This is the published version of a chapter published in *Guiding and Guided tours*.

Citation for the original published chapter:

Ohlsson, C. (2009)  
Guidebooks, Gadgets and Google Earth: Text perspectives on self-guiding and new technology.  
In: Petra Adolfsson, Peter Dobers, Mikael Jonasson (ed.), *Guiding and Guided tours* (pp. 113-130). Göteborg: Bokförlaget BAS

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published chapter.

Permanent link to this version:  
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-70611
Guidebooks, gadgets and Google Earth. Text perspectives on self-guiding and new technology

Claes Oblsson

Introduction: the guide situation and language

A guide situation is in one way or another always dependent on the use of language. A guide and a guided person can be present together in space and time and use spoken language with body and face gestures in a direct, and more or less dialogic, situation of communication. The talk-based guide situation is a common method for guiding groups in city tours or in similar events of sightseeing. This type of guided tour may even be seen as the archetypical guide situation in popular culture and as a general public concept and it is also the theme for several of the chapters in this book. But a guide and the guided person(s) may also be separated in space and even in time. A person can give somebody else oral instructions or advice on sights to see and places to visit without being an actual guide in the guide situation. Such a situation is of course still depending on spoken language together with the memory capacity of the guided person. A written guiding text is therefore a useful tool and an interface when those involved in a guide situation are separated in space and also in time. The
proliferation of text based guide information over a long time has helped to form a *self-guiding situation*, i.e., texts of this kind are obviously parts in a body of travel and guide literature, which by usage and tradition has formed genres that play important roles when establishing the self-guiding situation as we recognize it today. Questions of what to see, why and when and in which order have become inscribed and standardized through the use of guide texts.

Self-guiding is a good example of a distanced relation between individuals that normally is mediated with written language as the necessary interface. The self-guiding situation does always pertain to certain aspects of managing and scripting, which also are mediated through written language. The guidebook is perhaps the most self-evident tool in the self-guiding situation and this type of text has long and interesting roots, spanning from the literature of travel writing to the modern day guidebooks of mass tourism. As a broad and recognized genre, guidebooks have changed in appearance and function since the early 1800s and have over the years increasingly combined written texts with other types of text elements. Graphics, like maps and pictures have been parts of the guidebook genre since long and the blending of text elements is definitely intrinsic in modern day conception of guidebooks. This book chapter focuses on the different renderings of guidebooks and the texts of the self-guiding situation, their development and the different systems of signs that are used in these texts. The chapter’s descriptions of changes in texts that aim to guide are further related to the quite dramatic technical developments in our recent history. The quick and almost revolutionary expansion of the Internet, the possibility to acquire powerful handheld technical devices like mobile game consoles and the fast diffusion of affordable personal computers to the general public would have been subjects restricted to science fiction-stories only 25-30 years ago. Such examples of groundbreaking developments in technology are however realities today and also used in the dissemination of texts for self-guiding situations. The present day production of guidebooks includes a broad array of different text elements and semiotic layers. How new techno-
ologies are used in the construction and packaging of the self-guiding texts of today is therefore another central subject in the chapter.

**Guiding texts and their genres**

The guiding text has deep roots in history as shown in Bosse Bergman’s chapter of this book. The guidebook is interesting as text in the sense that it is recognized and established as a genre that unites functional texts of guiding information and also as a literary genre that has aesthetic, philosophical or entertaining values. The historical beginning of guiding texts is naturally unclear but it can be stated that the need for guiding certainly must have been necessary in prehistoric times. Inscriptions of geographic representations in different media like stone or clay and early maps give us hints about the early guide texts. But the need for information on how to go from one place to another does not necessarily include the time or opportunities to visit points of interest en route. Directions on travels of trade or pilgrimage routes are ancient examples of texts related to the need of guidance. Such directions have resemblances to modern day guiding in the sense that instructions for those types of journeys have been transferred orally or in writing for centuries. But they are also instructions for travels of utility more than travels of pleasure. Such directions do not aim to cover all points of possible interest on a route but focus instead on the goal of the journey and how to get there. The origin of the broader guidebook that covers points of interest in a city or in a region can instead be traced to the travel writing of the late 17th century and the early 18th century. This is the era when young men of the aristocracy or from the upper classes of Britain and Northern Europe frequently undertook *grand tours* of the European continent and Mediterranean world. These trips could include months or years of travel and staying in important cities like Paris, Milan, Berlin or Rome. The grand tour had a central idea of intellectual development and higher education of the young men. The travellers spent time at universities and met prominent figures in the local academies, which
served as preparation of adulthood and its responsibilities. The habit of conducting a grand tour did also become a subject of writing and source to literature, which helped to establish it even more as a social phenomenon.\textsuperscript{3} The diaries or logs of personal grand tours were individual accounts of travellers and their experience but were also turned into accessible literature that served as guides for other travellers or prospective undertakers of grand tours.

The personal travel writing with roots in the grand tours of the upper classes served as the main source for early tourists until the modern guidebook as of Baedeker and Murray saw light in the 1830s.\textsuperscript{4} The general idea behind these guidebooks was quite different from the travel writing from the era of the grand tours. The focus of the Baedeker or Murray guidebooks was primarily on formal knowledge and necessary practical information on sites to see, where personally coloured sentiments normally found no place. The genre of the modern guidebook can be understood as a development of the established genre of grand tour travel writing but it was also an answer to the increasing possibilities for people to travel and visit exotic places. The era of mass tourism was still waiting but railroads, steam ships and other features of the era of industrialism helped larger groups of people to travel. The practical and objectively framed guidebook has since become a long lived genre, which saw an even higher popularity and increase when mass tourism became possible in the 20th century.

The basic medium of the guidebook has, quite naturally, been the written text but other text elements such as maps and graphics has always been part of the guide genres. The interaction between writing and other semiotic systems has been a traditional part in the early guidebooks and in the era of mass tourism. This has also been developed and made to work in contemporary self-guiding texts. The late modern era still has place for the traditional guidebook even if it is possible to see a larger influx of personal patterns and informality. The increasing backpacker tourism to exotic locations in the late 20th century led to the production of guidebooks with an alternative image. Guidebook series like \textit{Rough Guide} or \textit{Lonely Planet} are now
well established in their own subgenre and provide guide information to both exotic locations and the rest of the world. These types of guidebooks are marketed with promises of help to self-guiding off the beaten track and with an emphasis on locally styled accommodation, food and things to do. The ‘alternative’ guidebooks combine a search for practical self-guiding and complete information on local sites with a search for unique travel experiences and possibilities for personalized stays. The blend of the older genres of travel writing and the modern era formal guidebook can definitely be traced in the current guidebook genres and similar text sources to self-guiding where the focus on individual experience appears to become foregrounded in later years. The need for practical and functional information on issues like directions, pricing, addresses and local alerts remains, however, an important feature in self-guiding texts.

Ways of studying contemporary self-guiding texts

In order to better understand how different text elements are brought to work and to interaction in the making of modern self-guiding texts, we need to go beyond the analytic views on guidebooks either as literature or as text-based functional information providers. My short description of the long history of these texts indicates that several aspects of both literature and functionality interact in the genre of guidebooks and self-guiding texts. The balance between these aspects has shifted over time but is still a prominent factor in the interpretation and analysis of self-guiding texts. It is evident that the guidebook in its contemporary renditions holds elements that appeal to both literature and functionality and also to entertainment. It is also the case that modern day texts of self-guiding not are restricted to the printed guidebook format even if it still exists and lives well. In order to describe and discuss the contemporary self-guiding texts, a broader understanding of text analysis is needed. We need to see guiding texts in new formats, provided by technology, from the perspective of literature and we also have to be able to understand how these texts are expected to function in practical settings.
The theories and methods of literature analysis are since long firmly based in critiques of aesthetic aspects while linguistic text analysis until the 1970s predominantly rested on studies of language from a system perspective. Neither of these perspectives takes full account on the text itself or on the very use of texts. Instead, the text is treated as source and stepping-stone towards discussions of authorship or symbolism in literature studies. In linguistic studies of language systems, the text has been subject to discussions of generative rules and also as a complement to syntax-based system research. The 1980s and onwards saw a development of language-based discourse analysis where texts became a natural focus for more usage-oriented studies. This research development was also flanked by an increased interest in semiotics and the pivotal works of M.A.K. Halliday in functional linguistics has successfully proved that the studies of language functions and the language system can be combined. The work of 1920s Russian literature scholar Mikhail Bakhtin was introduced to Western and continental readers in the 1960s and onwards and became influential in several academic traditions. His massive contribution includes the idea of the dialogic nature of texts, which has had an important role in the development of text research, where theories of intertextuality, or how other texts are related and mobilized in a text, have been successful both in literature studies and in linguistic takes on discourse analysis. As an example, the Bakhtinian notion of the heteroglossic or many-voiced text widens the understanding of how different actors or agents can be mobilized in a text. The dialogic view gives us the opportunity to see text as parts of causal or temporal chains and as being parts in the development and change of genres. The view of the text as a static and stable object has no place here.

The understanding of texts as always being dialogic and the influx of semiotic theories in language-based text studies form a useful, albeit broad, framework for our understanding of contemporary genres like guidebooks where several rather complex traits are interacting. The analysis situation is however made even further complex by the introduction of new technologies as discussed above. How can we
understand and methodologically approach the interaction in texts of self-guiding between written and spoken texts, pictures, colours, and even sounds or music? No rule-based model as of system-based linguistics can be provided, nor can we resign to the interpretation of aesthetic symbolism as in critiques of literature. We need a theory of the multimodality of texts where the interaction and coexistence between traditional text elements like writing and other modalities like layout, graphics and sound are central. The widening of what we mean by text is crucial in the notion of multimodality together with what we actually do when we assess a text, which holds several different elements. The modes and media of contemporary communication may differ and cannot be made into separate strata in an analysis. Kress & Van Leeuwen provide a multimodal framework for understanding how written text, different types of images, sound and other symbol systems work together and base their theories on the importance of the notions of discourse, design, production and distribution. A more detailed semiotic framework for analyzing images and other graphic text elements is found in Kress & Van Leeuwen (2004) where a proposal for a grammar of visual design is presented. The changing landscape of modalities and media also affects the concept of literacy where new technology challenges the reader/user of texts. How readers actually read and make sense of multimodal texts that are packaged in new formats is a field that calls for research attention. Analysis of self-guiding texts in new formats does not reveal such reading and usage strategies but it can give us an idea of the model reader/user from the perspective of the text and its producer.

The semiotic framework for interpreting multimodal texts takes into account the very hardware we use to access and understand publications, software, films or similar. The understanding of printed material is in this sense far less complicated and working on a different scale even if it still is an important aspect. The mobilizing of senses has always been present in the binding of a book, the texture of paper or the very smell of ink. But the inclusion of advanced technical devices widens the formatting aspect of texts and makes it even more
important to include in an analysis of text usage and text understanding. The multimodal layers of a contemporary self-guiding text also bring up several more issues like the roles of different voices, agents and discourses than perhaps in a traditional guidebook. The following parts of this chapter provide the reader with more detailed descriptions of self-guiding texts from two fields: texts that are accessible through handheld devices and texts that function on the Internet. Both these examples are depending on technology but they form quite separate areas in terms of practical usage, design and distribution. What follow here is therefore both an empirical account and a concentrated example on some aspects of analysis of multimodal texts.

Self-guiding with the help of handheld devices

There are several possibilities for self-guiding through handheld devices today. Mobile phones, personal GPS (Global Positioning System) receivers, mp3-players and portable game consoles can all be used for self-guiding purposes together with handheld computers like PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants). The most common and widespread function is directive and interactive map systems for use especially in GPS receivers but also for mobile phones. Licenced maps may be purchased even if free maps also exist and there are map packages for metropolitan areas of the world and for the use as nautical charts. These maps are visual representations of the world, just like printed maps, that can be accompanied by interactive text messages such as detailed directions from one place to another. Such directions can also be read aloud by a voice. These elaborated map systems, which make use of several modalities and media are not primarily used for self-guiding in recreational settings but function more like modality expansions of printed maps.

But mobile phones and mp3-players are also used for automatized self-guiding, something that is done with the help of recordings of narrating voices or of sounds. This has been successfully implemented for guiding in historical settings or in museums where the use of different voices and sounds both provide a listener with information and
with ambience effects. The use of personal mobile phones where the necessary self-guiding packages may be accessed as downloads also minimizes costs for hardware. A Swedish report from the national Museum of National Antiquities and the project Nordic Handscape presents an account on mobile phone self-guiding in the historical Västergötland region of Sweden where the stories of fictional medieval character noble knight Arn de Gothia are set. The mobile phone self-guiding for this area makes use of the rich and actual historical heritage in the region where early Christian monasteries and places of historical importance are found. A guided tour in the area is narrated with the help of neutral guide voices and also with the voice of the Swedish celebrity author of the Arn de Gothia-book series, Jan Guillou. The narrated texts for the mobile phones blend fiction with historical accounts and also dramatize situations in physical settings with the help of different voices and sounds.

There is no shortage of examples on how handheld devices make use of different types of texts and modalities for the purpose of self-guiding. Most of the examples are however bound to one or two modalities that are used to perform a certain main function; i.e. the combination of visual maps and voices in GPS receivers or the use of recordings in mobile phones for self-guiding in a specific physical setting. But there are also more ambitious attempts to combine different modalities and texts in handheld devices.

The passport to... -series. A Sony PSP software

The Sony PlayStation Portable (PSP) is a handheld game console, which can connect to the Internet, other PSPs and the Sony PlayStation 3 console system. The PSP can be used for watching films and images or listening to music in addition to playing games. The console was launched in late 2004 in Japan and in the rest of world in 2005. This is so far the most advanced portable game console on the market and it has extra features such as GPS and camera in later editions and its worldwide sales are currently over 40 million units.
There exists an extensive range of games for the PSP system and also several edutainment titles along with more practical applications like translation services and self-guiding aids. An interesting self-guiding title is labelled *Passport to...* followed by the name of currently six European major cities: Amsterdam, Barcelona, London, Paris, Prague and Rome where the series title for Rome is chosen as empirical illustration for this chapter. The guide series is a cooperative effort of Sony and the guidebook publisher *Lonely Planet* and the application combines several different modalities and functions in its format.

The *Passport to Rome*-guide is constructed around a text-based menu, which is presented at the top of introduction window when the application starts. The features of this menu are called Guide, My Rome, Maps, Images, Videos, Audio Tours and Phrase Book. Each such link directs the user to submenus. The last feature of the main menu is called Web and connects the user to Internet if a wireless connection is possible. The introductory window is presented in golden brown colours and is accompanied by a photo fragment of a classical ruin. It is already here clear that the *Passport to Rome*-guide will make use of different modalities of texts in interaction. The application produces lists of different places and attractions where the user can browse through restaurants or museums and much more. Such points of interest can also be tracked on the accompanying maps of Rome, which are dotted with marked sights to see, including museums, important buildings, places to eat and stay and stores for shopping. The texts that follow these places provide the user with practical information. The application is in these senses quite similar to a printed guidebook where maps and lists function much in the same way. But the user of *Passport to Rome* has as a consistent feature throughout the application, which is the option to bookmark selected points of interest for a personal profile of a guided tour in Rome. Another feature are three different audio tours of Rome, which combines a preferred route marked on a map with text-based information that include names of streets and neighborhoods and a guiding voice. The user can follow the planned tour without being in Rome or play it in the live
settings, with the option of terminating or pausing it. The built-in phrase book also makes use of the interaction between text and sound where it is possible to read and listen to phrases in Italian translated from English.

The *Passport to...*-series for the PSP console is built after the same principles as a printed guidebook with elements from tourist maps and phrase books among others. The application makes use of the same kind of multimodal text functions as other, more traditional types of guides, but the PSP platform do present a more advanced and integrated interaction between written text, images, sound and hypertexts. This is more elaborated than in other guide aids such as printed sources, GPS guiding or mobile phone applications. The small handheld device also helps to increase the users mobility when present in the physical setting of the guide situation. But the perceived freedom and many features of this PSP application are however based on an image of Rome that undoubtedly is constructed in advance. The publisher has the first and last word in presenting the framework of the guides to Rome and the other cities even if the user may bookmark own favourite places in a personal profile.

**Self-guiding with the help of computer and Internet resources**

The Internet and its fast diffusion have revolutionized how texts are produced and perceived. Concepts like hypertext and the general embedding of navigable features into texts have partly driven the development of theories of semiotics and multimodality described above\(^\text{13}\). But the Internet is also a place where traditional texts are made accessible and linked with each other through links in texts or between websites. The Internet appears to be a medium that blurs the boundaries between professional and private and also emphasizes efforts of individualism. Personal web pages and the growing number of online forums, communities and social networking tools are all examples of the increased focus on individual interests and DIY-cultures.
that have grown in terms of usage and influence with the Internet as channel. Following this line, there are numerous examples of professionally (or semi-professionally) produced texts for guiding on the Internet. Local tourism boards, different interest groups and many other organizations like universities or municipalities provide visitors with different takes on texts for self-guiding through the Internet. Standardized ‘travel diaries’ (similar to weblogs or ‘blogs’) is another guide feature of the Internet, which usually is based on commercial websites, where travelling individuals can write short entries, upload images and films for private or public instant access. Press and media sources also offer web-based guides to popular destinations as a service on their websites. The possibilities to coordinate written text with graphic elements like maps, images or films and publish them on the Internet are almost endless. The close relations between commercial, private, public and individual interests are therefore nearly always present in the text-based services that are found on the Internet. Specific applications that make intrinsic use of these relations together with multimodal texts for self-guiding purposes do quite naturally exist too.

Google Earth

Google Earth\textsuperscript{14} is a software program that needs to be installed on a computer but it is dependent on Internet connection in order to be fully utilized. It is based on a visual globe model of our planet and was originally named Earth Viewer in 2004. The major search engine company Google acquired Earth Viewer and renamed it Google Earth in 2006. It exits in a free version for all major operative systems like Windows, Mac and Linux but professional, commercial versions under the name Google Earth Pro/Enterprise are also available. Google Earth displays satellite images of varying resolution of the Earth’s surface and allows users to see objects like houses and geographical features from a bird’s eye view. The satellite images are of varying quality in resolution where urban areas in USA and Europe can be seen in very
high resolutions (down to 15 cm resolution) and other parts of the planet usually stay at 15metres. Google Earth has several possibilities for interaction. The official Google Earth community is an online forum where members can post points-of-interest with descriptions or links to other sites on the Internet. The application also features several layers as a source for information on businesses and points of interest, as well as showing the contents of many external communities, such as Wikipedia or YouTube.

The opportunities for virtual self-guiding in Google Earth are basically endless and may be done as completely freehand ‘globe-spinning’ or with the aid from community and layer resources. The Google Earth application provides its user with featured layers that point out geographic entities like bodies of water, mountains and islands. Manmade places like cities, roads and streets are another type of included geographic feature together with national, regional or other types of administrative borders. Google Earth users share self-programmed layers with each other on the official Google Earth community, using different file formats. These layers are constructed around highlighted places and written text by the authors. It is possible to get customized guides of cities or of historical places like battlefields or of marked down airfields all over the world as examples. Such layers can be used by people who share a specific interest or as general guides for printout purposes. The ideas for construction and sharing of layers on Google Earth are many and the multimodal interaction of marked places, text, links and photos provide vast possibilities for the user. Besides the individual community-based layer sharing with personal connotations, commercial actors or professional organizations make use of Google Earth. The described relation between the graphic representation of images of our planet, marked places and different links are therefore particularly interesting from a multimodal text perspective.

Individuals may add personal layers that perhaps highlight favourite cafés or restaurants or very personal places. But there are also layers of commerce and infrastructure that point out stores, ATMs, police...
stations or golf courses. It is therefore possible to get a guided tour of a city by its pharmacies or hamburger restaurants. A pinpointed place of commercial interest is usually accompanied by text-based information on open hours, line of business and also a photo and a link to an official website. This interaction between different modalities actually helps to disconnect the geographic fundament of Google Earth from usage, even if the map-based grounding is necessary in order to construct the option of a self-guided tour made up by e.g. McDonalds restaurants or sport arenas. The design of guiding with the help of Google Earth can be planned and likened to the support you will get from a traditional guidebook or map. But Google Earth also opens an opportunity for instant, unplanned self-guiding, much like free-hand surfing on the Internet. It is possible to start a spontaneous tour of the world by zooming in at the Eiffel Tower in Paris, continue with pinpointed good restaurants in perhaps northwestern Europe and end in the marked places of an unknown individual’s private life. The texts that are mobilized in a hypothetical tour of this kind will vary in terms of formality, perspectives and function. The user makes a temporary collage of different texts and modalities by hers or his virtual movements on the Google Earth globe. It is possible to save and stabilize a tour of this kind but it is very likely that its structure is to be forever forgotten after the session has ended.

The mobilizing of different written texts and hypertexts in Google Earth is accompanied with the extensive use of pictures, symbols and graphic elements in general. A layer from National Geographic magazine called African Megafltyover allows the user to zoom in at selected small areas on the African continent. The areas are showed at a very close and detailed level and feature examples of African wildlife such as hippos together with pictures of river deltas, villages and herds of cattle. But the pictures that appear as crystal clear cutouts in the somewhat blurred main image of the globe are taken from aeroplanes and seamlessly embedded in the default satellite images of the surface. These pictures are also captioned by on-the-go remarks from the pilot of the plane in the style of this example: ‘A pod of hippos along
this floodplain are being disturbed by a pesky Cessna aeroplane.’ The layer’s construction around the beautiful pictures with informally styled text fragments renders the user with an illusion of being directly guided from the sky, through the clouds and into the very dust of Africa.

The interaction of different texts and modalities is an intrinsic part of the Google Earth application. To ‘read’ the possible self-guiding tours in this application is to leave the ordered sequencing of a printed guidebook behind and the virtual tours that can be constructed in this manner are manifold. The application does however present images of what is seen as appropriate in general. As an example, a strong sense of global awareness is manifested in the included layers. Environmental issues, threatened wildlife and conflict areas are all featured in the layers of the program. Users that might want to include perhaps differing views on climate change or want to bring up delicate subjects like crime or sex will probably search for other channels than the official Google Earth community. The Google Earth Hacks website is not officially sanctioned and functions as a community for topics and tour suggestions of more sinister qualities along with themes of more traditional sights. The Google Earth Hacks website includes user layers of air crash sites, homes of celebrities or ‘secret’ military operations along with layers based on theories of conspiracy.

**Self-guiding, texts and technologies**

The printed guidebook of the modern era is still alive and well in the early 21st century. There are modifications and in general a broader interpretation of the guidebook as genre but the printed guidebook is still a staple product in bookstores all over the world. And, why not? We travel more than ever and virtually no part of the globe is off limit these days. The ongoing debate on the climate might change our travel habits together with rising costs for air travel but we are not there yet. New technology offer opportunities for more advanced solutions for self-guiding. The use of audio tours with mobile phones or mp3-players provides extended freedom for when to undertake a guided
tour. It is also easy to turn off a tour of this kind if it is boring or if something more interesting attracts the guided person’s attention. Self-guiding technology seem to be supported by two trends of our times – focus on individuality and distance from physical socializing – and is therefore in line with many other technical trends like home cinema systems and social networking on the Internet.

To read a traditional printed guidebook but being far from its subject destination and to follow rivers and trails on a map is probably age-old pastimes. To dream away and plan travels or things to see in exotic locations are obviously helped by the narratives of other people. The literature aspect of travel writing and guidebooks should not be underestimated, as discussed in Malin Zillinger’s chapter of this book. The new technologies that combine different types of self-guiding texts in multimodal manners are definitely enhancing the travelling at a distance as phenomenon. A Sony PSP title like Passport to... brings the sounds, sights and ambience of Rome and other cities to the safety of your home. To actually make use of the application in the streets of a major European metropolis might provoke robbery and theft of the expensive PSP console and also effectively marks its user as a tourist. In Google Earth, the possibilities of home traveling are endless and provide distanced interaction with other persons. The application’s combination of social networking, advanced software and hyper realistic imaging is also attracting millions of users.

The instantiation of distanced travel for the individual user is an important uniting aspect of self-guiding through new technologies. Other aspects are the strong focus on individual preferences and the development of already existing genre norms, taken from printed guidebooks and similar self-guiding texts. There is an unbroken tradition of guiding texts that combine functionality with literary aspects and entertainment. This genre tradition continues in self-guiding through technical devices or in the Internet even if multimodal interaction and new features call for new takes on analysis and understanding of these guide texts.
Notes


8 Ibid.


