

[illegible]

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Geo- Subjective Visions

To live in any of Mexico City's zones implies more than a mere vague location, a subjective stereotype, or level of privilege. Social stratification, statistics, and census data bestow seemingly objective qualities on the city's inhabitants in each area. Personal living spaces shrink as people are relocated to far away areas to be urbanized (or not), pushed out, isolated, or protected. Through such relocation mechanisms, as well as the media, zones are qualified as violent or desirable, and yet they confer only a reductive, illusory view of individuals' relationships to their surroundings. I want to ask instead: What contrasts or parallels could be drawn between an inhabitant and our imaginary projection of them? Are we psychologically determined by our geographic location? In what ways?

Let's call this an experiment under construction, where I neither seek to gather hard statistics or derive definitive conclusions from them. Instead, I created a Facebook account in order to find individuals and groups from different delegaciones (boroughs) in Mexico City and its urban districts, to collect answers from inhabitants who first had to be identified by their personal profiles. Some happily took part in the project, while others were suspicious and questioned my intentions. I persisted until I obtained some answers to the following broad questions:

- a What area of the city do you live in?
(Borough and neighbourhood)
- b How many windows are there in your home?
- c Look out your window and share with us
any thought that crosses your mind, the first
thing, an experience, a description,
a sensation, a critical idea. You decide.

Geo-Subjective Visions compiles the answers obtained from people living in different parts of the city, which were then superimposed on aerial satellite photographs of the zones in which they live. At the end of the compilation process, the answers from 20 individuals were selected from zones usually perceived as being sharply differentiated in socio-economic terms. The results were arranged in a mosaic, producing a map of the city that frames the particular perception of a subject from each zone. This project juxtaposes geography and subjectivity through far-away encounters mediated by contemporary surveillance technologies—Google Earth and social networks—as a way of getting to know people at a distance. During the process of compiling material for this project, a voyeuristic tone and a tender harassment persisted.

This juxtaposition of spaces and subjectivities had the sole purpose of observing the landscape, urban planning, and perhaps the symbolic charge a specific area embodies, confronting participants with singular perspectives—as if we could read/listen to one of the many voices that inhabitants observed. The encounters are, however, admittedly distanced, indirect, cold. I posit this exercise as a virtual interaction with space and its subjects, so the isolation is ambivalent: someone is reached, someone somewhere, sometimes far away so the construction of the other person's reality remains uncertain.

How close to reality are the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding geographic spaces and their inhabitants? Gonzalo Saraví argues that in Mexico City “there is reciprocal isolation, which cannot be measured or expressed only in objective terms, but that needs to be necessarily understood from the symbolic dimension of urban segregation.”¹ He places statistical observation only as a partial indicator of urban segregation, recognizing the symbolic dimension of geographic spaces as a way of articulating a “full comprehension of the isolation that characterizes coexisting worlds.”² Similarly, this project overlaps the symbolic dimension with individual perception, moving away from statistics and objectivity in order

to build a collective imagery of the city, built through distance.

The use of technological surveillance perhaps raises an internal contradiction: I am seeking individual perception by means of a tool that deprives me of direct experience—social networking. This medium embodies a person’s public body, implying a secondary dimension of subjects exposed to new statistical mechanisms focused on their recognition and location. This is why I sought to approach this topic by creating a sort of Situationist *dérive*, although I realize that contemporary subjectivity has changed greatly since the 1960s: modern social networks suppose a new dimension of being, a virtualization of experience and communication that both reduces and amplifies our relation to the world. The *dérive* proposes a reflection upon forms of seeing and an experimentation with urban life within the frame of psycho-geography as a way to escape the alienation of the daily routine; the *dérive* seeks to observe emotions, intuitions, and situations within the city in a way that involves direct presence. Virtual encounters, however, reduce experience to a screen through which we are able to see the environment of the contacted person on Google Earth; the subject is reduced to a “profile” and a chat window. So this experiment may be some kind of virtual *dérive* lacking one of its fundamental components: the direct experience of reality. But is not this lack of reality now part of our everyday life? And moreover, can social networks bring up a new understanding of people and spaces?

I do not seek to directly answer the questions I have posed in this project, nor do I intend to take any specific position. My purpose was to generate contrasts by way of free association, inviting a reflection about subjectivity and its current relation to reality, understanding virtual communications and surveillance technology as aspects that have reconfigured this relationship. Perhaps geographical isolation is reflected in the virtual world, or perhaps the virtual world pushes geographic and social boundaries into the realm of illusion. The interpretation of this ambiguity is left to the observer.

Notes

1
Gonzalo A. Saraví,
“Mundos aislados:
Segregación urbana
y desigualdad en la
ciudad de México,”
Revista Eure 34,
no. 103 (December
2008): 95.

2
Ibid.







