

beyond the controller – steve bull

i'm co-founding member of pvi collective, a tactical media arts group based in perth. pvi make performances, exhibitions and stage interventions on the city streets. we formed in '98 and are really driven by a need to create works that instigate tiny revolutions.

this has led to some unusual adventures but I think what we really hope for is for audiences & public to come along with us for the ride & engage with content in ways that are inclusive, provocative and activates them somehow.

a common thread for all our work is that they are situated in public settings so that they have capacity to somehow impact on daily life. we want to provoke audiences into thinking differently about their cityscapes and their capacity to instigate change. so using humour, performance, media and public action, we invite audiences to misbehave in playfully subversive ways.

we have been interested for some time now in working with augmented reality technology for mobile phones. we saw huge potential for us in utilising it as covert device for an audience to safely enter commercially owned spaces undetected and carry out instructions imparted within an artwork.

at the time we were talking about making a work in a mall, we wanted to make a work that kicked against consumerism, to question if it is a carefully crafted tactic designed to pacify the masses and were wondering how we could get away with it on site. we were drawn to the potential for augmented reality to add a layer of meaning, to a live video image, to overlay either 2d or 3d virtual imagery, for us that layer would be an opportunity to commit a kind of temporary virtual visual vandalism of a public space and see it on the mobile phones screen.

so far we haven't been able to make this work, these quasi public spaces are turning out to be a bit tricky to navigate. but we were fortunate enough to access some funding to enable us to undertake a residency at the human interface technology lab [or hitlab] in christchurch in new zealand and flesh out our ideas of working in this area which segued into making a new piece of work called *transumer* using this technology.

transumer is an iphone app, presented in an exhibition context. it is a mobile tool for a modern day insurrection that appropriates from augmented reality browsers such as layar, wikitude, navigator pro and junaio. these browsers present users with real time data about their surroundings, nearby landmarks and other points of interest by overlaying information on the screen of the iphone.

as an alternative to this real world information, *transumer* encourages audiences to clandestinely take over their city by placing gps based 'tags' that identify how they want to disrupt or intervene at a specific location. seen through the iphone's live camera view, these visual marker points in the cityscape represent underground networks and are available for other players of the work to see, find out more information about the proposed networks action and join the cause or not. participants are requested to offer detailed strategies for 'fucking everything up' and upload their suggestions to a live server allowing their ideas to be accessed by future users of the artwork. at the close of the exhibition, we will have inadvertently collated a design for a cities downfall.

the work draws from a highly contentious publication released in 2007 titled '*the coming insurrection*' which outlines strategies for a modern day revolution to take place in cities across the world. it's written with a poetic militancy by an anonymous french collective called *the invisible committee*, we decided to put this manual's theories to the test by activating one of the book's strategies for insurrection which was 'to liberate territory by super-imposing your own meaning over it'. this idea of new occupations and transforming a space by behaving differently or re-configuring information was at the heart of our explorations into augmented reality technology and had provided us with the conceptual foundation we were looking for in this work.

the first showing of the work has been as part of the sydney biennale where the work has had a lengthy three month season. we implemented a decay feature to the tags to avoid overloading the app if there were too many visual markers in the cityscape. we devised a process of natural selection whereby if no one joined a tag/network it would change state each day, getting smaller to the point of by the sixth day of non interest, disappearing completely from the

work. so the theory was, if it's a bad idea, it will fade and die. or what, also happened, which we didn't plan for, if there was a week of bad weather and no one wanted to go out in the rain, everything was gone. the revolution was gone due to bad weather and had to start again.

for us, this is our first work where we have handed over content control to an audience. it's a little scary for us. we would normally be there, psychically, performing live alongside them, guiding them perhaps. in *transumer*, we are there, mediated with instructional voice over and a series of short video clips from interventions we staged with members of the public in retail stores in sydney's cbd area, inviting them to immediately destroy an item they had purchased with money we had gifted them. so you can see that. but this is somehow not quite enough for us. so we are now plotting an update to the work which adds a live component featuring pvi.

what's sat uneasy with us with *transumer* is a loss of control of the work we feel with stepping away and not being involved directly. we've been questioning if the networks should remain virtual or perhaps be activated and have a real world impact? we have been looking at the data collected and wondering how these networks can perhaps be brought to life and tested out in public spaces.

later this month we will be working on an update to this work that will see future seasons for *transumer* ending with a live guided tour [either mediated or with a pvi tour guide] that reveals each of the networks placed throughout the cityscape and attempts to bring some of the ideas to life by shifting the written theories of occupation to live performative moments that are witnessed and experienced by our audience members. we plan to devise a number of responsive onsite interventions which can be undertaken by both the audience and performers.

it seems fitting to us that having made the provocation to audiences we now take on their ideas and find a way to set them in motion.

thank you.