

Introduction: GIS Databases in Digital Humanities

Or

zeitGIS(t): Imaging Place From Deep Thoreau(t) to Ul(t)mer FREsBEE

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Location is a fluid situation and not a fixed place, it is an approximate proximity, an architecture, an affiliation, a turbulence, a pause in the Brownian motion. "My axes are not so geographically logical" (Greg Ulmer). Locations are assemblages of indicators, sites of multiplicities, comprised of confluences of flows: semiotic, material, social, poetical, political, artistic. Differences in directions and speeds converge momentarily into braided streams, a temporary collocation. Suspended in the turbulence we find millions of particles. Some colliding, others softly slipping past one another...slipping through holes in the system. Other particles are on parallel trajectories. The locus being the weaving together of the field of representation (writing, art), the field of reality (the world), and the field of subjectivity (self).

Eve Andree Laramee

<http://www.thing.net/eyebeam/msg00038.html>

One could read this essay as an introduction to the work of Greg Ulmer and to the Imaging Place research contained in this volume. One could read this essay as an introduction to geographic information systems (GIS) for cultural problem solving, including future paths for digital humanities (the translation of data into humanities knowledge). The first title of this essay contains little information, but with its eventual publication, it will find a place in indexes, word searches, and databases linked to keywords. One might argue that it represents the print-based or logocentric description of the Imaging Place Project. The second title contains layers of information, but poetically coded to the point that it resembles an inside joke. The first title works on an infrastructural level to literally connect to the current mood of the times, while the

second title describes and performs that mood. One could describe the second title as heuretic.

The goal of the research in this volume is to insinuate the heuretic into the current discourses and keywords and, therefore, this essay needs two titles: one to link to existing search engines and databases, the other to perform the epistemological potential of those databases.

Perhaps the title says it all.

Perhaps the defining mood of a particular period in history means paying special attention to mood, as Greg Ulmer and others in this volume suggest. Among the aspects of that zeitgeist, one might also include the importance of collective thought (called smart mobs, wikid thinking, and other phrases and neologisms). My research, and much of the work represented in this volume, examines this mood (associated with getting an idea). Further, the inventiveness mood seems to appear in vernacular situations (among popular and folk life) as much in the rarefied world of specialized knowledge. One might dismiss mood because of its connection to popular distractions and the merely humorous.¹

Scholars, wanting to appreciate and eventually stimulate this mood of the surprising innovation, have turned to examples drawn from, the often debased and abject, forms of culture: low-brow popular, folk, and (paradoxically) traditional domestic practices. My essay considers the research in this volume (and the work of Greg Ulmer) as a folk hobby; and, therefore, it involves some allusion to folk practices not as objects of study, but as models. In previous work, I have

¹ This connection occurs on the linguistic level as well as through cultural contexts. The word mood in English appears as *humeur* in French and *humor* in Portuguese, and that word, in turn, is a homograph (same spelling different meaning) of humor. Some mistake *humor* for humor.

examined Amish quilts and practices as models to read Martin Heidegger's theories of innovative thought. Alluding to a phrase mentioned elsewhere in this volume, going forth (the mood of inventiveness) meant going home.

In fact, some have noted that the Gee's Bend Quilts exhibit of quilts, that has toured the US for the last few years, suggests the experience of the everyday and vernacular inventiveness and the corresponding feeling. The exhibit explicitly seeks to illuminate the life and vernacular art of a group of women. These women and their families were completely isolated from modern culture by racist policies in Alabama in an area named after a bend in the river. The Gee (an expression of surprise and delight related to Eureka, but more mild, and less profound) occurred in a Bee (a meeting for communal work or amusement). The Gee's Bend quilts have been compared to, and grouped with, sophisticated boogie-woogie modernist art rather than to the symmetrical folk art found in many other quilting traditions (like the Amish quilts). That is, the inventiveness of their quilts grew from a collective mood that only future generations could recognize in hindsight as quintessentially modern. To produce that invention mood of the quilting bee (artificially as a pedagogical simulation) one need only map (as a verb in Giles Deleuze's sense of mapping) the topics (topos -- a place, theme, formula) taken as given in new poetic geographies or what many in this volume call imaging place. To map the idea, gee whiz, onto Gee's Bend and vice versa.²

² None of the critics have wondered about the name of the quilting bee in the Gee's Bend area; were they the Bee Gee's or the Gee's Bee? One reason critic's often dismiss this sort of coincidental conjunction as an over-coded reading or joke is precisely because specialized knowledge production usually demands that reified categories remain separate. The only special case is in the moment of invention when the short circuit leads to new paths. Footnotes, with the marginalized meanderings, make a place for discoveries.

Returning to the title of this essay, the pun between the *geist* in *zeitgeist* and GIS(t) involves the now common acronym for geographic information system (GIS); in fact, the acronym has come to define the contemporary mood in the formation of digital humanities (or the translation of the humanities into the digital systems). New gadgets, software, and scholarship promises to spatialize and mix GPS with information retrieval and organization. GIS manages, analyzes, and displays information linked to spaces and geographic places. Informatics, the study of how data becomes information, relates directly to these uses of geo-visualizations.

One can link locations to networks (or databases) of meanings. In this volume, a series of places (some hot spots others mundane) become the locus of an information system, theme, or database. A list of these *topos* from the research of the Imaging Place group gives a concrete sense of how one starts a GIS. The list includes the following: a pyramid in Memphis, a West Bank village, Kamloops, Wendover, a Shanty town, a house in New England, a river in Miami, even a field of mushrooms, the auratic location of the former World Trade Center towers, a honky-tonk tourist center, a Key West parade, virtual play rooms, a book artist's studio, an address, a street, a pond, rail-road tracks, monuments, bristling desert environments, and more. This was the goal of the Imaging Place gathering, and the goal of this volume. You can layer that geographic information, combine layers, and use the result as a simulation of the mood of invention -- which takes place in the tour of the places (many listed above).

A GIS is most often associated with maps. A map, however, is only one way you can work with geographic data in a GIS, and only one type of product generated by a GIS, the projects described in this conference use databases of layered information that describes the world in

geographic terms. The places function as links to database of information and support queries, analysis, and editing of the information. Geographers and, now, digital humanities scholars call this way of working geo-visualization. In other words, GIS combines data with analytic and heuritic rules.

Returning to the title of this essay, the parenthetical (t) following the GIS as in GIS(t) completes, what Ulmer calls, the puncept on zeitgeist. It also alludes to the small t in Ulmer's acronym, CATT(t) that describes the process of getting an idea (or creating a theory. The CATT(t) also describes the steps to s(t)imulating that mood. Of obvious importance to identify the steps of knowledge production in terms of the context of discovery rather than the context of justification (something that many scholars have noted as one of Ulmer's most important contributions to the contemporary humanities), this essay (and the work of the Imaging Place group) focuses on the tail of the CATT(t); admittedly it is the tail wagging the...

The (t) functions as the tail (of the CATT) as a tale or secondary elaboration; it gives it a place on the map. The (t) changes how we read the GIS(t) of a theory and brings us back to the title of this essay. The gist of the conference, and this volume, is imaging place (although one might argue that the gist was also the algorithm that later appeared on the official conference t-shirt, but that discussion of Ka-Ching is beyond the scope of this essay, and others will more fully explain its meaning elsewhere in this volume). Making matters fuzzy, the phrase, imaging place, also names an ongoing series of artworks by J. Craig Freeman; so, it is unresolved whether the conference focused on Freeman's "Imaging Place" or an economy of imaging place as represented in the other works discussed in this volume. In either case, "Imaging Place" grew

from the concerns of FRE, and Freeman as a member, as that group relates to G. Ulmer's on-going geo-visualization research. One might describe that research as the mapping of *electrate* rhetoric, *heuristic* logic, and the *chora* mood on the *mystory* places. This condensed explanation simply sets the stage (or places) the (t) in relation to the GIS. There is more to say on these contextual issues, and I will return to FRE in the last section of this essay,

Putting the (t) on a GIS images place. You can see that in much of the research represented here. The geographic information systems, much discussed in the current research in the arts and humanities, needs the (t) to allow GIS(t) to express the mood, the secondary elaboration, or tale of the places used as part of a theory of cultural problem-solving and a new way of doing innovative research in a digital milieu.

This is not a new story, and it has important expression in what one might call Deep Thoreau(t). Of course, that phrase alludes, in a series of layers, to a self-consciously corny and ironic pornographic movie, a major character in the Watergate scandal, and to the famous American philosopher. The movie, starring Linda Lovelace, had the tag line, "how far does a girl have to go to untangle her tingle?," and that tag line could apply equally well to the condensed form of writing (about mood or tingle) this essay explores. Perhaps the (t) also stands for tingle; the (t) for tingle alludes to Marshall McLuhan's phrase "the medium is the message" (a pun on his own phrase about the message). The situation of GIS(t) -- the mapping is the tingle -- vibrates and resonates and now becomes focused on the affect, receiver, and dissemination rather than the medium, message, or sender. The network of meanings also has political implications -- which the Imaging Place gathering and the research in this volume often stressed.

When then-*Washington Post* managing editor Howard Simons chose "Deep Throat" as the pseudonym for an anonymous informant (to the reporters Woodward and Bernstein) concerning the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up by the Nixon administration, he gave a clue to the informant's name: W. Mark Felt (not revealed until years later). For felt is precisely the suggestion of mood and tingle that the allusion to the movie seeks to cover. Later, Douglas Adams used a pun on the phrase in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1978) to name the super-computer: Deep Thought. Not only does the pun connect the porn-movie to the electronic milieu, but also suggests the tingle of digital thought (a secondary orality). Some will note that by putting the tingle back on Thoreau, and in doing so creating a chain of allusions, the effect is to belittle Thoreau to put him and his thought in a compromising position. It looks like cheap graffiti rather than sober and serious thought: what could it possibly have to do with GIS? Before we reject this line of reasoning, let's examine Thoreau more carefully in order to find an historical precedent for the type of thinking examined in this volume.

Michael Jarrett, in an essay in this volume, uses Thoreau's *Walden* as a "tutor text that teaches me to conceptualize my place" and to provide "a precedent for thinking or imaging the relationship between sound and place." Jarrett continues summarizing the argument here as well as in his own essay.

I want to show how in meditating on the problem of the railroad, the roar that effaces identifying and particular sounds of place, Thoreau models "categories and logics of thought and decision" useful for *sociopoetics*. Thoreau had to un-think the opposition between reason and imagination....

The details of the relationship of the railroad's sound to the imagined serenity of the Walden-pond area are beyond the scope of this essay, and discussed in Jarret's essay. Thoreau's appreciation of the railroad's sound as an alternative way to map space suggests that one can read his work as a philosopher of tingle (mood/secondary orality/tale).

The work of Greg Ulmer also "un-thinks" the opposition between reason and imagination in the Thoreau(t) lineage. Of course, it is Ulmer's work with FRE as a communal activity that is the focus of the Imaging Place gathering. That gathering, and the research described in this volume, had a particularly pragmatic or active way of working: learning through doing. The quilting bee of Imaging Place and FRE (Florida Research Ensemble) functions as an epistemological model. Its connection to Ulmer's work on the (t) as the epitome of this way of work suggests another set of relations.

In a dialogue about the wishing Y and Herostratus (the former became a crucial imaging in the production of the t-shirt for the Imaging Place gathering and the later a crucial element in Ulmer's keynote address at the conference), Ulmer explains how this new electrate form thought works. "I once used the legend of Herostratus (who burned down the temple at Ephesus, one of the wonders of the Ancient world, in order to acquire the immortality of fame) to discuss existential envy. Once the ancient *Theoria* produced the official account of an event, no other version could be uttered. This power of *Theoria* to control discourse has expanded in the information age to encompass identity itself. No version of existence other than the one represented is permitted, and that version now is *celebrity*. Grammatology shows, theoretically, that selfhood is the form that identity takes in the apparatus of literacy. Collectively

and individually people entering electracy will die to themselves, let go, let things be, detach from the ideology of consciousness. To convert to electracy, however, as you and I must do, is something more complicated." The translation or conversion to Ul(t)mer (or Ulmerian) involves Brownian motion (named in honor of the botanist Robert Brown) to describe and visually and mathematically map apparently random dissemination of pollen.

Ul(t)mer is distinguished by its "Spirit of the Game: the principles of fair play, sportsmanship, and the joy of play." It is still customary for theory teams to sing a cheer for their respondents at the end of the conference or even in the midst of Ul(t)mer. The cheers or calls to thinking, ridiculous and humorous short games or songs, suggest that the competition end with raising everyone's spirit or mood. For example, in an exchange on the Invent-L list (the list which served as the genesis for the Imaging Place gathering), Ulmer noted that this author's name related to the "Indo European root "sap" meaning "taste." Dr. Saper, are you following? >> Do you see where this is going?" This author responded: "You forced me to tell (sap under pressure): About five years ago, our extended families took a cruise. We made t-shirts with a single line that made caricatures of the 13 participants with the slogan: Saper Family Cruise. My nephew wore the t-shirt at Brown University especially during Ultimate (frisbee) tournaments (the team was named Brownian Motion). Brown went on to win the national championship. His teammates -- especially the graduating seniors -- thought his t-shirt was very funny (for some unknown reason). When those alumni recently played in a national championship outside of collegiate competition, they needed a name -- so they chose Saper Family Cruise. They won the national championship and had Saper Family Cruise engraved as the National Ultimate Team Champion's Name. There's no accounting for taste (sap-er) in t-shirts or ... Sapers Float Boat in Ultimate."

In Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Brownian motion is used to create (or rather calculate) the Infinite Improbability Drive that powers the spaceship *Heart of Gold*. One learns that the Brownian motion generator is in the end a hot cup of tea.

Ulmer's notion of the Brownian motion generator, Chorography, "concerns my places, my haunts, and yours now ... Electracy ... does not exclude calculation ... part calculative and part metaphorical." (<http://www.altx.com/au2/lmw.html>). So, although it seems to spin out of control, the way an artist or poet thinks -- in Brownian motion -- untangling to get her tingle suggests a way to solve social and cultural issues -- to work sociopoetically. Will Garrett-Petts and Donald Lawrence explained, in their presentation for the Imaging Place gathering and in this volume, that their multi-year and multi-faceted project on Small Cities for CURA (Community University Research Alliance) sought not just to collect statistical demographic and economic data, but to appreciate the mood of those places. They wanted to understand not merely how fast a small city g(r)ows, but where and how it's g(r)eing. The experts in appreciating the texture and mood of growth are, of course, artists. Their project seeks to explicitly examine and illuminate the mood of small cities, tranquil or not. The research in this volume, which we might call Ul(t)mer, seeks to solve social and cultural problems, and propose an approach to organizing data into information, mapping that information on to geo-visualized places, and using that community-based or vernacular for the production of knowledge and cultural theories. The Imaging Place Project (i-PP with its allusions to the Pleasure Principle) asks figuratively about the translation process involved in moving from a print-based milieu to an *electrate* GIS zeitgeist, "how far does a girl have to go to untangle her tingle?"

