

18 JOYCEWALKS

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Project Summary

JoyceWalks is a participatory art project which uses Google Maps to remap routes from James Joyce’s *Ulysses* to any city in the world, generating walking maps for participants to explore the city of their choice adopting the form of the Situationist *dérive*.

Project Developer Background

JoyceWalks had its origins in an older 2006 web project, *The Bono Probability Positioning System (aka Google Bono)*,¹ which presented itself as a service for visitors to Dublin, claiming:

We know that for a visitor to Dublin an important attraction is the possibility that they may see U2 frontman and international celebrity Bono. The Bono Probability Positioning System version 2 Google Bono (beta) utilises Dublin’s extensive surveillance camera network in conjunction with facial recognition software, Google Maps and advanced probability techniques to allow visitors to determine the probability of seeing Bono in any of the most probable locations in Dublin’s city centre in real time.

The site was a Google Maps mashup which located live feeds from Dublin city’s extensive traffic camera network on a map of Dublin, allowing the site visitor to view live feeds of the city while giving the probability that they would see Bono at that particular loca-

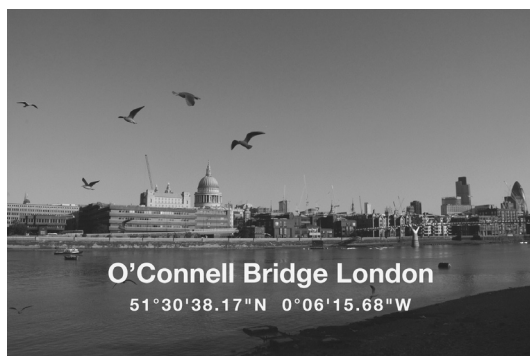


Figure 18.1, 18.2 Two views of the O'Connell Bridge as interpreted by *JoyceWalks* participants.

tion. Interestingly, the project, while obviously not all it claimed to be, was taken up by U2 fan sites (of which there are a surprising number) and tourism sites. It had obviously assumed another role, presumably as a useful interface to live camera views of Dublin, for U2 fans and for potential visitors to Dublin. I liked the way that the project had quite unintentionally taken on these multiple identities: as a net.art project being exhibited at festivals and, for whatever reason, as a popular site for U2 fans and tourists, and it led me to think more about designing projects which would facilitate its users in their own interpretations, taking the work beyond my original intention.

Introduction to Joycwalks.com

Project Description

The project is based on the annual June 16 Dublin Bloomsday celebrations where Joyceans and tourists follow in the footsteps of Leopold Bloom on his travels through the city, re-enacting the fictional events of *Ulysses* in a major event of the Irish cultural tourism calendar.

JoyceWalks remixes the cultural trail of Bloomsday by transplanting the routes from Dublin to any other city in the world where, removed from their local significance, they are transformed into an obscure set of instructions to be used for navigating urban space in new and unexpected ways. The project draws on the Situationist technique of the *dérive*² (or “drift”) which involves exploring the city according to sets of predefined instructions and seeks to provide a framework for participants to employ while building a critical and creative engagement with the city. *JoyceWalks* overlays the physical space of the city with a conceptual remapping allowing the user to navigate familiar streets as if they were the Joycean streets of 1904 Dublin, allowing the participant to re-enact the (fictional) footsteps of Leopold Bloom wherever they may be located.

The project has both web- and street-based components; participants create an individual walking route for the city of their choice, print out their customized map, and use the map as a guide to exploring the city. Participants have the option to also document their walk with videos and photographs and to share these on the *JoyceWalks* site as a Google Maps mashup.³



Figure 18.3 Screenshot of *Joycwalks* created in Paris.

Project Background

The original impulse which led to the creation of Joyce Walks was threefold; First, I was interested in exploring the Google Maps mashup as a platform for art in a way that would play against the dominant idea of the mashup as an informative tool.

Second, I wanted to develop a project which would facilitate ephemeral, playful interventions in urban space drawing inspiration from the technique of the *dérive* developed by the Situationists in the 1950s and 1960s which would, even in a small way, re-enchant urban space.

Finally, I was interested in the nature of the participants' role in "participatory art" with a particular focus on whether a truly participatory experience, that is, one in which participant action can transform the meaning of the work to the point where it can be thought of as having a shared authorship, is in fact possible.

These aims coalesced into *JoyceWalks*, a Google Maps mashup that provides the user/participant a method of navigating the city designed to subtly disrupt expected modes of operation, in effect a *dérive* generator using the locative capabilities of the Google Maps infrastructure to allow the user to wander aimlessly, with purpose. To this end I adopted and remixed the notion of the cultural trail, in this case Bloomsday, but any spatially expressed cultural activity would work.

The cultural trail, a familiar mainstay of the tourist industry in almost any city, represents the spatial commodification of culture in what Sharon Zukin characterized as "the symbolic economy of cities."⁴ Without dwelling too much on the role of culture in the modern urban economy, it will suffice to say that cultural trails are a known quantity. We understand how they operate, we can predict expectations about trails, and it is this familiarity which makes them the perfect tool for disrupting our experience of the city through the process of remixing and reframing at work in *JoyceWalks*.

Technical Description

Before exploring the concepts behind *JoyceWalks* I want to briefly discuss how it works on a practical level.

The project comprises the following four interconnected sections: the routes, the online component, walking in the city, and documenting the traces.

The Routes

The starting point was the annual Bloomsday celebrations in my native Dublin. 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, a granting of locational identity to culture, and a renegotiation of the spaces of the city according to a predefined cultural narrative. It is celebrated by retracing the footsteps—preferably in Edwardian period costume while travelling in a horse and carriage—of characters from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the actions of which unfold on a single day in Dublin in 1904. Many chapters in *Ulysses* have a clearly identifiable route followed by the characters in the course of the narrative, and it is these routes re-enacted every June 16 in Dublin which form the basis of *JoyceWalks*.

The original routes were first mapped out in Dublin using a GPS unit with a close adherence to the text of individual chapters of *Ulysses*. Each route selected takes place within a single chapter, nine or ten points of significance are identified and expressed as points of longitude and latitude with each point having an associated text from *Ulysses*—with the location specifically mentioned in the text.

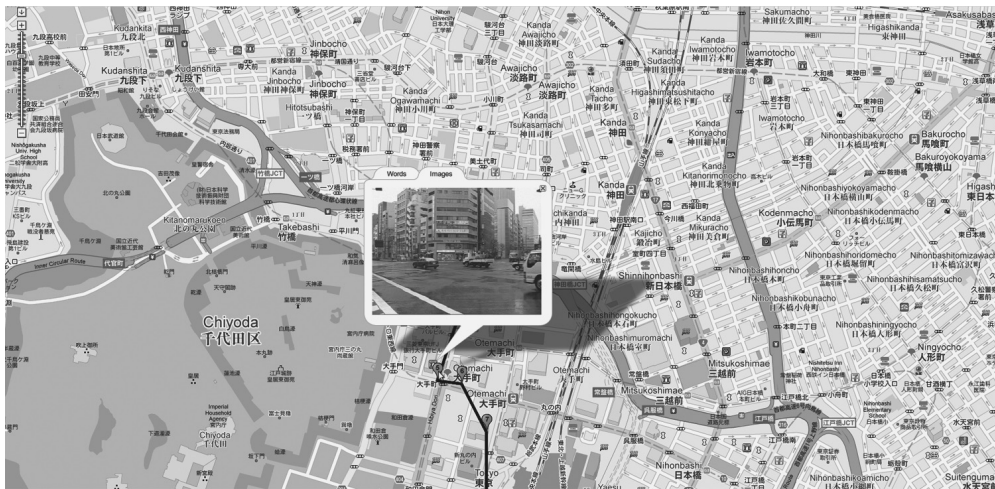


Figure 18.4 Screenshot of *JoyceWalks* created in Tokyo.

Online Component and Remapping

The main interface of *JoyceWalks* is the project website, joycewalks.com. To participate in *JoyceWalks* the user visits the website and is invited to create his/her own *JoyceWalk*. The first step is choosing a city to walk in. Through typing the name of a city, the interface loads a Google Map of the chosen city, you are then asked to select a center point, a crucial step as it creates a customized remapping unique to the center point selection. Finally, the user selects a chapter route from the menu and the route is automatically remapped to the city of your choice and displayed onscreen as a Google Map mashup. While displaying the new route in the chosen city, the mashup also allows the user to read the associated text for each point on the walks and to view a video of the original Dublin location.

JoyceWalks is based on the Google Maps API,⁵ a set of programming tools which allow anyone to create their own application incorporating Google Maps. At a technical level the remapping is executed through a procedure of linear transformation (with the center point as origin) that moves each point of longitude and latitude to an analogous location in the new city. The newly remapped route is an isometric reflection retaining the relationship between all places of significance in the route; and it is in effect an exact copy of the original Dublin walking route. However, though it may be an exact Cartesian copy, transferring it onto the topology of a different city, where the cultural significance of the original locations is lost, renders each route as abstracted walking instructions. While these instructions have no local significance, they have curiously been found to still carry echoes of their original purpose.

Walking the city

JoyceWalks most importantly takes place at street level, each remapped route generates a printable walking map to guide the user on his/her walk. A facility to download a route to a GPS device as well as a mobile version are now under development but were deliberately left out of earlier versions to emphasize this 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.

To ensure the uniqueness of each generated walk the project has many in-built features to ensure variability; to map a route the user must select a center point of the city and the route is generated in relation to this center 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 through buildings and obstacles which the walkers must negotiate at street level, increasing the routes' contingency on local conditions. In the practice of *JoyceWalks*, when shoe hits pavement, the clarity of the web drops away with the often confusing realities of navigating real space with these less-than-perfect Google Maps and the project stands or falls at this experiential level.

Leaving Traces: Documenting and Recording

A record of each walk created by *JoyceWalks* is saved as a map trace in a database. This database holds the most complete record of the project with every walk saved as a trace on a map as abstracted lines which are nonetheless suggestive of the activities they represent. After a walk is completed, participants have the option of uploading images or videos documenting their walk to create a Google Maps mashup. The database of all walks created is then searchable by city for other users to view the route walked and its associated images and videos. In this way, every walk exists as a trace on a map, as a memory of an experience personal to its participants and through the optional documentation of the experience. A tension always exists in live work between the work itself and the documentation of the work. This tension is emphasized in *JoyceWalks* as the work itself exists as an amalgamation of a multiplicity of experiences raising questions about the balance between open participation and appropriation. The question of documentation contributes to this, as it inhabits the shifting ground of authorship in the work addressing notions of the authenticity of co-authorship when the work is more clearly identified with one author.

Did Someone Say Participate?

The role of the participant is central to the *JoyceWalks* project. I would suggest that for a work to be participatory in any meaningful sense it must be significantly (re)created by the actions of the participants, and must go beyond the familiar approach of much participatory work in which the role of the participant is to "complete" or "activate" the work, while the authorship of the work remains very clearly with the artist. A key aim of the project was to explore whether a truly participatory experience, that is, one in which participant action can transform the meaning of the work to the point where it can be thought of as having a shared authorship, is in fact possible.

The approach I adopted was to create what I describe as a participatory framework which would internalize this essential freedom through supplying a set of tools which provided a set of procedures for action rather than dictating the mode of operation. To achieve this there is, of course, a need for the artist to relinquish some of their control over the work.

Even though this was a stated aim, I have to confess that sometimes I wish that every participant would document their walk extensively so that even though I cannot be there I can live vicariously through these documents. I am invested in the contemporary impulse to document everything in exhaustive detail, yet have to recognize that there is another way. Richard Long's 1967 *Line Made by Walking* shows a line in a field marked into the grass by repeated walking. As a record of activity the image is evocative,

suggestive but ultimately unknowable. Long describes it as a “distillation of experience”⁶ which can never compete with that experience. These documents of experiences, to paraphrase Michel de Certeau,⁷ can only ever refer to the absence of what has passed but miss the act of passing itself. Similar to Long’s distillation, *JoyceWalks* begins with the act of passing, and its documentation, like the experience itself, is left to the participants. For the artist, the important thing is knowing when to relinquish control, allowing the work to be directed by the participant.

Knowing your tools

JoyceWalks adopts the form of the Google Maps mashup, a familiar format to most web users, but one that is not without its own problems. I adopted the mashup with the awareness that maps are not neutral, objective documents. Instead, they are subjective, political documents with an inherent logic that needs to be decoded.⁸ Google Maps is in an unusual position because, while not immune to these criticisms, as illustrated by its willingness to blur out areas of their maps at the request of governments⁹ or by the vast inequality of its coverage, it also offers users an extensive set of tools within its API with which to overlay the maps with users’ own re-encoding of the space. While this offering assists in deflecting this criticism, it is not a panacea. Indeed there remains a persistent doubt over whether the format of the mashup itself really lends itself to criticality or is there, to invoke Lev Manovich,¹⁰ an inbuilt logic of selection that favors mashups which locate Starbucks or crime rather than exposing systems of surveillance and control, or even critiquing the medium itself?

In response to these concerns the *JoyceWalks* approach differs in that whereas most mashups are informative in intent, mapping practical data or revealing hidden histories, *JoyceWalks* allows users to map an imaginary landscape. It overlays the physical space of the city with a conceptual remapping, allowing the user to navigate familiar streets as if they were the Joycean streets of 1904 Dublin, thereby allowing the participant to re-enact the (fictional) footsteps of Leopold Bloom wherever they may be. This re-encoding is designed to interfere with and disrupt the existing encoding of the space allowing for the temporary insertion of a space produced through the actions of its participants.

For me the work has two aspects: *JoyceWalks* my personal project and *JoyceWalks* the public project which operates at this point fairly independently of my involvement through its website. I think it is worth elaborating on the difference, as I suspect that the two modes of operation mirror the way *JoyceWalks* operates in the real world.

The personal project is an ongoing part of my art practice. It is a public performative work where typically I am invited to lead groups of walkers in the context of an art event or festival. Each performance is very different, drawing on the interests of the participants, the nature of the event, and the city where it takes place. These performances are then documented as part of my art practice. At another level, whenever I am in a new city I will normally walk a personal *JoyceWalk* as a way of getting to know the city beyond the obvious places, these walks are often not documented but have proven to be a very effective method of exploring and getting to know the psychogeographic contours of a new place. Personal feedback leads me to believe that this is a common use of the project.

Without my direct involvement, the public project is ongoing. The 24-hour *JoyceWalks* event was a concentrated version of this usage, enabling me to gain insight regarding user tendencies. I have found that documenting the walks and uploading images to create a mashup does not happen in the majority of cases. This makes sense in

many ways: if the point of the work is the event, then the documentation of it seems extraneous, especially in the current version where it requires access to a computer. The other possibility is that while the routes are mapped on the website, the walks never happen. While this is no doubt true in some cases, I get fairly regular feedback from participants, mostly in the form of brief notes, to say that they enjoyed their walk. So I presume that most walks do in fact take place.

24-hour JoyceWalks

For Bloomsday 2008, I put out a call for participants to plan and enact a Bloomsday *JoyceWalk* as part of 24 hours of psychogeographical action. The call was straightforward: use the *JoyceWalks* site to generate a walking map for whatever city you will be in on June 16 and walk that walk. I also suggested, but did not mandate, that participants document their walks with photographs and videos to create a Google Maps mashup using the *JoyceWalks* mashup generator. The call resulted in 80 walks taking place in 39 cities around the world with each walk being saved as a map in the searchable project database.

Twenty-four-hour *JoyceWalks* was, most importantly, a participant-led intervention. The event was organized with a minimal set of instructions or guidelines other than the basic instructions for mapping a route and walking that route on June 16. For the project to succeed it needed to retain an essential openness, to be non-prescriptive so that participants would determine their own mode of operation. Some walks were organized as group outings, some as solo strolls, while others were undertaken by artists already involved with psychogeographical projects such as those in Mexico City by *Laboratorio de Situaciones*¹ or in Jundiaí, Brazil by *Quadrafônica Urbana*² who incorporated it into their existing practice as a new technique. While some were extensively documented, others exist only as ephemeral events acknowledged only by a trace on a map. I know of at least one walk planned for Marrakesh which was abandoned when the walkers discovered that the Google Map bore no relation to the actuality at street level, an event which was a failure on one level but could still be considered as a successful psychogeographical exploration of the city. For me, the important aspect was that the project was adopted by the participants, that they made it their own, and that it responded to their concerns rather than simply enacting a part in a larger work.

Historical Perspectives: The Production of Tactical Space

To gain a perspective on the art historical and theoretical underpinnings of the project, I would like to go back to the writings on space and place of the influential French theorist Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre argued that urban space is a site of contestation and, in *The Production of Space*,¹³ laid out what was at stake in his theory of spatial production. Space, according to Lefebvre, cannot be considered as an empty, neutral container in which objects and people are situated.¹⁴ Rather, space is a social product, defined by a complex set of interrelationships and the “outcome of a sequence and set of operations.”¹⁵ This production process results in a multiplicity of interconnected and overlapping spaces which influence, and are influenced by, each other. Space, Lefebvre suggests, is not 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” with each other. That is, the dynamic relationship between these layers establishes the nature of social space.¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷

If, as Lefebvre argues, space is in a state of continuous production, a state continually being brought into existence, then it is the process rather than the product which is of most interest. This leads one to an acceptance that location, for example as defined by a set of coordinates 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 defining 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 coordinates of that location.

In this sense I consider *JoyceWalks* as a producer of temporary ephemeral spaces produced by a complex set of interrelationships. The spaces produced take the properties of what Lefebvre called “lived space,” where users transform and manipulate imposed space in order to make it their own.¹⁸ This space disrupts and interferes with the existing spatial encoding and, I would propose, suggests new modes of spatial practice outside of existing spatializations.

The spaces produced by *JoyceWalks* can be further described by Michel de Certeau’s account of space as the locus of tactics. De Certeau considered the very act of walking in the city as an act of “tactical” resistance, famously calling pedestrian movements “one of those real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city.”¹⁹ *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, temporalize it.”²⁰ 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 as tactics, according to de Certeau, insinuate themselves into “the other place fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety.”²¹ They are opportunistic ways of operating within a system, of manipulating the imposed system and turning it to its own advantage.

JoyceWalks adopts these positions as a theoretical framework and sets out to provide a set of developing procedures to facilitate urban interventions which explore, reveal, and disrupt urban space, producing ephemeral spaces which “co-exist, overlap and interfere” with the spaces of the city producing temporary re-encodings of the spatial code which in turn facilitate alternative and critical spatial readings of the city. It is a hybrid work informed by Situationist practice, by locative media, and by the tradition of the walking artist to develop a critical spatial practice that is participatory in nature and open-ended.

Conclusions and Outcomes

In considering whether the project is effective, or indeed even a success, I consider the role of *JoyceWalks* as that of a catalyst. It facilitates and allows for work to be made, for interventions to occur which would not have happened without it. These actions thus go beyond the confines of *JoyceWalks* and establish their own way of being, their own mode of operation independent from the project.

While it is important not to over-claim the significance of these small spatial interventions, I 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 while it is the action of the participants which actuates the space of *JoyceWalks*, they are not defined by it. 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 600 *JoyceWalks* 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.

In its remixing of the cultural trail, *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 neutralizes 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 neutralizes 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 operational conventions have been disrupted. It reframes the cultural trail not as an instrumentalized spatial product of the cultural economy but as a socio-spatial production of a temporary, ephemeral space. As the project shifts between the certainties of its online presence with the all-encompassing, totalizing viewpoint of Google Maps to the often confusing realities of navigating through the *JoyceWalks* remix of the cultural trail, participants must reimagine its meaning, reinvent its procedures, and rethink the mode of operation. Through this process, the participants produce a temporary re-encoding of the spatial code which in turn facilitates alternative and critical spatial readings of the city.

Notes

1. Google Bono no longer functions because the majority of Dublin city camera feeds have been taken offline. A version is still available at www.stunned.org/bono/googlebono.htm.
2. Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb, Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006: 62.
3. A mashup is a webpage or application that uses or combines data or functionality from two or more external sources to create a new message or service.
4. Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995.
5. Application programming interface.
6. Statement carried on Richard Long's official website: www.richardlong.org (accessed May 15, 2010).
7. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984: 97.
8. The approach introduced by what has become known as critical cartography, of whom the best-known proponent was J.B. Harley with his 1989 essay "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica*, 26, 2, 1989: 1–20.
9. Google maps images with intentionally obscured data, Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_places_blurred_out_on_Google_Maps (accessed June 15, 2010).
10. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001: 123–129.
11. www.flickr.com/photos/laboratoriodesituaciones.
12. <http://quadrafonica.blogspot.com>.
13. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991: 86.
14. Ibid.: 68.
15. Ibid.: 73.
16. Ibid.: 86–87.

17. Ibid.: 73.
18. Ibid.: 39.
19. De Certeau, op. cit.: 97.
20. Ibid.: 117.
21. Ibid.: 32.

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Links

- Google Maps API: <http://code.google.com/apis/maps/index.html>.
- JoyceWalks: www.joycewalks.com.
- GoogleBono: www.conormcgarraile.com/google_bono.htm.
- Situationist Texts Online: <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI>.
- Bloomsday: www.jamesjoyce.ie/listing.asp?id=29.