



# Spatial Dissonance, Subjective Imagination and Locative Media: An Interview with Paula Levine

Barbara Crow

*Wi: Journal of Mobile Media, Spring 2008*

The online version of this article can be found at:

<https://doi.org/10.65968/QOTP7024>

Crow, Barbara. "Spatial Dissonance, Subjective Imagination and Locative Media: An Interview with Paula Levine". *Wi: Journal of Mobile Media, Spring (2008)*. Web. <https://doi.org/10.65968/QOTP7024>

# Spatial Dissonance, Subjective Imagination and Locative Media: An Interview with Paula Levine

Barbara Crow



**Interview conducted by Barbara Crow, April 3, 2008 on Skype using Call Recorder.**

Paula Levine is an artist, an associate professor at the San Francisco State University in Conceptual/Information Arts and just served a second term as a peer advisor for Almost Perfect, Banff New Media Institute.

Paula Levine is a visual artist focusing on experimental narrative and new forms of narrative spaces. Her research/art practice is in GPS technology, wireless, and remote devices. Paula has twenty years of experience in experimental documentary photography and video. Her current work looks at hidden dynamics as a way to develop

new understandings about the nature of place. Her works have shown in video festivals, galleries, and museums worldwide.

Her recent installation, *Signature*, is inaugural work in the new Contemporary Project Space at the Sonoma County Museum in Santa Rosa, California. *Signature* is a contemporary portrait of seismic history as it intersects with local lives and landscape. The work uses GPS satellites to trigger the sound of the 1906 Bay area earthquake. The same overhead satellites also cause the surface of a projected digital image of Santa Rosa to rupture and reveal the hidden presence of the Rogers Creek Fault that runs directly through the centre of the city. The sound is converted from a selection of seismograph recordings of the 1906 quake. Santa Rosa was severely destroyed by the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fires. While the Rogers Creek Fault has been quiet for many years, current seismic research refocuses attention on it as a possible continuation of the more active Hayward Creek Fault, lying to the south of the city.

*Signature* is featured as part of a larger historical and geological exhibit called *Force of Nature*, commemorating the centennial of the Bay area earthquake and fire, focusing on the historical and current seismic impact, events, and geography of the greater Santa Rosa area.

*Shadows from another place: San Francisco <-> Baghdad*, a web/GPS/transposed geographies project, overlays the sites of bombs and missiles from the first U.S. invasion of Baghdad upon San Francisco. These sites are then identified and located with GPS coordinates, the same technology used to identify the Baghdad target sites, as well as maps and photographs. Through this transposition, the distance between foreign and

domestic collapses as distant politics can be translated, visualized, and experienced in local terms.

*Shadows* has exhibited online in *Transposing Geographies: Mapping on the Internet*, Image Festival 2006, Toronto; in *peripheries + proximities*, HTMLles Festival – 7th edition, STUDIO XX, Montreal, Canada; and *Labertinos – New Geographies*. It was also featured in a paper Levine presented on transpositional geographies as part of the Mobile Narratives Panel at MIT4: The work of stories, a conference on narrative at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts. *Shadows from another place: San Francisco <-> Baghdad* was one of the projects proposed for and developed at The Banff Centre as part of the IntraNation Residency in 2004. Paula presented a talk on transposed geographies focusing on current projects at ISEA, San Jose, California in August, 2006.

A Canadian-American, Paula teaches in conceptual/information arts, an area focusing on digital art and experimental technologies in the Art Department at San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California.

(Biography from [http://www.banffcentre.ca/faculty/faculty\\_member.aspx?facid=3008](http://www.banffcentre.ca/faculty/faculty_member.aspx?facid=3008))

### **Recommended Locative Media projects by Paula Levine:**

1. *Christian Nold* (<http://www.softhook.com/> and <http://biomapping.net/>) Christian Nold maps physical spaces and the body within it combining GPS with Galvanic Skin Response, the latter used to indicate affective changes. Volunteers walk through various city spaces recording their movements and affective states along with their own written notations. All are combined to create compelling mapped portraits of place.

2. C5 – *The Landscape Initiative 2001-*

06 (<http://www.c5corp.com/projects/landscape/index.shtml>, and also <http://www.c5corp.com/venues/camerawork/index.shtml>) C5 is an artist-research group. This project, *The Landscape Initiative*, focused on generating new landscape data, combining it with existing information and designing new models of visualizing results. Their research process of gathering data was physically carried out with members climbing Mt. Shasta, Mt. Whitney and Mt. Fuji, collecting data from walking along the Great Wall of China and doing an extensive motor cycle tour across the country. One of the projects coming from their investigations was called The Analogous Landscape: Rim of Fire project which was “to develop inferencing techniques for navigation of terrains of similar characteristic.”

**Works that have resonance with and have influenced Paula Levine:**

1. Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz’s early research and work in satellite telecommunications and, in particular, their project “Hole in Space” (<http://www.ecafe.com/getty/HIS/index.html>) where they linked Lincoln Centre in NY and the Broadway department store in Los Angeles.

2. *Amsterdam Realtime* (<http://realtime.waag.org/>) and Esther Polak where volunteers carry gps devices that trace their movements through the city. Over time, the city becomes visible through the realtime movements of the bodies within it.

3. Morgan O’Hara whose *Live Transmissions* (<http://www.morganohara.com/>) are live drawn traces she made of movements of performers, dancers, speakers, musicians. However, her earlier work, a series of hand drawn maps tracing people’ movements

through time and space. For some, it was a day; for others a year. Emerging often from conversations she had with them, she linked these individual reflections of the body in space and time to the history of portraiture. The connections between these portraits and later traces of movements from GPS devices is uncanny.

**References mentioned in interview:**

Jeremy Hight. (2003). *Narrative Archaeology*. <http://www.xcp.bfn.org/hight.html>.

Susan Sontag. (2003). *Regarding the Pain of Others*. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Hayden White. (1973). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Paula Levine's homepage: <http://paullevine.net/>

**Her recent work:**

*Shadows from Another Place, Baghdad/San Francisco*, <http://paullevine.banff.org/>

*Signature*, [http://paullevine.net/index\\_frameset.html](http://paullevine.net/index_frameset.html)

*Between Conflict and Resolve*, [http://paullevine.net/index\\_frameset.html](http://paullevine.net/index_frameset.html)

*Shadows from Another Place*, <http://www.imagesfestival.com/2006/transgeo/>