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Bochum

Exploring the World through the Eyes of Someone Else

On self-documentary practices of the smartphone

Abstract: Originally produced for conducting voice conversations without restriction to place, the mobile phone now has become a mixture of several electronical devices. It forms a ubiquitous unit within the realm of globalizing connectivity due to its transportability and hybridity. Its pervasive nature has allowed users to quickly produce, share, and consume mediated traces of their daily habitus. By zooming in on the photo- and videosharing app Snapchat, this article explores the intersections of archiving and exposing private connoted content. I will outline how localization gains meaning and is visualized by the so-called 'Snap Map' that lets one see filmed content from users around the world. Whoever submitted content on the map remains anonymous, as it is merely collectively bundled and sorted by location, which opens up new ways of understanding self-documentary practices.

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1. Introduction

As with any relatively new media technology, the possible dangers of smartphones have been broadly addressed in society. It does not differ much from earlier fears people had for information overload and social isolation caused by the printing press¹, which ironically is replaced for the concern that the youth does not read enough nowadays because they are allegedly too distracted by electronic media, their phones specifically.² Without dwelling on the truth of those accusations, it is safe to say that the smartphone embedded itself in everyday life. The word 'smartphone zombie', in short 'smombie', was chosen as the German youth word of the year in 2015.³ It indicates distracted pedestrians too busy with themselves and their phones, thus, acting like zombies, and initiating various safety hazards. It has even caused a growing need for traffic safety measures around the world. A city in the Netherlands installed 'light lines', which are traffic lines built into the pavement at a handful of intersections in order to protect distracted pedestrians.⁴ Warning signs and cell phone lanes have been set up around other places in the world as well.⁵ The fact that we are apparently so preoccupied with our smartphone that we cannot pay attention to our surroundings anymore is probably not that unusual, considering that the small portable device is actually a mixture of all sorts of electronic devices.

Compared to other portable electronic devices, the smartphone has most rapidly been distributed and integrated into everyday life⁶ and grown out to be a ubiquitous "material artifact"⁷. A smartphone contains hardware, software, and network technology that allows users to quickly produce, share, and consume various data. Connectivity is key, yet the individual is central, not only because the device is worn "intimately close to the body"⁸, but also because individuality as a concept is, for example, regularly used by smartphone manufacturers in regard to security options. The fingerprint, seen as a long-time indicator of identity, often can be scanned to unlock the phone. Such biometric authentications⁹ strongly tie human identity to the smartphone's technology. Hence, it can be said that the device is not only a general recording and storage medium but also a personal one – a recording and storage medium of the self.

¹ Cf. Blair 2003: 11–28.

² Cf. Spitzer 2018: 15–45.

³ Cf. Vogt 2016: 175, 214.

⁴ Cf. HIG 2017.

⁵ Cf. Allen 2018.

⁶ Cf. Burkart 2007: 34.

⁷ Malpas 2012: 32.

⁸ Fortunati 2002: 48.

⁹ Apart from fingerprint identification, other methods of biometric authentication can be seen in, for example, Samsung's iris scanner and Apple's Face ID.

Two ostensibly contrasting ways of smartphone usage can be identified against this backdrop, namely between excessively producing and sharing self-documentary content with smartphones on various online platforms and using it as a digital-archive apparatus to store personal data in textual, visual, or audio-visual representations. This article will zoom in on the intersections of publicizing private connoted content and that of archiving and exposing. With the photo- and video-sharing app Snapchat, I would like to exemplify that mobile media, specifically smartphones, connect to a “sense of place”¹⁰ and new documentary experiences.

2. Ephemeral content

In mobile media, it is interesting to see how globalization and individualization seem to be brought into one. The compulsion to be connected to each other, to be public or visible online, intertwines with the individual’s privacy, causing shifting borders between public and private connoted content. An observation on this matter comes from Lev Grossman and Matt Vella who argue that:

Ironically enough experiences don’t feel fully real till you’ve used your phone to make them virtual – tweeted them or tumbled them or Instagrammed them or YouTubed them, and the world has congratulated you for doing so.¹¹

Social media and several other third-party applications happily enforce this idea by sending out push notifications in order to prevent inactivity. The overall message of such notifications conveys the idea that remaining online, visible, and connected by sharing personal experiences is an existential necessity of life. In order to share such personal experiences, they need to be documented. Digital media practices have, as Friedrich Balke states, triggered significant changes in documentary film form because documented content no longer requires to be organized into a (linear) narrative, which has been subsumed under various terms.¹² Egbert van Wyngaarden, for example, describes these changed film forms as “liquid documentary”¹³, meaning that the consistency in form, as can be seen in traditional audio-visual media, has faded, thus, became liquid.¹⁴ Similar terms by other authors are “videos of affinity”¹⁵ and “vernacular video”¹⁶. These terms all describe several changes in (documentary) film forms, produced by click-based experiences that are typical for online media consumption and consumers who are “likely to develop a very high tolerance to fragmented and aleatory media experiences”¹⁷.

¹⁰ Nyíri 2005: 17–18.

¹¹ Grossman/Vella 2014.

¹² Cf. Balke 2017: 910.

¹³ Van Wyngaarden 2014: 41–43.

¹⁴ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁵ Lange 2009: 71. This concept focuses more on the communicative connections that are established between people.

¹⁶ Dovey/Rose 2013: 366. The authors characterize vernacular videos as “amateur”, “intimate”, “fluid”, and “haptically convenient” video content.

¹⁷ Ibid.: 368.

Examples of such media experiences are evident in third-party applications. Though, apps are not the only features that enable and enforce producing and publicizing fragmented self-documentary content. The smartphone's hardware, such as the built-in camera and microphone, the internal memory that stores all data, and the so-called 'camera roll' or gallery that organizes produced footage are elements that should be taken into account when analyzing self-documentary content as well. It should be noted that self-documentary content is not limited to, for example, making Selfies or filming the self but can include recording one's surroundings as well, as subjectivity is embedded in the mode of address and still refers to a sense of the self. Therefore, it consists of any, usually private connoted footage that the creator uses to either create an online image of the self or deems important enough to capture and save for non-public usage.

Snapchat proves to be a fruitful object of analysis because of its oscillation between sharing ephemeral content and archiving it. Pictures and short videos on the app (called snaps) are self-deleting, thus they are only available for a short period of time. The same goes for messages in the chat feature. Several filters can be added to the footage, such as face lenses, time, location (through so-called geofilters), date, height, speed, and temperature. Additionally, the footage can be altered with text, drawings, and stickers, before it is shared with the user's contact list and/or saved in advance, which is one of the reasons why the application can be depicted as a "digital composing tool"¹⁸.

The short-lived nature of the app fits the speed at which content is produced and shared on the Internet. Because viewers are possible content creators, or prosumers¹⁹, and have access to consuming unlimited video content, sharing and creating such content can happen at "an increasingly accelerated rate"²⁰, which inevitably affects video content in the way that it becomes ephemeral: short-lived. Naturally, anything uploaded on the Internet is known to 'stay there forever' because people could have copied and spread content long before the original is removed. It causes videos and images to eternally flow somewhere on the web, available for anyone and at any time to view. Even an app like Snapchat, which claims that snaps will be deleted, cannot prevent its users from re-uploading content made with the app on other platforms.²¹

Therefore, what I mean by ephemeral is that the excess of available video content unavoidably assigns less significance or value to every single video. For example, videos that become viral usually stay viral for a short period of time. After that, they become 'old', or 'uncool' to view and recreate, thus, are forgotten amid uncountable moving images on the Web. This is especially the case for meme-like moving images.

¹⁸ Wargo 2015: 49.

¹⁹ The concept depicts the merging of producer and consumer (cf. Toffler 1980: 265–278).

²⁰ Tan 2015: 165.

²¹ This is especially the case for Internet-celebrities, whose snaps are reuploaded by several YouTube channels, e. g. KardashianSnaps.

It does not necessarily mean that we are unable to appreciate online visual or audiovisual content, but the speed at which we move through it is much faster than before, changing our experience of temporal linearity and conventions of time.²²



Fig. 1-2: Internet memes referring to their outdated state

3. Navigating through Snapchat

Snapchat adapted its functions to the accelerated Internet-usage, yet simultaneously provides an app-internal archive called 'Memories', where users can save a personal collection of their pictures or videos in advance to prevent it from being deleted. Moreover, the app introduced a 'Year in Review'-feature in 2017 that allows users to relive their year through a collection of saved photos.²³ The app operates between the intersections of archiving and exposing, and shifts boundaries of privacy by publicizing private connoted content.

When examining Snapchat's interface, it seems to be a typical click-based and easy-to-use interface as deployed by apps in general. The phone's camera, in a standard back-facing camera setting, is directly activated after opening the app and fills up the entire screen, enabling users to immediately record footage with the appropriate button. The other small symbols are aligned at the top and bottom of the screen and can be used to toggle the camera, alter the camera's flash and navigate through the app (see Fig. 3).²⁴

At first sight, there are four different spaces to navigate to by clicking the symbols on the main screen. Users either send snaps and messages to their friends by going to the Friends List (see Fig. 4), visiting their personal profile, watch 'Stories' created by (Snapchat) celebrities, or view their saved photos and videos in the app's archive-

²² See Dovey/Rose 2013: 370–374 on aleatory media experiences.

²³ Cf. *Snapchat Support* 2017: Tweet.

²⁴ This is true for Snapchat v10.37.5.0.

based Memories feature. A fifth, more hidden space will be discussed later on in this article.²⁵

When producing a snap and wanting to share it with friends, users have the option to send it individually to people in their friends list or upload them to 'My Story'. Snaps that are posted in the Story feature remain online for 24 hours before being deleted. When more snaps are posted, the snaps play in the order they were taken and can be viewed unlimited times within the 24-hour timeframe. Stories that are made public can be watched separately by clicking on the far-right symbol on the bottom of the main screen (see Fig. 3).

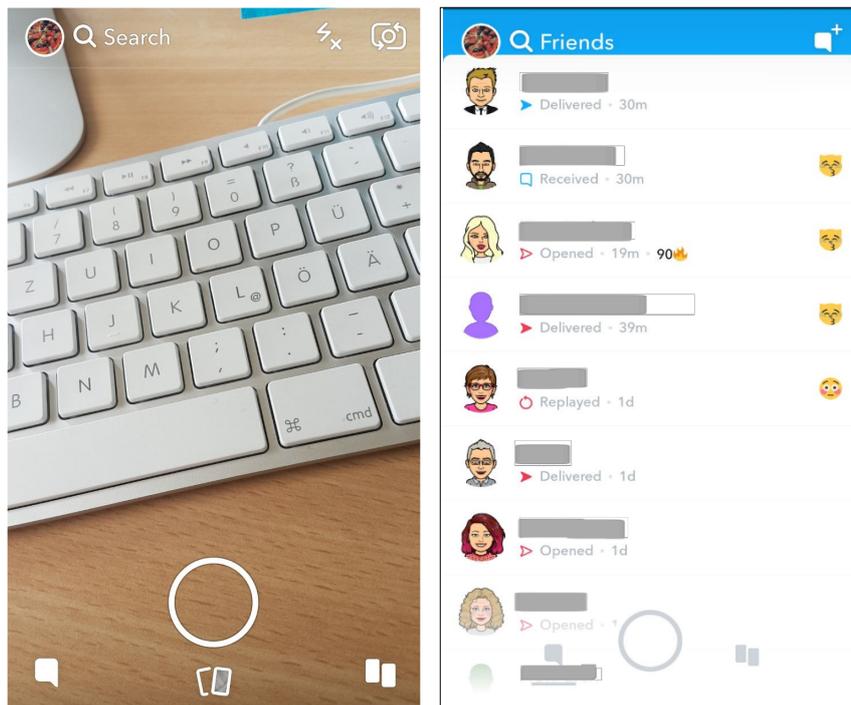


Fig. 3-4: Screenshots of Snapchat's interface

Photos, videos, or stories that are saved in Memories are sorted by date in a descending order. Stills from videos are automatically played when scrolling through one's Snapchat memories, so users are quickly reminded of the content of the videos. The user can choose if the app should save snaps merely in the app's archive, the phone's camera roll, or both. Snaps made with the app are saved automatically and directly on the phone's internal storage this way, yet the app has access to media locally stored on the phone as well. It enables one to quickly access footage recorded with the phone's regular camera in order to share it with friends without having to close the app.²⁶ Therefore, whereas Snapchat first was merely

²⁵ I have limited this explanation to the main features of the app, leaving out the search bar and various options within said features.

²⁶ Though, the app does not provide a backup of the footage in the phone's camera roll.

based on the idea of self-destruction of footage, it has implemented features that are quite the opposite, and now holds on to the alleged permanence of archiving.

4. Discontinued Moments

Naturally, filming the everyday as can be seen on Snapchat is nothing new. Due to the smartphone's portability, the aesthetics of its camera footage do not differ much from, for example, amateur filmmaking traditions,²⁷ as well as the handheld cameras that were used by American avant-garde filmmakers during the 1940s through the 1960s.²⁸ Mostly starting as amateurs, experimental filmmakers tried to break with cinematic conventions by focusing on film form and fragmentation and, in doing so, adopted a personal style. In avant-garde autobiography, one of the first was Jonas Mekas, who experimented with his Bolex camera and something that would later be called the "diary film"²⁹.

It must be noted that these practices differ from documenting the self with a smartphone for various reasons, mainly because experimental filmmakers intended to oppose certain cinematic conventions. Although I would argue that self-documentary practices with third-party apps do break with certain filmmaking conventions as well, this does not point to the same (political and artistic) motivations or intentions.³⁰

Poor video quality and shaky movements characterize the majority of the content on Snapchat. Such content is seen to benefit the feeling of authenticity because they stand in great contrast with high quality images of other media. The lightweight, handheld cameras as used by Jonas Mekas in his diary film *Walden: Diaries, Notes and Sketches* (1969) produced similar aesthetics and are exemplary for the avant-garde movement. Experimental filmmakers wanted their films to be imperfect and raw, often physically distorting the films by scratching or baking them in order to represent their individual vision.³¹ In avant-garde autobiography, the high personal note constitutes a reflection on the nature of cinema³² or in the words of Jonas Mekas: "As a group of images, it tells more about my own subjective reality, or you can call it my objective reality, than any other reality."³³

In his diary films, Mekas tried to capture reality as close as possible by filming short notes every day. The footage he recorded offered a series of discontinuous presents

²⁷ Cf. Schneider 2016.

²⁸ Cf. Sitney 1978a.

²⁹ Ibid.: 246.

³⁰ The comparison between experimental filmmakers and users of Snapchat is, therefore, solely useful in order to convey similarities in aesthetics, temporality and diary-style content.

³¹ Cf. Dixon/Foster 2002: 2–3.

³² Cf. Sitney 1978b: 202.

³³ Mekas 1978: 193.

that bear next to no reference to the past,³⁴ as they were not documented in retrospect, which is usually the case for written diaries. Recording series of discontinuous presents is the practice that forms the foundation of Snapchat as well. The app's slogan fits it perfectly: "Life's more fun when you live in the moment!"³⁵ When browsing through the Stories feature, it becomes clear that creating a linear narrative is of secondary matter. Most stories jump from moment to moment without any introduction, sometimes accompanied by geofilters or time stamps that provide the only type of orientation for the viewers. Since the footage is recorded with a smartphone, mostly by using the phone's front- or back-facing camera with one hand, shaky movements are inscribed and unavoidable in this practice. Even though users do not have to press and hold the recording button during filming, due to one of the recent updates, and now can swipe left to lock the camera, recording with one hand still seems to be challenging. When comparing filmed footage to photographs made with the app, the latter are usually of significantly higher quality.

As Jon Dovey argues, the low-grade video image is often used as a signifier of truthfulness in reality television, which might remind us of our own experience of the domestic home movie; hence, the footage comes across more intimate, and more authentic.³⁶ Susan Stewart explains that notions of authenticity are structured around the concept of longing and that of absence, and describes it as a "generalized desire for origin, for nature, and for unmediated experience."³⁷ Such footage, thus, not only creates a feeling of authenticity but that of longing for immediacy as well. As stated by Mikko Villi, who wrote on camera phone photography, mobile media offer the possibility "to mediate the 'present presence' of a person,"³⁸ and provide a close communication despite physical distance, which strengthens the feeling of immediacy. Sharing seemingly unmediated and intimate connoted images on Snapchat might subsequently both soothe the desire of unmediated experience as well as affect a sense of longing in the same way that reality television reminds us of the authentic home movie.³⁹

5. Digital Memory

On Snapchat, users alternate between temporarily sharing the 'present presence' and preserving those moments. José van Dijck depicts digitally holding on to images of the past, as seen in Snapchat's Memories feature, as "mediated memory objects"

³⁴ Cf. Sitney 1978b: 245.

³⁵ Snap Inc., the corporation behind Snapchat, uses this slogan to describe their app in the Google Play Store, and Apple's App Store (16.02.2019).

³⁶ Cf. Dovey 2008: 136.

³⁷ Stewart 1984: 24.

³⁸ Villi 2015: 2.

³⁹ Though low-quality snaps might be an unintentional effect of the app's compressing techniques, as such footage contains less byte than their HD-version, which makes it easier to maintain the excessive flow of data on the app.

because “they come to serve as material triggers of personal memory.”⁴⁰ Although archiving and remembering is not the same, such digital archives can build a material memory that Andrew Hoskins identifies as a loss of control and “memory’s alienation from the self.”⁴¹ Hoskins understands digital memory as a corruption of remembering and forgetting through undermining human-scale memory.⁴² I would argue seeing the Memories feature not so much as alienation but as a space that offers to be reminded of and to dwell on the past. When going back to the work of Jonas Mekas, he thought he kept a fairly objective diary on his life in New York City. After friends commented on the first edition of his film *Walden* (1969), he realized that was not the case and stated that:

When I started looking at my film diaries again, I noticed that they contained everything that New York didn’t have... It was the opposite from what I originally thought I was doing... In truth, I am filming my childhood, not New York. It’s a fantasy New York – fiction.⁴³

Mekas was trying to get close to a place he could not access anymore. By filming snippets of his surroundings, he unintentionally recreated images from his past; a practice that can be explained with the concept of nostalgia. Nostalgia originates from a medical discourse that, especially in the context of experiences with war, pathologized homesickness. By the nineteenth century, nostalgia was seen as a sentimental *Sehnsucht*, a romanticized recollection of the ‘special past’ by screening out the less enjoyable memories and feelings.⁴⁴ Dominik Schrey identifies this shift in the spatial meaning of the concept to a temporal meaning, although both meanings of nostalgia are still used.⁴⁵ Schrey argues that mediated aesthetic or narrative simulations can represent a nostalgic object and alleviate a sentimental feeling, yet, it can also evoke the awareness of the distance to that object, meaning that it simultaneously stimulates nostalgia.⁴⁶

Mekas’ diary of New York simulated his childhood, a time and place he longed for, and thus opened up a space to dwell on the past. Similarly, the digital archive of Snapchat provides its users with snippets of their saved footage and even if users do not intend to do so, an automatically created ‘Flashback Memory’ allows them to view snaps they created and saved a year ago.⁴⁷ These mediated memory objects stand in great contrast to the ephemerality of sending and receiving images on the app. Designed to relive moments of the past and composed out of footage that the user redeems worth saving, the Memories feature serves as a tool to sentimentally

⁴⁰ Van Dijck 2007: 28.

⁴¹ Hoskins 2016: 32.

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*: 31.

⁴³ Mekas 1978: 191.

⁴⁴ Cf. Davis 1979: 17–24.

⁴⁵ Cf. Schrey 2017: 342.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.*: 345.

⁴⁷ So-called Flashback Memories, as well as the earlier mentioned Year in Review feature, are automatically shown until the user manually removes them or disables the feature.

look back on footage that is otherwise automatically deleted after a maximum of 24 hours.

Moreover, besides offering a possible⁴⁸ nostalgic space, Snapchat's archive enables a connection to oneself as well because of the subjective distance it provides in its medial externality. In the words of Jörg Dünne and Christian Moser, self-reference is impossible without the recourse to the externality of a technical medium.⁴⁹ The technicality of a medium thus enables a space of self-reflection. On Snapchat, the only way to do so is through saving footage and browsing through the app's digital archive. Therefore, instead of understanding Snapchat's digital memory as a loss of control, I would argue that its digital archive functions as a memory-gatekeeping counterpart of the app's temporary nature.

6. Aleatory Places

Roughly ten years ago, Michiel de Lange explained that due to the growing market for navigation, mobile technology not only included the convergence of GPS but content providers were "searching for the hen with the golden eggs in the promising field of location-based services."⁵⁰ Now, it seems like Snap Inc., the corporation behind Snapchat, has found the golden egg as their application is not only based on linking space, but also time and temperature to the digital composition of its users' lives. It is for this reason that Jon M. Wargo, when referring to Snap Stories, argues that Snapchat users are "becoming nomadic narrators to tell temporal tales."⁵¹ According to him, the selection of snaps that users post to their stories form temporal as well as spatial narratives: "Whether residing in the mundane or memorializing an event, Snapchat is a mobile application used by users to 'feel' space and place through composing."⁵²

This 'feeling' of space and place is especially evident when entering the location-based feature of Snapchat. It is called the 'Snap Map', which is a virtual world map that allows users to create and view snaps⁵³ that are sorted by GPS data instead of usernames. An onscreen button or symbol to enter the map does not exist. Instead, using Michel Foucault's words from *Of Other Spaces*, "[t]o get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures,"⁵⁴ namely by pinching two fingers together on the main screen. This rather unnatural movement allows users to enter the app's hidden space. To Foucault, some places are "linked with all the others,

⁴⁸ Snapchat users could decide not to save anything and to disable the default Flashback option, therefore, not creating a digital archive in the first place.

⁴⁹ Cf. Dünne/Moser 2008: 13.

⁵⁰ De Lange 2009: 56.

⁵¹ Wargo 2015: 49.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Only videos can be uploaded to the map.

⁵⁴ Foucault 1986: 26.

which however contradict all the other sites.”⁵⁵ He calls such places “heterotopias”⁵⁶, ‘other-places’, in which members have few or no connections to each other, and either get in compulsory, such as a prison, or have to submit to certain rituals. They are, therefore, set outside everyday life and neither solely public nor private – mirroring, yet also inverting certain places. Snapchat users can look at virtual representations of places in the world by entering the Snap Map. Mediated fragments of the users’ lives can be submitted to ‘Our Story’ that will then be publicized on the map. However, there are a few aspects that do not mirror everyday life but invert, or even disconnect it, not only from non-mediated reality but from the self as well.

The first things that catch the eye on the map are its bright colors and game-design elements (see Fig. 5). The user can scroll and zoom freely through the map and is represented by a cartoon avatar⁵⁷ that is located with the phone’s GPS data and only visible to friends. The map is designed as a heat map, where blue areas represent little snap activity, while red means there is a lot of activity. This heat map is a game-design element often seen in First-Person Shooters.⁵⁸

A ludic interface is created with the use of such game-design elements, and the interface clearly derives from the earlier mentioned click-driven experiences typical for digital media practices. By clicking anywhere on the map, footage is shown that has been uploaded to Our Story and assigned to the specific place where it was recorded (see Fig. 6). The app shows the most recent snaps first when a lot of footage is submitted in a particular place. A linear narrative is, however, absent. Apart from the location, little coherence can be detected between snaps, unless they are uploaded during a public event and film the same event. In such cases, the snaps represent a somewhat consistent recording.

De Lange argues that locative media, which would include Snapchat, questions the boundaries of place by detaching it from its physical appearance, as ascribing meaning to a place is possible without haptically perceiving it.⁵⁹ The process of sharing a place on the Snap Map is based on the fragmented and instantaneously uploaded documentation of people’s lives. Experiencing a place through Snapchat is, therefore, based on a collectivity of such temporary saved recordings, simulating an “open-endedness of experience”⁶⁰. The fragmentation and temporality of self-documentary footage on the map shows that new forms of globalized collaboration can reconfigure a linear documentary experience as well as notions of place in which the question of localization instead of identity stands in focus.

⁵⁵ Ibid.: 24.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ An avatar can be created with the app *Bitmoji* and can be linked to one’s Snapchat account. If the user does not create a personal avatar, a monochromatic one appears instead.

⁵⁸ Usually representing infrared goggles to track down enemies.

⁵⁹ Cf. De Lange 2009: 64–65.

⁶⁰ Schleser 2014: 155.

One can merely see the place that is assigned to publicized recordings on the basis of GPS data because the usernames of the creators remain invisible, which makes interaction impossible. Thus, the footage is disconnected, or alienated, from a specific identity. Still, many users upload private connoted content (e.g. their children or private home) to the publicly accessible map. This enables viewers to ascribe meaning to a certain place without having been there physically through the experience of unfixed, aleatory footage that represents the 'present presence' of anonymous strangers.

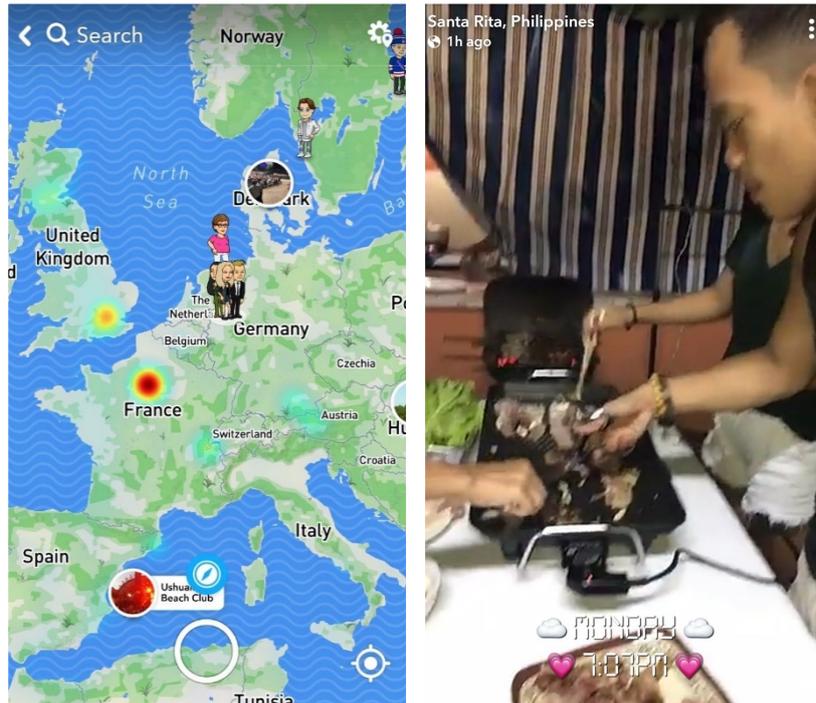


Fig. 5-6: Screenshots of the virtual world map and uploaded footage

7. Final thoughts

Although Snapchat conveys the idea that its practices indicate a grassroots movement of self-documentation in which a multi-perspectival, collective identity authentically documents what is going on in the world, this is not the case. Contrary to diary filmmakers, who ideally edit their footage themselves or are at least part of the process, this kind of authority does not entirely lie with the user when they want to globally publicize their content, but with the guidelines of Snapchat. A good example for it are the news events on the Snap Map, which are collaborations between users and the app. Relevant footage that is recorded by users is collected

by the app and text is added to create the feeling of an unmediated news story (see Fig. 7 and 8).

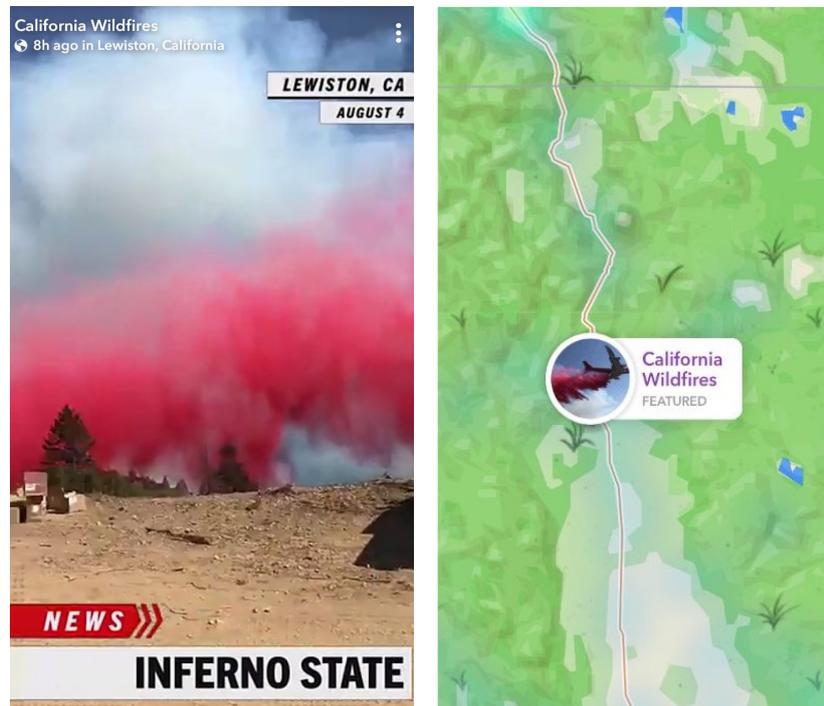


Fig. 7–8: Screenshots of a news event on the Snap Map

Due to strict guidelines, violent or sexual images are not publicized. Though I have browsed through a lot of footage on the Snap Map and have not exactly figured out yet how the guidelines are enforced, I have not once seen even remotely inappropriate content. Additionally, when using the app, a trail of personal data is left behind that can be used for marketing purposes.⁶¹ Although it appears otherwise, participation can, thus, only take place within the controlling boundaries set out by the app.⁶² Similar to third-party apps in general, the authority over one's Snapchat account and content subsequently lies with its corporation, not with the user. It forms a hierarchical power relation that should be considered when analyzing mobile self-documentary practices.⁶³

As mentioned, Snapchat provides a digital archive of the self and enables the possibility to excessively produce and publicize (self-)documentary content. Although the app conveys the idea that content is produced authentically, these practices should not be seen as entirely bottom-up, as they are embedded within

⁶¹ As of the enforcement of the General Data Protection Regulation in May, 2018, collected user data can be made available as a ZIP file.

⁶² See Kaerlein 2018 on automatisms in the interface design of the smartphone.

⁶³ Users can report unwanted content, and I suspect Snap Inc. hired content moderators (besides using algorithms) who possibly review all submitted snaps.

corporate control and strict algorithms. The easy-to-use ludic interface of Snapchat enables content to be produced, shared, and consumed at an incredibly accelerated rate. A (nostalgic) counterpart to its otherwise ephemeral usage is evident in the Memories feature, where the app offers a sentimental space to reflect on the past and the self through so-called mediated memory objects.

Finally, by providing a collective, temporal diary of the world, the Snap Map changes the way first-person mobile footage is perceived, because it creates a disembodied perception of all of us. One can see the world through the eyes of someone else but will never know the identity of that person. The question arises what happens to the concept of identity and authorship when filmed footage is alienated from the self and thrown into a sea of anonymity, merely anchored by GPS data. Instead of the question of 'who am I', a question of 'where am I' stands at the forefront, and place is ascribed a high level of significance.

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Figures

Fig. 1–2: Internet memes referring to their outdated state. *imgflip.com*.

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Fig. 3–4: Screenshots of Snapchat's interface. Version 10.37.5.0, 2018, taken with a Samsung Galaxy S7 (Android).

Fig. 5–6: Screenshots of the virtual world map and uploaded footage. Screenshots of Snapchat's interface, Version 10.37.5.0, 2018, taken with a Samsung Galaxy S7 (Android).

Fig. 7–8: Screenshots of a news event on the Snap Map. Screenshots of Snapchat's interface, Version 10.37.5.0, 2018, taken with a Samsung Galaxy S7 (Android).