

Paysage technologique, théories et pratiques autour du GPS
 Andrea Urlberger | 2005 – 2007 |

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Masaki Fujihata: Entretien avec Andrea Urlberger

8 septembre 2005, Centre pour l'Image Contemporaine, Genève

Masaki Fujihata

Né en 1954, est professeur à la Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. Infographiste au début des années 80, ses oeuvres digitales ont reçu de nombreux prix (Goldene Nika, Ars Electronica, en 1996) et font partie de collections permanentes comme Beyond Pages au ZKM Karlsruhe.

Masaki Fujihata

[Le site de Masaki Fujihata](#)

Andrea Urlberger — We are interested in your GPS work because you are one of the first artists working with GPS even in 92. Can you talk about your use of GPS, in 92 till now ?

Masaki Fujihata — I found these technology in the year 91 or 1992, then instantly, I understood that technology is a kind of 3 dimensional data by using satellites. Because I've been working in the area of computer graphics. For making some objects inside the computer that needs some techniques the really 3 dimensional data into computer. That is a very updated topic in the field of the computer graphics at that age. So the first phase, I mean in a very early stage of computer graphics. Normally peoples using keyboards, typing some numbers x, y, z, data by typing with fingers (rire), but after that, some others inventions have happened. I mean software or using special devices to capture the 3 D data. So we are thinking about autonomy but not only me, but also most of the peoples who where working. We are always thinking about a new technology for capturing 3 dimensional data. So I thought, when I knew the technology over GPS, - oh it's great – 3 dimensional techniques in the choosed area. A very fast idea about use GPS was to walk on the same numbers of a longitude.

Then I can make a match data of Mount Fuji. But when we think about the real activity, it's impossible because there is no way to walk. So I have to make a new road. Maybe you don't know, but there is a very famous area near Mont Fuji, with many suicides, you know. People are going in the deep forest, then they died. So, it's a very famous area. It's very dangerous. So I started to stop to make a match data on the Mount Fuji. Then after, I shifted the idea, let's make a circle, I mean at the bottom of the Mount Fuji. For example, we can make the circle by car about tow hours. And also on the top of the Mount Fuji, and I made a circle on the top of the Mount Fuji, if this is also two hours. So the bottom is two hours and the top is two hours, so the shape of the Mount Fuji is a cylinder. This is a kind of an interesting abstraction; we related the actual speed of our movement. Then we decided to realize this. First we used a car to make a circle around Mount Fuji. This was about six hours.

On the top of the Mount Fuji, we faced very strong wind, so we forgot to make a circle on the top of the Mount Fuji. So this is a fact we faced. But after we claimed up the Mount Fuji, in the year 1992 with the GPS and of course we have a video. After that, we started to think about the use of these data. That was the result of the documentation : we deformed the shape of Mount Fuji according to the speed on each altitude. So. you know. in this storv. the GPS is a kind of technology to

capture the position altitude, longitude, latitude, but also there is a timer stamp. So these numbers are very simple, very ordinary numbers, but it's very strong to use these numbers. We can use them in different ways after we captured the data. This is why I was using GPS as a tool of my works.

A.U. — And in the other works after ? The GPS changed between 92 and 2000, it changed a lot.

M.F. — You know very well GPS. Actually, we claimed up Mount Fuji in 1992, but I needed to process these data into a shore. I spend two years because GPS is all we have, video is all we have, but I needed to get a match data. I bought this data from a national institution. And also I needed to get the image data. I wanted to map the texture on the match, than also I bought the thematic map data from others institutions. Then I have to combine these into an image. So I found several difficulties and I need, over these programs, I needed to spend to years. Then I've got very tired, about to extend this idea. But the year 2000, it is a kind of coincidence. An art producer asked to me a workshop for Junior High school students. I've accepted so I started to research. Most of the equipment is getting very, very cheap when we compete with 8 years before. So I was possible ... and also a lot of different companies were starting to sell software and equipments.

At that moment, we know the news from America, when Clinton said, let's forget about scramble. Then we got very great data. And also the data we collected in the year 1992 is very important, because these lines could not be generated any more. This is a jumble, a very noisy data. It's a kind of nostalgic data. It's true you know. When we go on the top of the Mount Fuji. Then we were seeing the data on a laptop. So, you know, we see, that we are up 100 m, then we down 50 m. Even when we are not moving. That was the situation with this scrambled data.

But now, we have very acquired data. Almost of, relatively of 50 cm, we find. Absolute the accuracy is about 5 m. It's really accurate. Then, I tried to realize the idea I had before. The kind of way to coordinate video data to GPS data. That is a starting point.

Masaki Fujihata
[Impressing Velocity Project, 1994](#)
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A.U. — In your opinion, are video data and GPS data a kind of maps or are they very different from each other?

M.F. — I think, they are different things. There some ideas exist. One is from Michael Naimark. He was thinking about add GPS data into the video. So normally video has a time code, but there is possibility to put the GPS data on the dead of the video frame. So, he has been researching this idea when he was in an internal (

?) research in California, but he couldn't make some fruits with that idea. But in may case, I also combine positioning data with video. But GPS data, positioning data is longer than the video sequence. So this is a complete different idea. The positioning data is showing where I been go, where I went. But the video sequential should not be following all sequences. So if I'm using video with can contain GPS, only, when the video run, I can record where I was. So this is a completely different idea. Even if I didn't shoot any video, I can record where I went. So this is different. This is why my project is interesting. So the GPS is in a dominant position, on the top of the layer.

A.U. — So is it a global sight ?

M.F. — Yes

A.U. — And video is a subjective sight ?

M.F. — Yes, that's a different idea.

A.U. — But in your work, both are converging, overlapping ?

M.F. — Yes, but the top player is the GPS. That's the difference.

A.U. — What GPS can reveal about landscape ? I'm thinking of your Geneva map. A subjective map, but it still is a map.

M.F. — Conceptually, that is an other interesting aspect. According to this side, may be I could perhaps realize one public participated project. For example, I can ask through the magazine or through the web « Please send GPS data » to my server. Then I combine every data into one big map. These containing all the activities of a collective map. This can be realized without any government-oriented objective. An abstract map or a subjective and also a collective and personal data. That is also interesting, but I didn't realize it yet. So GPS, should be use the personally It is a very important attitude to use this technology? I tried to offend the uses of GPS a weapon. On the other side, this was invented for the weapons.

A.U. — It's always a weapon. You use GPS, so you are working with the American army.

M.F. — Yes, they are using GPS very strongly.

A.U. — Do you think, our point of view is changing with using GPS ?

M.F. — I don't know if my answer is correctly responding to you question or not? But after I use this GPS in the project of Tsumari. There is no photography and all the lines are made by students. This is a totally big drawing in 3 D. This was quite fascinating.

A.U. — It changes the representation ?

M.F. — Yes, we are recapitulating, representing the real space.

A.U. — Perhaps it's also changes real space, if everyone is using ever time GPS ? Perhaps, but it's too early.

M.F. — Actually, there is a group of artists in London or in Wales ? Anyway, in England. It's GPSdrawing.com. They just use GPS for draw some pictures. This is not so interesting because they just draw something, a butterfly or an elephant.

A.U. — An other question about your work, why do you have choosed Geneva or Mersea, why these places are in your work ?

M.F. — It's a kind of ... It was a « chance », I was offer to do something in one side. On the other side, if my curiosity and the place could be matched, then I can realize the project. So the occasion for the others ... I was discussing a lot of with Jeffrey Shaw and also Peter (Weibel) about my idea to use the GPS in a local area. And this was my experience when I was in the ZKM as an artist in residence. Somebody brought me to the French side to have some diner. In this moment, the Euro is not started like yet, then all the time we have change the German marks and French francs. When we paid in German Marks, we become French francs as a change.

You know, it's understandable, the real happening there, but it's a little difficult to understand the concept of the border. So a kind of curiosity, a kind of desire to inquire the concept of the border, how to been reminded. Then I asked them about to make a piece of art of that with GPS. So GPS can record where I have been there and people can recognize the localization. Not only the video, but also the

view, the global view, recorded by the GPS.

A.U. — If you see the line of the GPS, you don't see any border. You don't know where is Germany and where is France. It appears only in the narration of the people ..

M.F. — That is a kind of point, I did not solve it yet because ... it is possible to create a real wall. Actually, there is a line on the border with is yellow. So it is possible to extend this tiny orange line to a wall. So you can see it's a wall. But I don't know, I think this is not so beautiful to make a yellow border as a wall. So I let it stay like it is.

A.U. — The question of the border comes back in *Landing Home in Geneva* when people are evoking the different languages they talk, they speak about their travels, their biographies ... Another form of border.

M.F. — The project in Geneva have started from my long friend or friendship with the professor in Paris at University Paris 8, Mr. Jean-Louis Boissier, he asks me to realize one project in Geneva. The first idea, he gives me is to use the lake. Then I do some research to get a new idea about the lake, but this was stopped. But on the other hand Daniel Pinkas, an art school teacher. He is also a professor. He is also interesting, because he is original serbocroate), but his family escapes to Venezuela, he was born in Venezuela, but he comes to Geneva when he was a teenager. So he has an interesting biography. And then we discussed a lot, not only about Geneva, but also the piece of art was sometimes a topic for the discussion.

Actually the place of Geneva is very special, very different from other cities in Switzerland. The Red Cross or the United Nations has a center in Geneva and of course here are a many interpreters with the different languages. Then, it's my feeling; Geneva is a kind of city witch is floating in the air. On this place, peoples are connecting each other. Then Daniel gave me an idea about to make interviews with translators, the interpreters. Then, you know, always, this type of idea starts by some inspiration. Then we found, and this is interesting, because, not only the real border, not only different places, but also languages has an other domains, other localization and other borders. I don't know if my piece could solve these problem, but I think it looks quite success to show differences. Every interpreter brought me to complete different places, they also talk about different things.

A.U. — And then the interpreter shows you places inside and outside Geneva ?

M.F. — The idea is about to start the interview in their home or apartment, than he or she gave me, show me the place they wanted to show me. So originally, we asks to them to bring me to the place where you are, ... you mind them as a homeland. But most of the response of them is it is quite difficult to find out where we mind the homeland. Then they brought me to some kind of special place for them.

A.U. — And in this floating town Geneva and these floating people, the translators, they touches a little bit the ground with GPS?

M.F. — Yes, I am meditating; I tried to make an impression of floating not to try to grounding.

A.U. — But you make an articulation between real space, Geneva, it's a real space, and, a mental landscape ?

M.F. — I don't know, it's a quite difficult question. The technology itself is quite strong; it's a complex concept for that piece. Technology is a kind of a spectacle. So when I'm editing with this technology, it is easily to shown the floating images. But maybe this is quite difficult to grounding these images, to put them to the ground. And also when the images statically grounding the earth, it is not so charming. So in the moment, I develop the technology, it is quite nice for the



Masaki Fujihata
Landing Home in Geneva, 2006

movement.

A.U. — So you use GPS like a navigation system ?

M.F. — No, I think, in my system the GPS, is not a tool for navigation. GPS is just a system to capturing the position and the movement. So the GPSdata is like a recorded data where we are moved. Then after ... I should tell you, the layers of the technology. So the first layer is data capturing like an interview somewhere, record all data. Then after we have to edit the sequences that I really want to use. So may be ten times smaller than collected by the computer. Then, you know, at that stage, data, the GPS and the video, this is a kind of cyberspace, this is a kind of, how can I say, second level, how can I say, artificial world. In that way, it is possible to give this situation to the user. The user can go anywhere and check the video but for the exhibition I always making a clear pass to visit each video, sequences. So in that stage, here is one cylinder, so we can go there, in this direction or in that direction,

in any direction of course. But I can choose how can I reach there and how can I reach there and how, you know, I can follow this. So all this, how can I say, navigations for the viewer, were edited by my-self. So I'm using the GPS is for realizing this additional (?), but for the final exhibition, I edit an other alternative. So in that moment, the GPS is just a data.

A.U. — But in comparison with other artists working with new technologies, in your work, real landscape is important. There are always connections between landscape and technologies. You are never only in an artificial world. Your work, it's not a closed world, it's open.

M.F. — I never think too much about that, about that concept. But may be, there is one thing missing because it is a little difficult to using GPS in town. So the use in the buildings doesn't allow getting precise data. So the most of the projects where realized in the rural area. It's a fact.

A.U. — Open space ...

M.F. — (parle d'un projet en cours et préfère finalement que cette partie de l'entretien ne soit pas rendue publique).

A.U. — So GPS is a weapon, is it an important fact for you in your use of GPS ?

M.F. — I do not focuse to use GPS in opposite side of the modern army. But surely, I have to have consciousness that the American army invented this technology. Anyway, the technology of the GPS is quite, has quite interesting aspects.

A.U. — Yes, it's true. Do you think that the GPS can be considered like a kind of proof « that you have been really there ».

M.F. — Yes, I think so. And also ... I don't know, but this is my strong impression. Even a line in a space, even if I didn't use any video, just looking the data of the GPS, it is really easy to understand. Weather I'm riding on a car or on a bicycle or walking, each line has certain characteristics. It is really funny; it is really similarly to the line when you saw a notebook, which was made by a pencil or by a fountain pen or a board pencil.

A.U. — And you see if you are fine, if you are sad or sick ?

M.F. — That's not impossible. Going .. Left and stay a few hours, then go. This is certifying, we have a land here. This kind of activity can be observable. Just by the lines.

A.U. — What do you think about the aspect control, survey somebody with GPS. This is always in the mind of people if you talk about GPS.

M.F. — I think, this is completely misunderstanding this technology. The GPS is just a receiving the data from the satellite, the GPS cannot transmit any data to the satellite. So, if we think about surveillance or control connected to GPS, we needed an other technology with this technology. So until now, as far as I know, there is none other object on the market. There a specially equipment for the army or for professional users. I think, this is a kind of mass media misunderstanding for public people.

A.U. — Because, it is used for prisoners living outside. The GPS allows to look where they are walking because there is not enough place in prison anymore.

M.F. — That's a special case. Actually, if somebody wants to use this kind of technology, they have to combine several techniques. Not only GPS but also phone, also wireless techniques and other things. So they have to fusion these things.

A.U. — What do you think about this idea of fusion, hybridization?

M.F. — Yes I think this is very important. I really believe in hybridization. So until now, we were always surprise with new inventions, but the most of the inventions are just single inventions, but now people starts ... not confuse, but

A.U. — Converge? GPS is even hybrid. It's not a real digital media. It works with radio and in the satellite; there is a clock, an atomic clock.

M.F. — Actually, in my case, this is also a hybridization between video and GPS and also an angulator.

A.U. — I have a question about the ground in your work, it's black, a black space.

M.F. — It's empty.

A.U. — It's empty for you. It's an empty space ?

M.F. — If there is nothing, then it's black.

A.U. — And when the ground is white, it's also empty ?

M.F. — Yes, I think so. Because most of the case for printing media, they don't like a black background. For this reason, I normally made a white background for the printing media. So, it's a completely same impression when the background is white or black.

A.U. — So you see only our way and the meeting points with the people ?

M.F. — What do you mean ?

A.U. — If you see *Field-Work@Alsace*, the public sees only your story, your way, you're walking around. If you don't say it's in Alsace you don't know really where it is. It could be anyway ?

M.F. — On one side, I think it is a kind of offending to be seen. The piece is similar to a documentary program. So strongly I show, my project is not a documental program, it's a bit similar to a documental program because I edited it like it is. But it is possible to edit the final way of showing more similar to a documental program. But I want to give a chance to the user the possibility to see

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documental program. But I want to give a chance to the user, the possibility to go anywhere by the user. So as I told you, it is possible to give a special device to go anywhere. There is, the video archway exists, each video is a steady board accorded to the location, then anybody can go anywhere to see the video by himself or herself. This is the basic concept. Then, the show is a kind of example, which I made for the user. So you know, the exhibition place is very limited, so most of the people do not want to stay two weeks. So I have to show some sequences for the visitors. That is why I edited it. I don't believe that the exhibition place is the best place; I need another special place to show my piece. But until now, we couldn't invent a nice way of showing my piece. So I tried to ... to the exhibition place.



Masaki Fujihata
Field-Work@Alsace, 2005

A.U. — I really like your last piece.

M.F. — Yes, it was the first time I used a panorama camera. It was very interesting.

A.U. — I worked for [Artifices 4](#) and I saw very often *Place* from Jeffrey Shaw. Shaw used also lines (between the panoramas) but these lines were lines from the Kabala. And if I compare with *Landing Home*, I feel the difference in the force of the GPS. It is not the same; it is not a spiritual invention.

M.F. — Yes, basically, for Jeffrey this has a very strong background for himself. Maybe, I don't know. Perhaps this is a kind of European way of organizing ideas, thinking. So there is abstraction, ideology exists there. And his pieces following or according to this configuration, he put other sequences. But, I think, I am more passive with the happenings. Perhaps, I have a strong curiosity of a play, played by something. So I am very happy to face some happenings which I could not control. So GPS is quite interesting to record these lines. I can control by using GPS.

A.U. — You can go where you want and you keep the information.

M.F. — Yes, automatically.

[Biennale Artifices 4](#)