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JoyceWalks: remapping culture as tactical space

Introduction

This paper will discuss JoyceWalks, a participatory locative art project which uses Google Maps to remap routes from James Joyce's *Ulysses* to any city in the world. The project is web based using the Google Maps API¹ to remap these routes from Dublin to any other city and to generate walking maps which are then used as the basis of situationist inspired psychogeographical *dérives*.

This paper will argue that JoyceWalks acts as a tool through which participant action can be used to generate critical spatial knowledges of the urban environment. Through a structured mechanism of remapping spatially expressed cultural tropes such as (but not limited to) the Bloomsday celebrations in Dublin the project questions the spatial commodification of culture as part of what Sharon Zukin calls the symbolic economy of cities (3)² and its implied fragmentation of space into zones of culture and zones of what presumably can be described as 'non-culture'. My proposal is that JoyceWalks offers a mechanism for (re)mappings of cultural space in cities which privileges the social relationships of cultural production over the spatial and in the process offers an expandable set of procedures for generating situationist inspired explorations of urban space. I suggest that JoyceWalks produces ephemeral tactical spaces which are actuated by the user/participants and that this form, the 'tactical toolkit' as it were, represents an effective method for the interrogation of urban space.

Mapping *Ulysses*

The project chooses as its starting point Bloomsday, the annual celebration of James Joyce's *Ulysses* which takes place in Dublin on June 16th. Bloomsday is a typical cultural product that can be seen in almost any city in the world today. It involves re-enactment, a cultural trail, pageantry and a granting of locational identity to culture and a renegotiation of the spaces of the city according to a predefined cultural narrative. *Ulysses* is an ideal text for such an exercise and I'd like to take a moment to drill down a little into the relationship between *Ulysses* and the city and explore how it

1 API (Application Programming Interface). A set of programming tools which enable the user to use Google Maps resources for their own applications.

2 See Hegglund's discussion of the 'Wandering Rocks' episode of *Ulysses*

underpins this project. Ulysses is inextricably connected to the topography of Dublin and Joyce, while living abroad, famously mapped out the streets of Dublin with great precision from memory and through a close adherence to the 1904 edition of Thom's Almanac and ordnance survey maps (Budgen 1972, Hegglund 2003). The maps consulted were products of the great Imperial mapping projects of the 19th century, the Ordnance Survey of Ireland and the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India which adopted its methodology. These enterprises which established the modern notion of scientific cartography were inextricably involved in the construction of empire; the role of mapping in the construction and definition of territory is beyond the scope of this paper but has been widely discussed in the literature of critical cartography (Harley, Pickles, Woods). A parallel could be drawn between the 19th century mapping revolution which influenced Joyce to the current mapping revolution as typified by Google Maps where users are invited to construct their own territory through the API driven mashups which, through these facilities to overlay the map with new data sets, have tentatively reintroduced the idea of the neutrality of maps

There is also in Joyce another impulse at work which can be gleaned from Joyce's oft quoted remark that "I want to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the face of the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book" (Budgen 1972 : 69) indicating (what Daniel Birnbaum³ might call) the world making intent of his project, Joyce too seeks to construct territory³ but unlike the imperial project of constructing and defining the empire he constructs Dublin through the everyday actions of its inhabitants which can then be extrapolating to a universal narrative of the city. In effect Ulysses can be thought of as presenting a city which is brought into being through the actions of its inhabitants. I connect this to Michel de Certeau's writing on walking in the city where when speaking of pedestrian movements he asserts that "their intertwining paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of those real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city." (de Certeau 1984:97) JoyceWalks is, in this de Certian way, a walking project, one which is involved in the production of its own space through the manipulation of existing spatial elements. This process is mediated through the web and enacted on the street and can be thought as taking place in a hybrid space (Kluitenberg 2006) with elements of the network facilitating real street based actions.

While I would argue that Ulysses is a particularly rich starting point for this project I recognise also that Bloomsday exists primarily as a generic cultural product in a wider scheme of cultural commodification, belonging in particular to a class of spatially contingent products -such as cultural trails, cultural quarters and so on - which denote zones of culture and construct the symbolic

3 Director of the 53rd Venice Biennale of Art 'Making Worlds' <http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/exhibition>

economy of the city. In Dublin Bloomsday has a pivotal role to play in this process and as it can be claimed that in *Ulysses* Joyce constructs a version of the city of Dublin it is also true that Bloomsday, the cultural event, in turn reconstructs the city of Dublin as the 'Joycean City' which is itself a subset of 'Literary Dublin'. JoyceWalks Techniques

Before exploring further the idea of JoyceWalks as a producer of spaces I want to briefly discuss how it works on a practical level. JoyceWalks is based on the Google maps API. The original routes are mapped out in Dublin through a close adherence to the text of individual chapters of *Ulysses*. Each route takes place within a single chapter of *Ulysses*, nine or ten points of significance are identified which are expressed as points of longitude and latitude each point has an associated text from *Ulysses*. At the moment three chapters are available, chosen for routes that are easily walked.

To use JoyceWalks the participant chooses a city to walk in, selects a chapter route and crucially chooses a centre point for the selected city. The original Dublin routes are then remapped to your chosen city through a procedure of linear transformation (with the centre point as origin) which moves each point of longitude and latitude to an analogous location in the new city. This results in an isometric reflection which retains the relationship between all places of significance in the route. The points on the mashup retain the associated text from *Ulysses* so participants can choose to read the text at each location. After a walk is completed, participants can upload images or videos associated with each point and the resulting final mashup is accessible for other users to view the route, text and images. To ensure the uniqueness of each walk generated the project has many in-built features to ensure variability; to map a route the user must select a centre point of the city and the route is generated in relation to this centre point, the points of the walk are draggable and repositionable, there is no snapping to the line of streets, points are joined by straight lines, taking them though buildings and obstacles which the walkers must negotiate at street level increasing the routes' contingency on local conditions. The mechanisms and code behind JoyceWalks are extensible and it is proposed that future development will allow the user/participant to create and customise their own routes using GPS tracklogs or by importing routes created with Google Earth/Maps. The option of downloading your route to a GPS enabled device will also be added shortly, this feature was deliberately left out of the first version to emphasise the traditional experience of trying to find your way with a map, a familiar locative experience and one very different in character to using the latest locative technologies to navigate the city.

Reframing Space

I have previously discussed the way in which *Ulysses* (and Bloomsday) is embedded in Dublin and its role in the definition and perhaps even the reinvention of the city. JoyceWalks asks the seemingly

simple question, what happens if you move it ? Through displacing the cultural trail from the site of its locational identity one assumes that it neutralises that identity and removes not only its role in the construction of this cultural economy of the city but also collaterally the cultural resonance of its engagement with the text and site. In actuality the results are more nuanced and less straightforward than they would appear. Certainly the geographic displacement neutralises the specifically locational elements of the narrative but in the process forces a re-engagement with the idea of the cultural trail. JoyceWalks remains a cultural trail but one in which the conventions of how to operate have been disrupted. It reframes the cultural trail not as an instrumentalised spatial product of the symbolic/cultural economy but as a socio spatial production of a temporary, ephemeral space. As the project shifts between the certainties of Google maps with its all-encompassing, totalising viewpoint to the often confusing realities of navigating through the superimposed spaces of Joycean remappings at street level participants must re-imagine its meaning, re-invent its procedures and re-think the mode of operation and through this process produce a temporary re-encoding of the spatial code which in turn facilitates alternative and critical spatial readings of the city.

I would like at this point to disconnect the project from Joyce and Ulysses. Their role is to act as a framing device for the project establishing a set of procedures or score⁴ which indicates a mode of action for the participants in their engagement with the space of the city rather than a prescriptive set of instructions which govern the enactment/performance of the work . In the disruptive process of remapping cultural spaces JoyceWalks subverts the function of the Joycean routes transforming them into a set of procedures for navigating city spaces in new and unexpected ways. I consider the remappings to be a form of generative (situationist) *dérive* and suggest that the situationist tactics of the *dérive* and *détournement* (Debord, Knabb) offer powerful methods for considering the technological city which lend themselves to a contemporary reworking in locative art. Guy Debord described the *dérive* as "a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances" which "involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects" (Debord 1956) but he also warned of the limitations of relying on chance as it was 'naturally conservative and in a new setting tends to reduce everything to habit or to an alternation between a limited number of variants' urging that "progress means breaking through fields where chance holds sway by creating new conditions more favorable to our purposes. We can say, then, that the randomness of a *dérive* is fundamentally different from that of the stroll, but also that the first psychogeographical attractions discovered by *dérivers* may tend to fixate them around new habitual axes, to which they will constantly be drawn back." (Debord 1956) In its offering of a algorithmic approach to the *dérive* which combines the randomness of the generated route with a set of mapped instructions I argue

4 After the Fluxus 'event score' introduced by Georges Brecht

that it removes this danger of the habitual resurfacing and as such is a legitimate contemporary reworking of the Situationist *dérive*.

The Production of Tactical Space

In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre argues that space cannot be considered as an empty neutral container in which objects and people are situated (Lefebvre 1991:68). Rather space is a social product, defined by a complex set of interrelationships and the "outcome of a sequence and set of operations" (Lefebvre:73) this production process results in a multiplicity of interconnected and overlapping spaces which influence, and are influenced by, each other (Lefebvre 1991:86-87). Space, he suggests, isn't superseded whenever a new space is produced but rather each space overlays previously produced spaces resulting in a multi-layered space in which the layers "co-exist, overlap and interfere" (Lefebvre 1991 :86) which other and that it is the dynamic relationship between these layers which establishes the nature of social space (Lefebvre1991:86- 87). Social space in turn acts as a tool of control in that it is "what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (Lefebvre 1991:73) . If as Lefebvre argues space is in a state of continuous production, a state of continually being brought into existence, then it is the process rather than the product which is of most interest. This leads on to to an acceptance that location, for example as defined by a set of co-ordinates of longitude and latitude or by being named in a text, is of small importance in and of itself. Of greater significance is how that location is related to other locations and to the practices which define that location. It is the practice, the procedures and the process that lead up to, for example, standing at a specific location as a participant in a locative art work that matter rather than the GPS co-ordinates of that location. With *JoyceWalks* the spaces produced can be considered as Lefebvre's 'lived space' where users transform and manipulate imposed space to make it their own (Lefebvre 1991:39) . This space disrupts and interferes with the existing spatial encoding and, it is proposed, suggest new modes of spatial practice outside of existing spatialisations.

The space produced by *JoyceWalks* can be further described by Michel de Certeau's definition of space as the locus of tactics. 'Space' according to de Certeau is 'place' actuated by the "ensemble of movements deployed within it" which "occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalise it" (1984:117). It could be said that space is place+practice and so the streets are transformed into the space of *JoyceWalks* through the actions of the participants as they walk the *JoyceWalks* routes in a temporary transformative appropriation of place. In this way they can be considered tactical interventions. According to de Certeau tactics insinuate themselves into " the other place fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety"(1984:32). they are opportunistic

ways of operating within a system, of manipulating the imposed system and turning it to its own advantage

Conclusion

While it is important not to over claim the significance of these small spatial interventions I would propose that these tactical appropriations of space have the potential to produce critical spatial knowledges. JoyceWalks is structured to retain an essential openness in its offering of a set of procedures without a prescriptive mode of operating so that it is the action of the participants which actuates the space of JoyceWalks. The work hinges on the interaction between the walkers and the route with each space produced being a unique contingent spatio-temporal event. With almost 500 JoyceWalks taken place in over 70 countries each walk also sits within a larger ongoing work involving a geographically dispersed series of tactical interventions facilitating multiple re-encodings of the spatial code enabling alternative and critical spatial readings of the city.

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