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Untitled Spaces: Locative Media, New Media and the curatorial connundrum

Locative media works trigger in actual physical locations in cities and in the landscape. This is a great paradigm shift and is out of the gallery system. Or is it? Now there are more places for locative media but it is even more the intriguing bastard that new media is in the general art world. Is building an alternative sort of microverse out of the gallery system to always remain as spatial and explorative (hope so but...) or in a few years will someone find a way to subsidize/hybridize the form and have the works pay to explore, coordinates purchased like privatized water rights somehow to a collector? Will someone purchase the land and code of some great locative project as yet unborn? Will someone hybridize it in a half locative and half in gallery feedback loop that has the feedback loop and its technology for sale as an art piece?

Curating essentially is an uber-octopus of semantics and semiotics and there are more experimental and avante-garde forms of curating and exhibition. The greater question is of what collected interests and perspective come to utilize the new paradigms. There currently are more festivals that are including locative media projects and all locative media symposiums. The question is where we go from here. The field is clearly at a juncture (actually multiple junctures). What is it to "curate" an unseen signal, a free open access system originally designed for military use, the re-contextualization of mapping, space itself?

The works have a clear lineage to land art (work like Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" composed of natural materials and site specificity) and the happenings (artworks existing only in the moment as an experience as opposed to artifacts/art objects). This type of medium made the curatorial tradition already a bit off kilter. The definition historically has been manifold yet always tied to a specific, designated location/space; the role is to organize, sift, locate, contextualize a group of work(s). Once the organization is complete, the work(s) are housed in either a gallery or museum. Locative work is already seen as what manifestos have screamed for decades in terms of work existing out of the hierarchical canon, and apart from the layered symbolism of exclusion seen in the white walls and monetary connections of galleries seen as similar to feudalism and the architecture of the barons designed to show their value and culture as elevated above what is below.

Of course these declarations themselves are prismatic and problematic historically in terms of viewpoints, bias, context etc, but the thread is the same: art should be able to exist in the streets and freed from commerce per se.

Locative works are site specific, yet there are several forms. Some are annotations, open invitations to place comments, recollections, observations at a location for others to trigger. Others are more narrative based and place stories and modified histories in locations to tell of them from another time. Others are more specifically spatial narrative histories which "read" locations and the layers of events, people, buildings, economy and shifts in a single place in time like the Narrative Archaeology of "34 North 118 West". Others map movements in locations to show emergent patterns such as the early "GPS Drawings" of Jeremy Wood and the new works mapping entire places like the great wall of china and placing them to trigger in a new location like the work of the C5 collective and Brett Stalbaum.

The process can be done communally as a workshop in groups such as “Plan: pervasive and locative arts network”, can be presented in symposiums such as the “mobile digital commons network symposium” can collect works to all be developed and/or function in a specific area such as the “Futuresonic Festival” in Manchester, or may someday globally link projects done in different key cities by theme, concepts or even type of landscape or data.

There also has been talk in some locative media circles for years about “feedback loops”. The idea is that if a person experiences the locative work they can return to the starting point and a last piece will appear or be produced to track/map their specific movements or as a last work of metaphor/data formed by their specific results. This is fascinating in scientific and experiential contexts as the work has a last key piece that each participant shapes into being at the end of their experience with the locative work.

The curious thing here though is how this may be chosen by someone to be sold as an art object. It could become some sort of new media/locative media/sculpture or flat screen with a hidden computer to create a sort of “moving painting”. This would then shift to a classical art object in the mercantile/aesthetic system and such works would be caught up in the usual conundrum. Is it a new hybrid of new media, locative art, science (feedback data loop as in genetics etc..) and the tactile classic form in the arts? Is it a way for something “avant garde” and free form to become reigned into commerce and the game of the art world in terms of making it etc which the field by its pure data is currently apart from?

What is the cycle of the “new” in the history of art? “New” in semantic/linguistic terms is a near paradox already because it is a form of measure, yet is intensely variable and relative thus near immeasurable in specific terms at all. The alternative to the traditional modes also ultimately gains exposure. The new possibility becomes quantified and known in the rear view mirror as most radical upon first emergence or encounter.

“New Media “ has been declared “dead” by several critics and curators , yet is still seen as the bastard of the art world and bemoaned as not accepted. Locative Media is becoming something quite similar, but is still currently far out of the gallery system and thus still in the woods of free form and still defining and redefining itself. The path from here is wide open and full of all kinds of possible permutations or stasis; nothing is certain. The avante garde is a space of experimentation and often developing new paradigms, tools and is exploratory; the location and the signal and the re-contextualization of space sit in that space but only time will tell what will come when the experiments come into a cogent established form.