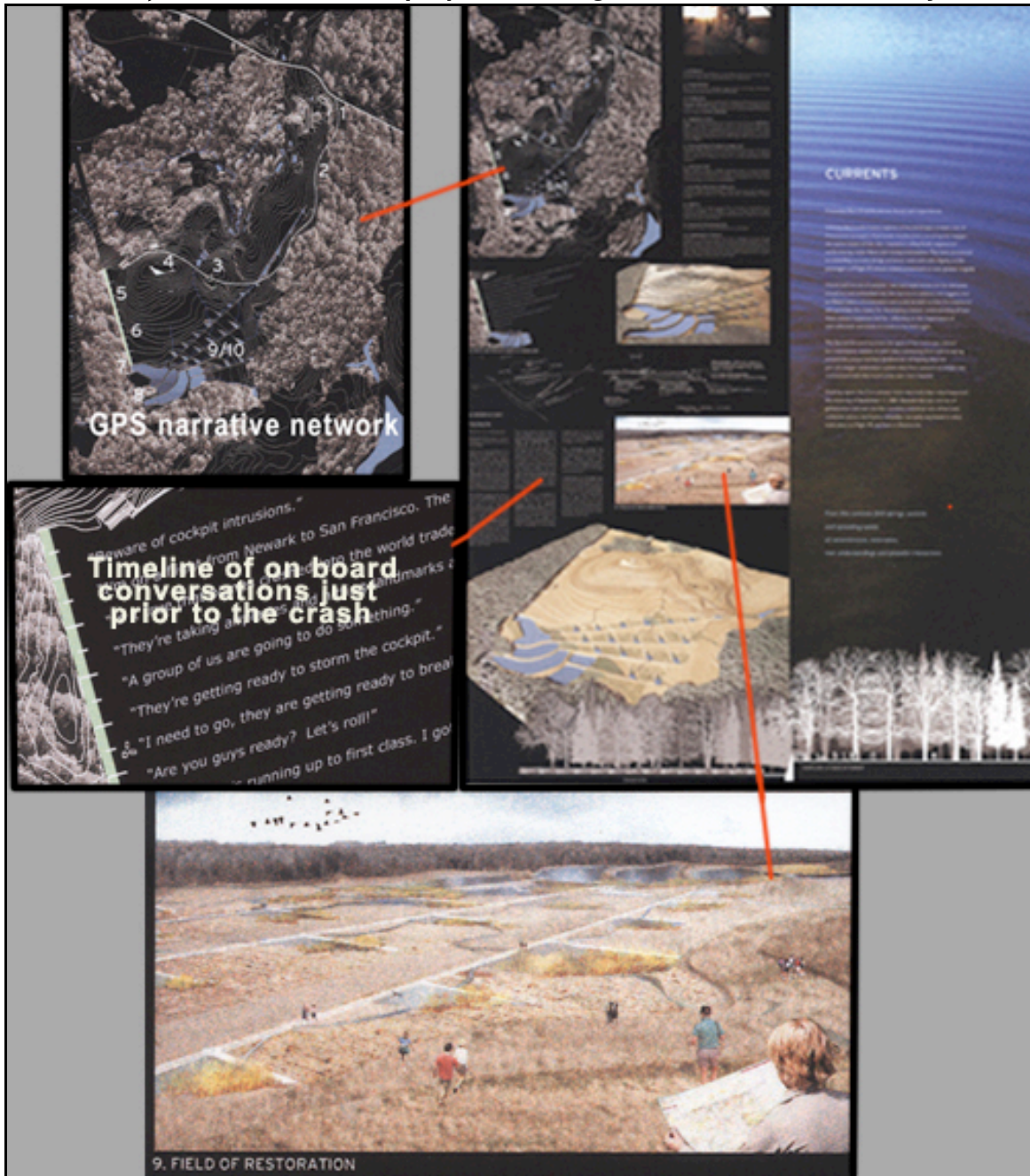
----

5. **Related works**

> "…if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is a pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place." [17]
>
> -Yi-Fu Tuan-

My research interests and art practices lay in creating new kinds of narrative spaces using locative media, mapping and other digital technologies. Three projects follow, all employing mapping and narrative as ways to organize, overlay and embed physical spaces in order to create new hybrid and augmented environments.

Currents, 2004: _A memorial proposal for Flight #93, <u>Shanksville, Pennsylvania</u>_[18]

GPS narrative network

Timeline of on board conversations just prior to the crash

9. FIELD OF RESTORATION

CURRENTS

Currents was a design submission for the Flight #93 memorial site in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, the site of the United Airlines Flight 93 crash on route from New Jersey to California on September 11, 2001. **Currents** was a collaborative submission with artists Susan Schwartzenberg, Peter Richards, and landscape architect Tom Leder.

We proposed a site of reclamation using the metaphor of water and currents that emanated out from the site of the crash, spreading infinitely out past the boundaries of the location and, by implication, beyond the moment of the event itself in time, generating larger cultural and social resonances.

Once a mining area, the site contained many standing ponds of water, each with toxic runoffs from early mining. We proposed to a series of ponds that radiated out from the crash site, each acting as a filter for the toxic waters. The system, designed by Peter Richards, slowly cleaned the water as it ran down towards the site of the crash.

In addition to the network of reclamation ponds, we proposed a large network of reclamation narratives within the environment on the event's history, biographies of passengers and crew, and relating to the history, use, and geography of the local site itself. Using GPS to map the memorial site, the narratives could be heard through earphones worn by visitors who carried small GPS receivers as they moved through and explored the site of the crash.

History has a way of flattening over time, losing its ability to convey the complexities of events. Monuments also share this characteristic, as their creation often takes place by sacrificing the nuances of the historical event for the sake of a more accessible ideology.

Our intention was to layer the site through narrative. We wanted to the larger historical and political events that gave rise to the circumstances be embedded and mapped within the site. These narratives would inform the visitors' experience of the event and the related historical and political circumstances by contributing to their experience of and in the site.

*SpeakingHere: On language and landscape, 2004*
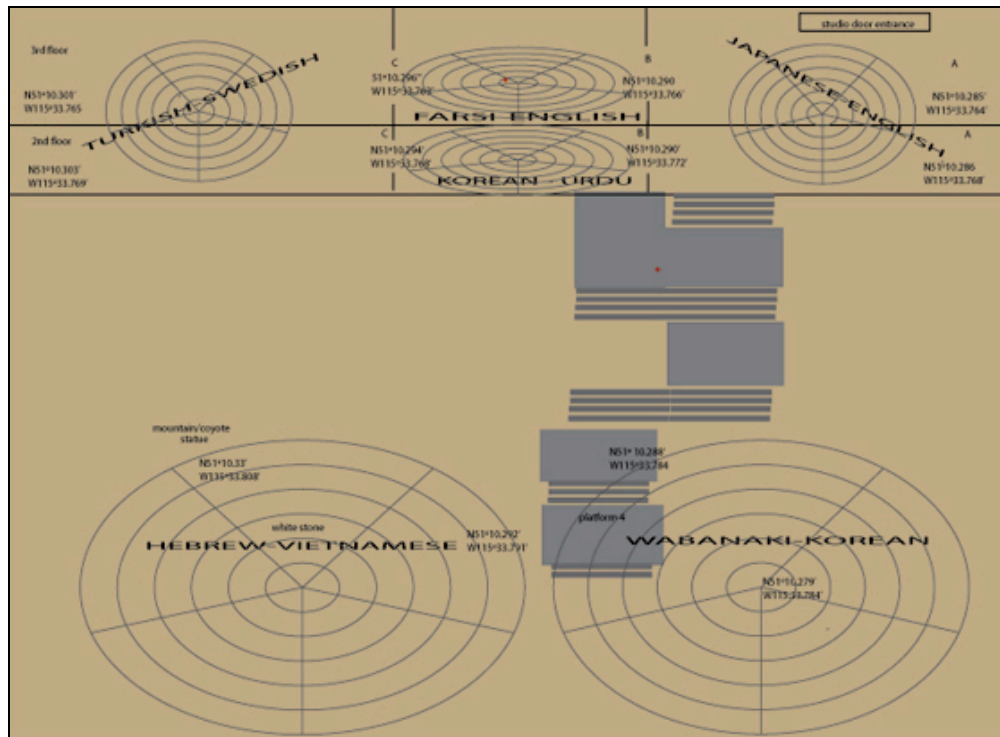
Graphical map of landscape language space mapped by GPS coordinates:
Turkish, Swedish, Farsi, English, Korean, Urdu, Hebrew, Vietnamese, Wabanakı and Korean

SpeakingHere is a narrative and GPS project developed during *Intranation,*[19] a Banff Centre residency that explored questions about the existence and cultural implications of nations within nations. The power of the vast landscape that lay outside my studio window led to research on the history of the area, the languages spoken, the evolution of the site in terms of its geography and cultural shifts and changes. With this in mind, I mapped the immediate surroundings that lay just outside of my studio window embedding the languages that were currently present, spoken by fellow residency artists.

Nine artists from the residency, each speaking a different language, described what they saw through the window that looked out onto the mountainous surrounding. Their descriptions were combined with another form of language, that of images: Short panoramas taken of the same space, every day over the course of the month.

Nhan Nguyen describes in Vietnamese what he sees out the studio window
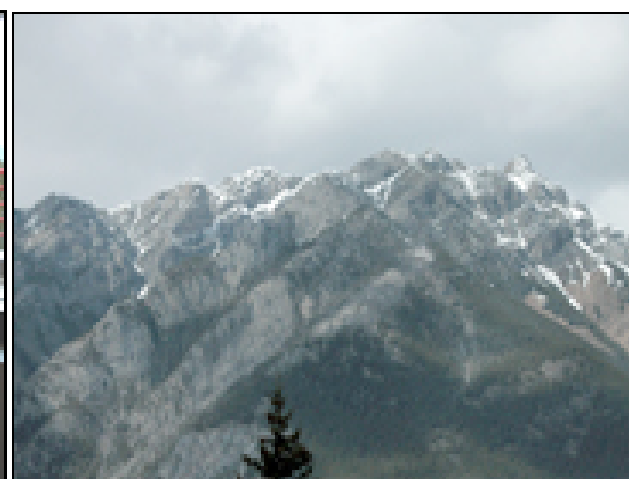
View from the studio window

Larissa Lai listening to voices and viewing images describing the space in which she is walking

The images and voices were 'embedded' into the landscape using GPS coordinates that allowed walkers, equipped with computers, a GPS receivers and headphones, to hear the many voices and see images describing the same landscape from another time.

The project touched upon the futility of ever knowing a place; of its history and presence always exceeding the grasp of our very limited human sense of time. In spite of this limit of human time and language, the compulsion remains to forge our own narrow and imperfect paths into and through spaces we inhabit.

---

7. Summary

The approach to culture begins when the ordinary man becomes the narrator, when it is he who begins the (common) place of discourse and the (anonymous) space of its development…

The task consists not in substituting a representation for the ordinary or covering it up with mere words, but in showing how it introduces itself into our technologies – in the way in which the sea flows back into pockets and crevices in beaches – and how it can reorganize the place from which discourse is produced.[20]

-Michel de Certeau-

The bombing of Iraq in 2003 as experienced through old and new media created a profound sense of dislocation. ***Shadows from another place: San Francisco <-> Baghdad*** arose from this experience. It has led to a series of projects all using divergent technologies and information to recast the familiar and everyday in order to create sites that more closely reflect the experiences of living *interlocationally.*

Shadows casts sites that are imaginary *and* physical where both local and global events can be seen and experienced simultaneously. Instead of dislocation, the series offers location, rendering foreign events as though they were domestic and allowing the body to move through these spaces that exists in between local/familiar and distance/foreign ground.

Each form of media is limited. Knowing the capacity of each form to express what it can and what it cannot helps to shape an intelligent and insightful listener/witness. However, older forms of media, such as television and radio, seem to mask our increasing reliance upon newer forms of technology for information. For example, the embedded journalists model gave us a picture of war that we expected to see—journalists riding in trucks along with soldiers, one group with microphones, the other with guns. The continued reliance on eyewitness views belie the fact that wars are no longer fought in this fashion, from fixed geographical positions, locations and points of views. More and more, the military relies on new technologies by which to see, navigate and identify place.

Similarly, our own, everyday experiences of place are changing as technologies dissolve the markers of and anchors to place and location. *Shadows from another place* explores how these old and new technologies relate to each other; how they respectively shape and inform the understanding of information and experience; how they differ in terms of the particular ways in which they convey what is geographically distant, and recast it as local and familiar.

8. **Endnotes**

Events coexist within a human framework--that of our bodies, our local communities, our families. Even though we are experiencing the world through a confluence of both old and new technologies, Michel de Certeau reminds us that the events themselves are still being translated through the practices of, and in everyday lives; through our routines, our senses, our familiar landscapes and our narratives. All these still remain powerful potential points for creative resistance; these primary sites and means, in and by which we experience and convey what we know.

NOTES

[1] Michel de Certeau, <u>The Practice of Everyday Life</u> (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) 5.

[2] The invasion of Iraq began around 5:30am, March 20 in Iraq/ 6:30pm in California. Sounds of the invasion can be heard at *KSL1160 NewsRadio* <http://radio.ksl.com/index.php?sid=15865&nid=102>

[3] Global Positioning System (GPS) is radio navigation system composed of signals from twenty-four orbiting satellites, each about 11,000 miles above the earth's surface, that enables one to locate position on the surface of the earth. The system is worldwide. Originally developed by the US Department of Defense in the 1970's to allow submarines to target sites for missiles and bombs as they were moving, it was opened to the general public in the 1990's under President Clinton's administration.

The satellites orbit the earth in precise patterns, each sending back radio signals to ground stations in Hawaii, Ascension Island, Diego Garcia Kwajalein and Colorado Springs. GPS receivers pick up these signals and calculate location by means of triangulation, to determine both location and altitude using information from four satellites.

There are many sites online that give excellent background information on the GPS system. One such site is developed and maintained by Trimble, one of several GPS companies. The Trimble site is found at <http://www.trimble.com/gps/index.html>.

[4] Avital Ronell, "Video/Television/Rodney King: Twelve Steps Beyond the Pleasure Principle," <u>Differences: A Journal of Feminist and Cultural Studies</u> 4.2 (1992) 9.

[5] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," <u>On Narrative,</u> ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981) 16.

[6] Karl E. Weick, "Leadership when Events Don't Play by the Rules," <u>Leading in Trying Times, T</u>he University of Michigan Business School, Faculty Research and Essays Following September 11, 2001, <<u>http://www.bus.umich.edu/FacultyResearch/Research/TryingTimes/Rules.htm</u>>

[7] Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," <u>Image, Music, Text</u> (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 79.

[8] White, p.16, footnote 2.

[9] I have come to think of these as *interlocational* maps. The word, *interlocation*, describes the position or space represented in these overlays. The word is composed of *inter,* suggesting *between or among*, and *locus,* meaning *place*. *Interlocation* brings to mind something taking place between locations, which describes these mappings quite accurately. The maps reflect not only an overlaying of one site upon another, but they also visualize the space that exists as the result of that overlay, conceptually moving between one site and the other. Interlocation is the space that arises through this transposition of one place upon another. It allows relationships between distant places to be simultaneously realized and offers an extended sense of relatedness.

[10] "War with Iraq – The battle for Baghdad." The Guardian Unlimited <http://www.guardian.co.uk/flash/0,5860,836462,00.html>.

[11] Some of these particular options came from comments and conversations following my presentation of this paper at the "MIT:4 The Work of Stories Conference" in May, 2005, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Background on the conference can be found at <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit4>.

[12] For the history of geocaching and current worldwide activities relating to geocaching, see the Geocaching.com website <http://www.geocaching.org>.

[13] Ward Harkavy, "Day by Day, Death by Death: A Chronology of U.S. Military Fatalities Since 'Mission Accomplished,' Parts 1 & 2, May, 2003-March, 2004, The Village Voice March 23rd, 2004 <http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0412/haravy.php>.

[14] Harkavy

[15] One such example in the Illiad reads, "Then Menelaus son of Atreus with his sharp-pointed spear killed the hunter Scamandrius son of Stropius. He was a great man for the chase, who had been taught by Artemis herself to bring down any kind of wild game that the mountain forest yields. But Artemis the Mistress of the Bow was of no help to him now, nor was the long shots that had won him fame. For as Scamandrius fled before him, the glorious spear arm of Menelaus son of Atris struck him with his lance in the middle of the back between the shoulders and drove it through his chest. He fell face downward and his armor clanged upon him." Homer, The Illiad, trans. E.V. Rieu (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966) 64.

An example from Harkavay's publication, "Day by Day, Death by Death," reads, "A private first class is killed when his convoy is hit by a homemade bomb and small-artillery [Stephen E. Wyatt, 19, Kilgore TX}; A specialist is killed when his unit is hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. [Donald L. Wheeler, 22, Concord MI]; A specialist and a private first class are killed when an Iraqi garbage truck swerves out of control, rolls over, and lands atop their Hummer. [Douglas J. Weismantie, 28 Pittsburgh PA, Jose Casanova, 23, El Monte CA]'; A private drowns in a recreation swimming hole set up for troops in the Euphrates River. [Benjamin L. Freeman, 19, Baldosto GA]

The connection between war and the Homer's Illiad was made by Elaine Scarry in her extraordinary and powerful writing about war and its implications on the larger social losses. In it she writes, "The 'unmaking' of the human being, the emptying of the nation from his body, is equally characteristic of dying or being wounded, for the in part naturally 'given' and in part 'made' body is deconstructed…as well as in each case the unmaking of the civilization as it resides in each of those bodies. The arms that had learned to gesture in a particular way are unmade; the hands that held within them not just blood and bone but the movements that made possible the playing of the piano are unmade; the fingers and palms that knew in intricate detail the weight and feel of a particular tool are unmade;…all are deconstructed along with the tissue itself, the sentient source and site of all learning." Elaine Scarry, "Unmaking: the

Structure of War", <u>The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World</u>, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 122-123.

[16] Iraqi Body Count: Civilians Reported Killed during the Military Intervention in Iraq <http://www.iraqbodycount.net>

[17] Yi-Fu Tuan, <u>Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience</u> (Berkeley: University of California, 1994) 6.

[18] Flight 93 National Memorial, Stage One Designs, <http://flight93memorialproject.org/dessta1geign_version2.asp?GroupID=11542>

[19] Information on the IntraNation Banff Residency can be found at <http://www.intranation.net/>

[20] Michel de Certeau, <u>The Practice of Everyday Life</u> (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) 5.

●●●

Paula Levine, plevine@sfsu.edu   June, 2005