

Interventionist Guide to Melbourne

ORIGINALLY MANIFEST AS A SERIES OF ZINES
THIS EXHIBITION ENCOURAGED ENGAGEMENT
WITH THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT.

WORDS DAN NUNAN

EXHIBITION
INTERVENTIONIST GUIDE
TO MELBOURNE
PLATFORM GALLERY,
DEGRAVES SUBWAY AND OTHER
SITES AROUND MELBOURNE
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"MARK UP YOUR CITY ... TAKE PART IN SOME creative urban orienteering!" the flyer read. I was intrigued. I was then invited to come down to the Platform Gallery in the depths of Flinders Street Station to view a series of display cabinets that became portals to interventions throughout the Melbourne CBD. The Interventionist Guide to Melbourne originally manifested itself as a series of zines produced by twelve different artists whose work interrogated the urban fabric in some way. Each artist exhibited maps and photos in the lightboxes and the audience was asked to interact by writing their thoughts and feelings over the maps, voting for possible performance sites or overlaying a more temporal cognitive mapping of the city and its people.

This exhibition took place on many different levels, leaping from the virtual space of the internet to the layers of physical grit that line our city streets. By creating a constantly shifting process of relating map to mind to body we are able to experience space in all its multivalent possibilities. This process has its roots in the

study of our relationship with urban spaces that began with the Situationist International, founded in 1957. Despite the fact that the situationists vehemently refused that they ever existed (a concept of the movement in itself), they advocated that our experiences in life are as much affected by external situations as our own internal cognitive processes. They were often involved in setting up constructed situations and urban high jinks that tested their theories of psychogeography and spatial analysis. More recently, Italian political nomads Stalker Lab spent hours wandering Rome and documenting their experiences through writing and photography. Their manifesto states that "To intervene on a territory is not merely an act of planning but an act of creation, an attempt to assemble contradictions and transform them into poetic relationships: ultimately one is more attentive to modifying how space is perceived than the way space itself exists."

Curated by Lynda Roberts, the Interventionist Guide to Melbourne formed part of her Masters of Architecture (expanded field) at RMIT. Roberts' art

practice, Public Assembly, draws upon a range of experience including architecture, public art and education to challenge the way we perceive the city. Moving beyond pure perception, Roberts says, "Those who participate (in the interventions) will change the way Melbourne is." Through a simple act of marking the pavement with chalk or even changing the direction of someone's path of travel, the participant has indelibly altered the material and social fabric of the city.

Through careful curatorial consideration Roberts chose twelve artists who each explored Melbourne through a unique sensory experience. From manipulating light and sound to provoking public reaction through performance, the artists created various scenarios that cleverly and subtly engaged with people's interaction with the space around them. The recent popularity rise of culture jamming escapades such as yarn bombing and guerilla lighting are represented in this exhibition as well as more subtle acts such as sound walks.

In Ceri Hann's light-jacking experiment he demonstrates how to hijack existing lights in ▶



- 01 SOUNDWALK BY ANTHONY MAGEN.
- 02 BARREL OF MONKEYS PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT BY CERI HANN.
- 03 CABINET DISPLAY BY CURATOR LYNDA ROBERTS.
- 04 RADICAL CROSS STITCH BY RAYNA FAHEY.

PHOTOGRAPHY:
 IMAGE 1: KATE SHAW
 IMAGE 2: ALASDAIR NICOL
 IMAGE 3: LYNDA ROBERTS
 IMAGE 4: RAYNA FAHEY

the city by manipulating them with structures, mirrors, lenses or tape. His *Barrel of Monkeys Philosophy Department* consisted of a 44-gallon drum placed over a tree's upright. The monkey pattern perforated into the side of the drum emitted a faint glow, giving the effect of a hobo's camp fire. Standing around the barrel pretending to warm our hands and discussing low-tech philosophies, we were often approached by people asking us if they could stand by our fire. The barrel of monkeys was released and the pandemonium began.

The Craft Cartel has built a reputation for radical "craftism" in Melbourne's galleries and streets and their founder, Rayna Fahey, developed a series of works called *Radical Cross Stitch*. Her playful interpretation of the city grid wove its blue thread over a steel climbing frame, inviting the quizzical to inspect. The urban fabric was never so literal, but it did inspire the viewer to discover a children's perspective of the city,

which is often lost. In Fahey's more interactive work, the *Melbourne Bicycle Beautification Society Outing*, participants were armed with a kit containing needle and thread and instructions for a small yarn bombing exercise on bicycle baskets around the city. The receiver of the newly beautified bike may never meet the artist but is sure to go on cruising the streets with a bigger smile than before. Perhaps they now view the city through rose-coloured glasses?

Landscape architect Anthony Magen has been running sound walks for several years, infiltrating the realm of acoustic ecology through field recordings and other audiovisual explorations. Through his research into the soundscapes that emanate from all environments, Magen intuitively guides a group of people through the city, allowing them to open up to the acoustic experience. Sound walkers are told not to speak so as to optimize their aural skills and not be distracted by other senses. We paused under a

bridge to listen to the cacophony of swallows roosting; the echo off the bluestone chambers spoke of a hidden Melbourne history and revealed the lost sounds of the city.

The *Interventionist Guide to Melbourne* allowed the audience to write, act, edit, hear and view the stories set on the stage of the city. This multisensory experience encouraged a deeper engagement with the urban environment, fostering participation in artist activism by the very people who make a city culturally vibrant: its inhabitants.

Dan Nunan is a landscape architect at the City of Yarra, Melbourne. He is currently teaching at RMIT and Melbourne Universities as well as contributing to the AILA in Victoria.