

Locative Dissent

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The landscape is the map. Our histories of panic, of dread, of the disorientation of shifts and slippages, attempted erasures: all is a map. The advent of locative media art makes this possible. The nature of wireless signals and global position satellite data (GPS), as available in many laptops, PDAs and cell phones, is that it allows information to be placed in a location. The landscape can hold dissent, can reveal facts less known or even repressed in time.

A protest is an event that exists physically in a single moment in a single location, or in multiple locations. Then the crowd disperses, and the message gets voiced as best as possible through channels of dissenting voice, sometimes in bits and pieces in the mainstream media (usually as a blip, and with lowest possible numbers reported). The audio files triggered in a location are more permanent (for years, until the technology possibly becomes outmoded). The possibility exists that anyone with a cell phone can trigger the layers of a place as they pass through.

A location is full of unseen layers: in time, of events past, of places gone, derelict or even remaining, but with ghosts of former resonance, and memories of people. Place is an agitated latency; anywhere you stand has unseen stories and knowledge dormant beneath you. The cell phone can excavate the lost layers of what has come before, as signals triggers sounds, accounts, images and even video of what must be remembered.

A drawback is the fact that not everyone can afford a laptop, PDA or cell phone. This is a limit in terms of dissemination, to be sure. A way to circumvent this can be through funding raised by arts organisations and political awareness organisations to give tours and

community access with locative-enabled equipment. The voices of personal accounts of injustice, malice and tragedy, as well as positive accounts of struggle, empowerment, and community, can thus be heard, and facts can be sewn to places, to be seen and known.

An example of this in America could be a project at Manzanar, California, one of the internment camps of Japanese Americans in World War II. Between 1942 and 1946, this War Relocation Centre held over 10,000 Japanese-American detainees, both US citizens and resident aliens. The site now is a barren wasteland, with only a small visitor centre and a few derelict ruins of the temporary city/jail that held many people. The site is a sad metaphor for the American memory of what occurred. The dry, cracked earth and pathetic memorial is a further erasure and implication of deliberate suppression by forgetting. The locative project could be GPS-driven, and trigger all the accounts, images, maps, videos and tapestries of the individual stories of the many people forced to stay there in wooden shacks, living out the tragedy of internment and prejudice. The project, and thus the place, will agitate into life what must be remembered

The dissemination of knowledge can therefore move beyond the disconnect of books (read in isolation away from the physical place of the text's origin and gist), and move beyond the unfortunate ephemerality of individual protests. Multiple projects and efforts can be developed that trigger in the same area. This allows any variety of information and art to be available to many. The site-specific nature of a project triggering in a location allows many layers of place to be available to be read ; for example, a war in 1930, a tragic shooting of protesters in 1957, a town raised in 1968, a hazardous chemical spill from a multinational company in 1989^a

The work can be with scientists, historians, etc., utilising all types of information; or can be grassroots accounts of communities. The works can be oral narratives and text, mixtures of text and image, video, etc. The authority of the intellectual here is negated, but by intention. The authoritative voice of intellectual discourse is counter-intuitive to creating works that speak of place, events, moments, important layers of a place lost in time. Instead of the voice of authority, what is needed is the voice of the work and location itself: the information, the artistic use of language and image, and most of all, of the agitation into being of a location as multi-tiered, alive. The practitioner of locative media, by shedding the implied distance and finality of authoritative voice, has greater freedom to allow the account, the facts, the relevance and power of the place itself, to be felt with great clarity.

This is where the landscape can now agitate into being what needs to be known, what has been neglected in time, what has not seen the emergence of a voice as loud as necessary for it be made fully known. History is multi-layered, not just in archaeological terms in a sense of layers, periods and their artefacts, but in terms of what has been displaced and forgotten in the short memory of general culture.

History is told in many voices. Context shifts in time as well. The intellectual, the artist, the local citizen: what knowledge of events, moments, ways of seeing beyond the present and literal, do these voices have to implant in places, to be known and heard?

Stories can emerge from standing where a building decayed and was abandoned,

where an empty space now stands in the place of an event, a gathering, a human architecture broken in time. Turbulence can be the effect of the present, of the wash of information, of disinformation, of media bias, a blurred multiplicity. In time, that present can be seen more clearly, more wisely, more deeply, and even the quiet things and small voices can be heard as profoundly resonant and vibrantly clear.

