

Nate Larson and Marni Shindelman
Geolocation: Deserts

Irene Carlson Gallery of Photography
April 15 through May 24, 2013

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHS...

We use publicly available embedded GPS information in Twitter updates to track the locations of user posts and make photographs to mark the location in the real world. Each of these photographs is taken on the site of the update and paired with the originating text. Our act of making a photograph anchors and memorializes the ephemeral online data in the real world and also probes the expectations of privacy surrounding social networks. We select texts that reveal something about the personal nature of the users' lives or the national climate, while also examining the relationship to physical space and the ways in which it influences online presence.

Twitter estimates there are more than 50 million tweets daily, creating a new level of digital noise. Clive Thompson uses the term "ambient awareness" to describe this incessant online contact in his *New York Times* article, "Brave New World of Digital Intimacy." According to Thompson, "It is. . . very much like being physically near someone and picking up on his mood through the little things he does — body language, sighs, stray comments — out of the corner of your eye." Our collaborative work is a means for situating this virtual communication in the physical realm. We imagine ourselves as virtual flâneurs, ethnographers of the Internet, exploring cities 140 characters at a time through the lives of others.

A COLLABORATIVE BIOGRAPHY...

Nate Larson and Marni Shindelman's collaborative work focuses on the cultural understanding of distance as perceived in modern life and network culture. Their projects have recently been featured in *Wired Magazine*, *The Picture Show* from NPR, *The Dish*, *PetaPixel*, *Fast Company*, *Gizmodo*, *Hyperallergic*, the *New York Times*, *Hostshoe Magazine*, the *Washington Post*, *Utne Reader*, *Flavorwire*, *Frieze Magazine*, the *British Journal of Photography*, the *BBC News Viewfinder*, and on the radio program *Marketplace Tech Report*.

Their solo exhibitions include *Light House* in Wolverhampton, *Blue Sky* in Portland, *United Photo Industries* in Brooklyn, and the *Contemporary Arts Center Las Vegas*. Selections have been shown at the *Light Factory* in Charlotte, the *FotoFestival* in Poland, the *Athens Photo Festival* in Greece, the *Houston Center for Photography*, *Baltimore Museum of Art*, the *Moscow International Biennale* in Russia, *RAIQ* in Montréal, *Peloton* in Australia, and *Conflux Festival* in NYC. Their work is in the permanent collection of the *Museum of Fine Arts Houston* and the *Portland Museum of Art*.

Larson & Shindelman's recent project *Geolocation* tracks GPS coordinates associated with Twitter tweets and pairs the text with a photograph of the originating site to mark the virtual information in the real world. New site-specific work from the series was recently completed for *Third Space Gallery* in New Brunswick, the *Walter N. Marks Center for the Arts* in California, and the *Format International Photography Festival* in the UK. We also created a site-specific series of digital billboards for the *Atlanta Celebrates Photography Public Art Commission*, a time-lapse video for the final issue of *Aspect: The Chronicle of New Media Art*, and are currently completing a site-specific public artwork for the *Indianapolis International Airport*. We will be artists in residence at the *Robert Rauschenberg Foundation* in 2013.

Nate Larson is full-time faculty member at the *Maryland Institute College of Art*. He received his MFA from *The Ohio State University* in 2002. Marni Shindelman is Lecturer in Photography at the *University of Georgia*. She received her MFA from the *University of Florida* in 2002.

Nate Larsen and Marni Shindelman, April 15, 2013
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Tributes to the Data Stream
By Sean Dillon
Associate Professor of Theatre Arts

Nate Larson and Marni Shindelman describe a goal of their collaborative work as focusing on “cultural understanding of distance as perceived in modern life and network culture.” Their exhibition entitled *Geolocation: Desertscapes* invites us to consider distance, as its title implies, between points in space. We quickly move on, though, to consider other kinds of distance: between the hearts and minds people, between aspirant and goal, between points in time, even between caption and content.

The photographs frequently present barriers that underscore the physical distances. Walls, divisions, gulfs. A looming wall stands between manicured palms and a tall building that stretches out of frame. A handrail and ramp whisper of accessibility from here to there. In several instances, a distant snowy peak teases with a cool respite from the heat and dust, but it is impossibly far. Roads cross our paths, but they do not lie down before us; they are not the way ahead, but rather an obstacle. And these roads are not just visual impediments, but hint at the danger of an oncoming truck, the smear of lights the artifact of a vehicle gone too quickly to see. At best, the road offers us a choice to go left or right, but never a clear option to go directly where we are headed.

The tops of tract houses peek up behind a block wall. “He dnt kno y im hurt but its all over his twitter!!!! Y do I still carry hope?” The caption is plaintive, and the mundane roughness of its abbreviation resolves after a moment into the poetry of unrequited love. Are we meant to be tantalized by what lies beyond the wall? Another tweet starts with “Blegh,” but goes on to give that guttural expression a crystal clear and specific meaning, leaving the only real mystery of the piece in its geography. Not a house in sight, but is “Kaites house” nearby? Wouldn’t any of us feel “blegh” if we had to walk there?

The tweets serving as captions may (or indeed may not) lend a clue. Is this the parking lot of a desert casino? The next a church parking lot at night? Does the crude repair of the gaps in a fence have something to do with a lost child? Our imagination may tell us so, but hard evidence is denied us. It’s not likely that detritus baking in the desert scrub has much to do with the recently-robbed home, but one’s mind cannot help but draw a connection. What do romance, heartache, passion, or God’s love have to do with these places? In one caption/tweet, a quotation from “My Love is Lost,” a 1939 poem by Judy Garland is followed by statement of enthusiastic approval, and accompanies an image that seems to have nothing to do with kisses or hearts or souls, but that doesn’t stop us from trying to forge that connection. But this is a case of putting the cart before the horse. The image is born of the caption, or rather the shared DNA of a tweet’s geolocation, the caption is not created to relate to the image. And of the 360 degrees of directional possibility, and further choices of tilt and magnification, the artists’ choice in making the image may be that which obscures rather than explains. The images seem to willfully resist the inclusion of details that would make our assumptions unequivocal, thus proclaiming that the question is more important than the answer.

#apictureisworth140characters
By Gail Tang
Assistant Professor of Mathematics

In *Geolocation: Desertscape*, Nate Larson and Marni Shindelman curate a selection of tweets and pair them with photographs of the location in which they were tweeted. Singularly, neither tweet nor photograph is impressive; it is their juxtaposition that makes this show dynamic.

Twitter is a social networking platform that allows friends, family, celebrities, musicians, politicians, or even organizations, such as universities, to instantly share updates or general happenings with millions of people. More commonly, users unabashedly confess their inner monologues to the general public in 140 characters or less. These messages go out to the world, but whom do they reach?

The photographs are as banal as the tweets themselves, with quotidian compositions, shoulder-height perspectives, and long depths of field reminiscent of disposable cameras. However, the creative quality of this exhibit lies not in the photographs alone, but in their unique ability to engage the audience in a mental exercise of questioning the world around us -- the essence of contemporary art.

Though the artists do not control the general location of the tweets, they determine the time of day, the angles, and the directions toward which the photographs are made. By making these choices, the artists have constructed visuals based their interpretations of the tweets. Not only do these diptychs illustrate the complexities of interpreting the minds and motivations of others, but they also deliver a powerful message of isolation.

As human beings, we inherently try to connect with one another physically, mentally, and emotionally. Throughout history, these connections were limited by time and distance, but with the increased public accessibility to the Internet and the advent of social media, our reach extends farther and faster than before. Tweets have the capacity to reach anyone on the planet, yet none of the photographs feature people. By creating lonely visuals for the tweets, are the artists drawing our attention to the irony of social media's attempt to connect people to each other? Are they asking us to ponder whether social media brings us closer, or whether the increased connectedness is merely an illusion?



Don't mistake intensity for passion.



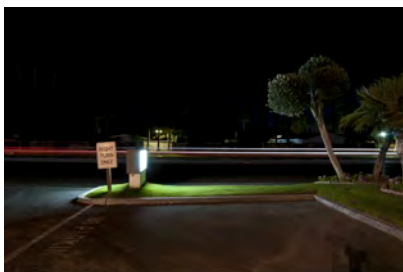
For it was not into my ear you whispered, but into my heart. It was not my lips you kissed, but my soul. Love it!!!



Omg! My house just got broken into and they took all of our electronics. :(



Time to get back all the money I spent on Christmas



Mark 3:1-6. What's Jesus want to whisper in your ear tonight?



Welcome to the salton sea. Beautiful. I was stranded here 2 yrs ago.



Blegh. I have to walk to Kaites house to get my straightner (: but I don't wanna walk therefore I have the 'blegh' mood.



He dnt kno y im hurt but its all over his twitter!!!! Y do I still carry hope?



These tweets have my location?



why dont people try making bracelets or necklaces with chips in them so kids can avoid being kidnapped and lost forever?!