

Voyage Around Our Rooms: Performance in the Mapping of Lockdown Spaces

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Abstract:

During the pandemic summer of 2020, I co-lead a “walkshop” called “A Sense of Impending Doom: a strata-walk for turbulent times.” Organized by the Commission for Art and Cartography (ArtCarto) in partnership with my artist collective Hamilton Perambulatory Unit (HPU), this event was originally supposed to take place during the *Drifting Bodies/Fluent Spaces* International Conference on Walking Arts in Portugal, but like much else, ended up on Zoom. Wherever they were around the world, participants joined our “Zoom of Doom” to go on a synchronous walk around their rooms, tuning in to their layers of everyday emotions to create personal hand-drawn lockdown maps.

COVID-19 had shut down most of the world. Australia was on fire. When ArtCarto Vice-Chair Joanna Gardiner in Melbourne suggested the workshop we were planning (along with HPU co-founder Donna Akrey and Vice-Chair Sharon Hayashi) be themed IMPENDING DOOM, it seemed perfect. Inspired in part by Xavier de Maistre’s tongue-in-cheek travelogue *Voyage Around My Room* (1794) and the idea of paying close attention to one’s everyday surroundings with the eye of a traveller, we devised a series of prompts designed to tune one’s body into one’s emotional landscape.

The participants began by collectively joining their pieces of paper, establishing everyone in the virtual space, and creating a tabula rasa. Participants were then prompted to write down their fears, anxieties, as well as a source of comfort during these times. In order to situate themselves in space, participants were then asked to make a small hole in their paper. This established their specific location in their environment, locating their here and now, and their sense of beingness. Using the hole as a framing device, participants followed a few exercises that required them to capture and document their body in space and their relationship to the things in their environment. Next, they looked through the framing device to capture their vista, their horizon line, the view from their location.

For the last framing exercise, participants were invited to take a picture of the sky through their window or above their heads, whether day or night. Using the hole as a marker, participants went on a walk in their space and mapped their trajectory, tuning in to their emotions, anxieties, comforts, dreams, sensations. They used their body as a sensing instrument and emotionally mapped the space around them, indoor, outdoor, or in their mind.

The final prompt had the group take their 2D maps of emotional and sensorial strata and turn them into 3D emotional sculptures – through folding, scrunching, cutting, crunching – to represent their emotional connection to the place that they were in. This cathartic exercise represented the act of mapping their way out of impending doom. As the final exercise of the walkshop, the participants flattened their sculptures and reconnected with the original paper they started with, now turned into emotional and sensorial map-sculptures. The group, individually located in places all over the world, were able to connect and sense each other, through this analog, physical, and cathartic exercise in the virtual space of Zoom.

This short presentation will outline our methodology of mapping our rooms, its relationship to the larger theories of performance, participatory and relational art, and how practices such as these can translate into more spatial awareness of the hybrid spaces where we spend most of our time.

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