
artlink – experiment

every map has an agenda

“welcome to the city formally known as glasgow, we have re-mapped it, renamed it and reclaimed our streets for play and revolutionary fun” – deviator voice over, glasgow, 2012

it took us a while to realise that maps were not a neutral accessory. they are selective about what they represent, they can provoke new understandings of networks, shape our beliefs about people and shift our perceptions of place and power relations. maps are as much a political agent as they are a locative reference tool.

since the phenomenal rise of social media, geo-tagging along with [ex-military incubated] gps capabilities, our smartphone devices now gather unprecedented amounts of location based data, making latitude and longitude co-ordinates a part of our cultural vernacular. locative media is now one of the fastest growing areas in digital technology, and with it comes an emerging generation of artists employing it to establish complex relationships between physical and virtual spaces – experimenting with new forms of interactive, distributed art making. it has also generated a heightened awareness of orienteering ourselves in relation to others. spatial navigation appears increasingly central to our contemporary engagements with each other. it seems we all know where we are, who we are with, where we are going and more curiously, we want others to know about it.

when we started developing two projects last year, *deviator* & the cia wikipedia, we’d already had a taste of the potential of locative media to establish temporal situations whereby an artistic experience is interwoven within the fabric of the everyday. as a mixed reality work that showcased as part of the 17th biennale of sydney, *transumer* invited participants to roam the streets with iphone in hand and place augmented markers around the rocks, identifying alternative uses of those sites in relation to an imagined revolution. the markers appeared as graffiti style tags overlaid on top of the actual spaces. the work was as much an experiment with the technology as much as it was an attempt to plot a fictional map full of ideas for creative disruption in public spaces. it didn’t quite work in all honesty, the ‘revolutionary map’ was invisible to almost everyone [other than players who saw the city through the screen of our phones], and as soon as the server dropped out, it disappeared completely. some experiments are destined to fail and that’s the creative risk you take when you play with the unknown. but the failure also pointed us towards new ways of thinking about the digital journeys we can create whilst our feet are firmly planted in the physical world.

pvi’s new work *deviator* is a much more direct use of mapping technology. as a locative media artwork that can be downloaded onto any 3g phone, the work is an open challenge to temporarily transform your city into a playground by deviating from familiar social codes in public. using a hacked google map of each city as your guide, *deviator* appropriates traditional children’s games, inviting players to locate hidden audio instructions in the city that are triggered by scanning qr codes mounted on walls, bus stops and urban debris. from activities such as ‘guerilla pole dancing’, to ‘kiss chase’, ‘spin the bottle’ ‘follow the leader’ and ‘twister’, each game encourages a physical and seemingly harmless disruption of that site. the notion of ‘play’ is explicit in the work and is deliberately used as a tactical device to allow players to reject traditional narratives of place, throwing them aside temporarily in favour of a new normal. after navigating your way through the streets for 45 minutes and hopefully working up a sweat in order to become the ‘best deviator,’ you are offered a derivé of your journey, which comes in the form of a simple line drawing that has plotted your gps co-ordinates from the time you entered the work. this map is unique to each participant and can be emailed directly to you as a memento of your deviation within the cityscape. what I love about this aspect of the work is the use of the map to express the personal cartography of the experience. we shift

the map away from a navigational tool to an abstract visualization of each persons trajectory within the work, hoping that the memory of their journey can be triggered and re-constructed by reading between those lines.

the simplicity of basic mark making to map out an idea, was where the cia interdisciplinary arts wikipedia began. with permanent markers in hand facing a 10 metre high white wall in the foyer of pvi's artist run space cia studios [centre for interdisciplinary arts], we started an experiment to see how collaboration is informing new modes of practice. in 2011 pvi had the privilege of being awarded two 'geeks-in-residence' for an entire year at cia studios [courtesy of australia councils digital culture fund] and what transpired from an initial provocation to them of 'how do we strengthen connections with our peers, outside of the confines of the building we inhabit?' became a much broader enquiry into the landscape of interdisciplinary art in australia. over the course of a few months, our scribbles transformed into a giant map connecting artists and groups who were working with hybrid art forms in australia.

the map attempted to visualise which peers and groups we are connected to and in turn tracking who they are connected to and what new relationships / collaborations were forged as a result. the only [loose] rule was that it was to remain artist focused [so venues and festivals were omitted at first]. after getting thru a dozen black marker pens and dragging in step ladders to assist with the spidering lines linking artists, groups and seminal events together, we realized the wall wasn't going to be big enough. so with the guidance of our geeks, we shifted to a digital architecture and through this process became acutely aware of how interdisciplinary practice relies heavily on collaboration in order to form new ideas and creative explorations.

the cia wiki is still growing on the walls and each artist that visits us is invited to pick up a pen and track their journey. we are still using that data to inform the online version, which is becoming more of a story telling tool as opposed to a clinical database of names and events. even though we're not quite sure where its headed and it has been a very intuitive process so far, for us the wiki is really an opportunity to acknowledge that interdisciplinarity is founded on the simple premise of connecting out beyond familiar pathways. like the wayfarers of the middle ages, or the situationists with their psychogeography investigations, maybe we just feel our way and allow the agenda to follow.

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