

**EL POPO** | the smoking mountain

a transmedia documentary

The landscape is frozen history, but takes part of living history. In this sense, the landscape is transtemporal, linking the past and present. The human space resulting from the intrusion of society into these landforms, attributing a value or a function which, over time will change. These changes are made not as a physical reality, but as a social reality on the cultural conceptions of the landscape that we have generated.

Milton Santos. Nature of Space



## 1 | introduction

**Let's imagine that the volcano Popocatepetl erupts. It is an eruption like no one has ever seen before. An epic eruption, completely unexpected from a volcano with those characteristics.**

**In this eruption everything around the Popo vanishes into the ashes, is buried beneath the mudslides and the lava.**

**Nothing is left; the towns, the animals, the costumes, the forest, the people, nothing. Does anyone remember how it looked before? What was there? What did that landscape meant?**

**What did it meant for you?**

El POPO is a transmedia documentary project, which involves a feature film, a web platform with user-generated content, a webseries and a audio/video installation. The goal is to bring the public closer to the rich universe around the Popocatepetl, active volcano just 60 kms. from Mexico City. The Popocatepetl gathers an enormous amount of history, cultural legacy, and biodiversity which are all about to vanish without the help of any volcanic eruption.

Through the personal choices that the user will make in order to explore the site, therefore the surroundings of the volcano, the main goal is to create a very personal and unique idea and set of interests around the Popocatepetl. Even though everyone has a different reason to keep those places and interests safe, the final objective is common to everybody.

The strenght of those interests will fortunately create a bond between the user and the landscape, and encourage society into an active role in the management of the cultural and social heritage, as well as the environment.

Several main themes come together in this project; nature, science, culture and society. When looking at their connections, and how each of them rely on the other to survive, we can see the bigger picture, and understand the different steps we have to take in order to keep the volcano and its wonders, alive.

Each of the platforms in this project work independently from each other, but are nurtured from the same content and a common point of view. The development of each platform, as well as the production and launching stage are also independent from each other, even though some of them share the same paths and complement each other. By diving the different stages on wider span of time, we allow the project to have a longer life on the web and outside of it, and in consequence have the opportunity to aim at a wider target as well as a several funding sources.

EI POPO: THE SMOKING MOUNTAIN is conformed by this projects:

Where's the volcano? (HD, color, 2013, 58 min.)

This documentary tells the story of a young filmmaker that starts a journey around the volcano with the goal of regaining a sense of reality after an awful virtual breakup with her long distance girlfriend. The volcano, the incidents, and the characters that she finds along the way will teach her about the importance of experience and how sometimes, some things just exists so we can look them from the distance, as the landscape.

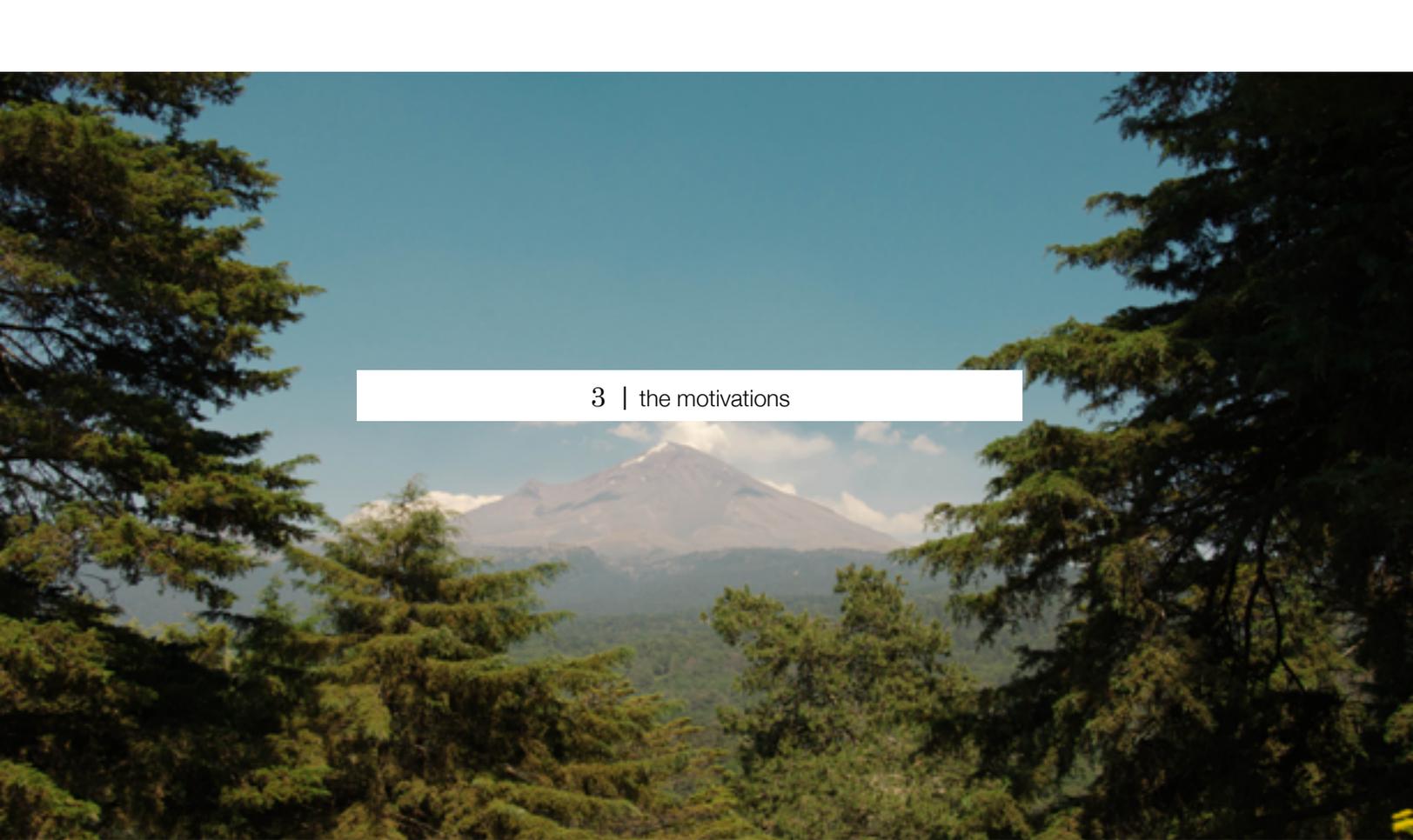
This project was initially funded with a grant from the Programa de Estímulo a la Creación y Desarrollo Artístico del Estado de Puebla 2012, but after several changes on the story, some extra funding will be needed to make this documentary suitable to a web based platform.

On the horizon: installation (video and audio, 15 min.)

Before the feature length documentary idea came to be what it is right now, the original idea was closer to a James Benning time of movie. The idea was to shoot 10 or 12 landscapes with the volcano at the background, similar to the sumi-e prints from the XIX century in Japan. The shots that were made originally for this project, were mostly discarded on the editing of the feature film, but are very interesting for a different kind of approach; the installation allows the user to live the volcano in a more sensitive and present way. The idea is to use movement to re-enact the journey of travelling around the volcano.

Traces on the volcano

This video web series is the result of the very large and deep research done through the preproduction for the feature length documentary. All of this important information was not going to be used on the film, but was not available in any other place either. There is very few information available to the regular audience. Most of the interesting and relevant work about the environment, geology, history, economy, art, and culture surrounding the volcano is only on the reach of specialised researchers. In order to keep their researches going, it is also important to spread the word, about the wonderful work, everyone in academy, local communities and other institutions are doing. This part of the project is still on development and will try to involve local people and researchers on it.



### 3 | the motivations

#### What is my role in this project?

Developing a transmedia project demands a lot of effort, great planification and execution. There has to be a common ground for all the contents and parts, and a very driving need to do it. This is the first time I get involved with a transmedia project, nevertheless it has been on my list for a long time, I just needed to find the right subject.

Before coming back to my hometown, right next to the volcano, I lived abroad for five years. I had my life almost built and figured out on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean at Spain. I came back to shoot a documentary and to participate on an academic exchange program with a very important film school in Mexico. And now, after two years, I have realized, that it is my hometown and the landscape around it, seen with new eyes, that appeal to tell this story, to create a community and to propose a new way of relating to my homeland.

After living abroad, I did not thought that any of the cliché ideas about “feeling the land” were real. After this project, I came to understand that it does not matter if you were born or not in a place, the important thing is to create that “sacred” space in your life, in your town, in your hearth and in your mind. Having respect for any piece of land is what we’ve been lacking, and the main reason why we keep making this planet a more difficult place to live.

This project, and this subject is very special, because in my opinion, we are talking about a something that we all experience (at least the people that live around the volcano, which taking in to account the three closest cities, might be around the 8 million) almost the same way. The landscape, the horizon, the “limits of the know world” is something universal, common to every person on earth, since the begging of times. The way each of our gazes, our points of view, meet, exactly in the same place, should be something to think about, as a way of gathering, of understanding and of willingness to see ourselves on the eyes of the other.