

# Locating Media: On Spatial Associations between Digital Media and Exhibition Space

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This short paper outlines the spatial relationship between digital media and exhibition space by focussing on how the distributed properties associated with a selected locative media artwork were translated through curatorial design.<sup>1</sup> The discussion that follows describes how distributed spatial practice influenced the dimensioning of the exhibition form of this artwork. Through the applied practice of curatorial design and its concentration on the complex of relations that are synthesised by the exhibition, the virtuality associated with digital media is given spatial expression.

Distributable media are making a significant impact on contemporary aesthetic practices. While redefining how an artwork might actually take shape, these forms also challenge how artworks might conventionally be exhibited.<sup>2</sup> No longer consigned to screen-bound virtual spaces, digitally mediated practices are increasingly influencing how real spaces operate. As will become apparent in the following discussion, the curatorial design process mediates the way in which an artwork is 'transposed' under exhibition conditions. Pete Gomes' *Littoral Map* provides a particularly effective illustration of how the complex of relations that interconnect artwork, gallery and museum were negotiated as part of the curatorial design process applied to the *Remote* exhibition.<sup>3</sup>

Curatorial selection and exhibition design, which for the most part operate as asynchronous stages in the exhibition development process, are synthesised in the curatorial design approach. The curatorial philosophy of the *Remote* exhibition drew upon the coincidence of the invention of photography with early advancements in instantaneous telecommunications and seeking to give expression to the paradoxical relationship between proximity and distance. In turn, the curatorial design of *Remote* set out to challenge the medium of exhibition by proposing a hybrid model interconnecting multimedia spaces with the physical qualities of the gallery environment. Early concepts were immediately drawn to the potential for developing a 'distributed' exhibition that would capitalize on the architectural footprint of the

particular site, accentuating both the physical properties of the Plimsoll Gallery as well as the social conditions which see it function within the cultural precinct housing the premier art school in Tasmania.

Deploying the gallery in a more 'instrumental' way meant that artworks could be related to the gallery but encountered in a number of supplementary, annexed spaces. The mixture of different locations, each with their own site-specific qualities, was factored into how artworks were to be situated within the exhibition's scenography. As the installation of the locative media work developed remotely by London-based artist Pete Gomes demonstrates, site-specificity not only entails an artwork's relation to its particular physical site, but also its context (at a micro-level through its own mixed media and multi-modal organization, and at a macro-level by the encompassing exhibition).

The work under discussion is representative of Gomes' ongoing performative utilization of GPS technology.<sup>4</sup> The genesis of *Littoral Map* drew its inspiration from the artist's pre-visualization of a tract of Madagascar coastline and its superimposition over the local precinct in Hobart that was to be transposed.<sup>5</sup> This particular iteration of the work employed a distinctive *multi-media* approach, with its centrepiece situated in the main entrance foyer of the Centre for the Arts. In this bustling public space, a series of four large prints were mounted into window recesses that line a glass wall opening onto an external courtyard. Upon closer inspection, these works present a series of maps representing the island of Madagascar. Increasingly magnified details focus attention to a coastal area of littoral forest in Southern Madagascar with the final frame superimposing this coastline over a floor plan of the Centre for the Arts.

To the right of this main arrangement that draws upon the familiar language associated with information display — photocopied printouts providing information about the mineral Ilmenite and its use in the production of Titanium Dioxide were found on a low podium. Discernible through the adjacent set of access doors,

the sound of assorted bird and animal calls filled the exterior courtyard. Blending in with the atmosphere of local sounds — ranging from seabirds and the sound of local heavy industry to conversations taking place in the social space frequented by staff and students of the art school — this sound scape leaked into the interior whenever traffic passed through the doorway.

At floor level, a white chalk-line ran continuously from the exterior courtyard, coursed through the foyer and cascaded down along the main staircase into the plaza below. The drawing directly transposed geographic coordinates of Southern Madagascar onto these locations using chalk and toothpaste (in reference to the use of Titanium Dioxide as a whitening material found in paints, food and many toothpastes). Both ends of this path were exposed to the elements. The path itself was impermanent and eventually ‘washed away’ as a consequence of being exposed to Hobart’s winter weather. As a result, over time only ephemeral tracings were left in situ to record the line and its marking of coordinates (these notations indicated the GPS positioning of a series of selected points tracing the contour of Madagascar coastline with that of the exact location of the Centre for the Arts).

Gomes’ *Littoral Map* was thus assembled through the connective tissue of the exhibition. When its dispersed and apparently unrelated elements were actualised by the continuous chalk-line that wove its way over, across and through a variety of sites, the work’s resulting effect was put to the service of visualizing the invisible streams

of information that pervade, permeate and envelope any geo-political sense of the interconnection of local and global spaces.

As introduced at the outset, the paradoxical interplay between distance and proximity underpins the thematic rationale of the exhibition. While the transcription of another place is effected through technological mediation or reproduction — which in the case of other artworks included in the exhibition inventory such as Susan Collins and Nancy Mauro-Flude’s use of web streaming technologies and the audiovisual installations by Martin Walch and Derek Hart — the presentation of the mediated narratives of these artworks also involved a translation of digital contents into real space: the transposition of virtual spaces into (and — as most directly illustrated by the artwork contributed by Gomes — onto) a subset of selected physical environments.

The distributed spatial practice demonstrated through the curatorial design of *Remote* addresses the paradoxical conditions of technologically mediated experiences: experiences that are simultaneously dispersed and situated, that combine synchronous and asynchronous features that take place (somewhere; sometime) across a continuum of real and virtual spaces. By calling upon the exhibition form to provide the infrastructure that supports the contiguous meeting of different times and places across a series of distributed spaces, an experience of being dispersed between informatic and physical space is constructed for the viewer.

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- 1 The conference presentation accompanying this text will complement this abbreviated overview by providing a more detailed illustration of how the distributed properties associated with Pete Gomes’ *Littoral Map* were directly translated through applied curatorial design.
  - 2 An increased reliance upon participatory modes of engagement is a feature of many forms of digital communication, whether found in popular media or artistic contexts. According to Darren Tofts, these forms ‘have modified the spatial and temporal dimensions of what constitutes an art event and an experience of it’. Tofts, Darren. 2005. “Beyond: Anticipating Distributed Aesthetics.” In *Fibreculture Journal — Distributed Aesthetics* (7), Electronic Source: Fibreculture, unpaginated.
  - 3 *Remote* was developed for and exhibited at Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania from 3-23 June 2006. (Artists: Susan Collins, Pete Gomes, Derek Hart, Nancy Mauro-Flude, Martin Walch; Curatorial Design and Locative Media: Vince Dziekan). Funding from Monash University, University of Tasmania and Arts Tasmania supported the project’s research and development. For more information and supplementary documentation, see: [www.remoteexhibition.com].
  - 4 Gomes’ combined social and aesthetic engagement with locative media offers a refreshing alternative to the predominant emphasis upon experiencing networked environments through telematic interactions involving immersive formats. For reference, see Zapp, Andrea (Ed.). 2004. *Networked Narrative Environments As Imaginary Spaces of Being*. Manchester: MIRIAD.
  - 5 *Littoral Map* is related to site-specific ‘performance drawing’ produced by the artist and staged as part of *Node London* in 2006. In this other iteration of the work, titled *Littoral Walk*, Gomes transplanted satellite coordinates of Southern Madagascar onto an area in South London in order to draw focus to this area of threatened coastal forest that stretches for 70km approximately on either side of Fort Dauphin. As Gomes’ relates: ‘This London walk is an imagined sense of myself in a specific location; for me, somewhere between future projection, imagination and a dream’. See: [http://www.mutantfilm.com/] and [http://www.nodel.org/].