

On narrative, abstract and location

A few words on location-based data in art

If we produce a work of art that is based on data acquired from a locative device such as GPS, Bluetooth or WiFi the fact that it tells a story of some sort, is a given. It's inherent. To produce the data, the device would have to physically move from point A to B to C etc.. So if I show someone the following and explain that it's a tracklog, downloaded from a GPS device, the fact that it describes a story is unavoidable:

Trackpoint	N67 53.037 E12 59.075	6/21/2004 1:42:58 PM	76 ft	94 ft	00:00:03
Trackpoint	N67 53.047 E12 59.102	6/21/2004 1:43:01 PM	75 ft	84 ft	00:00:03
Trackpoint	N67 53.055 E12 59.324	6/21/2004 1:43:18 PM	76 ft	510 ft	00:00:17
Trackpoint	N67 53.052 E12 59.489	6/21/2004 1:43:29 PM	81 ft	378 ft	00:00:11
Trackpoint	N67 53.048 E12 59.515	6/21/2004 1:43:31 PM	82 ft	65 ft	00:00:02
Trackpoint	N67 53.024 E12 59.599	6/21/2004 1:43:40 PM	84 ft	245 ft	00:00:09
Trackpoint	N67 53.035 E12 59.777	6/21/2004 1:43:55 PM	65 ft	414 ft	00:00:15
Trackpoint	N67 53.047 E12 59.811	6/21/2004 1:43:59 PM	67 ft	108 ft	00:00:04
Trackpoint	N67 53.092 E12 59.871	6/21/2004 1:44:09 PM	59 ft	302 ft	00:00:10
Trackpoint	N67 53.114 E12 59.878	6/21/2004 1:44:13 PM	56 ft	136 ft	00:00:04
Trackpoint	N67 53.156 E12 59.870	6/21/2004 1:44:21 PM	67 ft	259 ft	00:00:08
Trackpoint	N67 53.174 E12 59.886	6/21/2004 1:44:26 PM	70 ft	114 ft	00:00:05
Trackpoint	N67 53.198 E12 59.920	6/21/2004 1:44:41 PM	71 ft	166 ft	00:00:15
Trackpoint	N67 53.209 E12 59.945	6/21/2004 1:44:58 PM	64 ft	87 ft	00:00:17
Trackpoint	N67 53.212 E12 59.978	6/21/2004 1:45:14 PM	59 ft	77 ft	00:00:16
Trackpoint	N67 53.211 E12 59.982	6/21/2004 1:47:02 PM	81 ft	10 ft	00:01:48
Trackpoint	N67 53.212 E13 00.028	6/21/2004 1:48:00 PM	68 ft	106 ft	00:00:58
Trackpoint	N67 53.212 E13 00.031	6/21/2004 1:48:01 PM	68 ft	8 ft	00:00:01
Trackpoint	N67 53.212 E13 00.035	6/21/2004 1:48:03 PM	70 ft	10 ft	00:00:02
Trackpoint	N67 53.244 E13 00.103	6/21/2004 1:48:24 PM	82 ft	253 ft	00:00:21
Trackpoint	N67 53.258 E13 00.107	6/21/2004 1:48:29 PM	79 ft	84 ft	00:00:05
Trackpoint	N67 53.300 E13 00.108	6/21/2004 1:48:42 PM	76 ft	252 ft	00:00:13
Trackpoint	N67 53.309 E13 00.131	6/21/2004 1:48:46 PM	76 ft	76 ft	00:00:04
Trackpoint	N67 53.304 E13 00.195	6/21/2004 1:48:53 PM	54 ft	150 ft	00:00:07
Trackpoint	N67 53.300 E13 00.249	6/21/2004 1:48:58 PM	51 ft	125 ft	00:00:05
Trackpoint	N67 53.322 E13 00.292	6/21/2004 1:49:05 PM	49 ft	169 ft	00:00:07
Trackpoint	N67 53.330 E13 00.307	6/21/2004 1:49:07 PM	49 ft	56 ft	00:00:02
Trackpoint	N67 53.337 E13 00.353	6/21/2004 1:49:11 PM	51 ft	114 ft	00:00:04
Trackpoint	N67 53.336 E13 00.404	6/21/2004 1:49:15 PM	51 ft	118 ft	00:00:04
Trackpoint	N67 53.327 E13 00.439	6/21/2004 1:49:18 PM	49 ft	97 ft	00:00:03
Trackpoint	N67 53.303 E13 00.487	6/21/2004 1:49:24 PM	56 ft	181 ft	00:00:06
Trackpoint	N67 53.302 E13 00.527	6/21/2004 1:49:28 PM	56 ft	92 ft	00:00:04

But what is not obvious, is what that story is. If I do some research, I might be able to figure out where it is, what direction the device was moving in and how long the trip took. However, this tells me nothing about what actually happened during the trip. It tells me nothing about the people involved or their feelings, surroundings or how they may have interacted with their location. In that sense, this information is quite abstract. If I don't do any research, it becomes even more abstract. Yet, if I'm made aware of the fact that this is a GPS tracklog, I know that there must be some form of narrative regardless of whether or not I'm actually able to read any of it. This is one of the most

important aspects of locative media as an art medium. Regardless of how we choose to present it, it's always a record of a sequence of events. A story.

sto·ry¹(stôr'ē, stōr'ē)

n. pl. **sto·ries**

1. An account or recital of an event or a series of events, either true or fictitious, as:
 - a. An account or report regarding the facts of an event or group of events: *The witness changed her story under questioning.*

<http://www.dictionary.com>

And the reason that this is important is that we can choose to present the data in a variety of different ways. We can use it to control the pitch of a simple beep, we can use it to control bezier curves on a simple line or we can use it to control the color of a 200 x 200 pixel square but it still contains the original account even though it's not immediately obvious. So our story is still there and by learning to read the presentation method chosen, the audience can begin to formulate their own ideas concerning what that story is. This is what turns this medium into an exciting platform for researching what I choose to call Abstract Narrative. A form of narrative that provides an audience with a means for creating their own story. The work is able to provide a timeline and clues regarding location and in fact, as much or little information as the artist chooses to provide but it's up to the audience to fill in the blanks and create the actual events within the story. It's not a test. There is no wrong or right story. The audience gets to experience the work on their own terms. The artists focus is on the presentation. The visual or audible aspects. He is free to focus on the aesthetics without regarding whether or not the "meaning" is coming through. The work doesn't have to contain any meaning except in the audiences own interpretation of the work. However, unlike the ideology behind abstract painting, the idea is not simply to invoke an emotional response. The idea is to invoke an "understanding" of the events involved by formulating relationships between events. Regardless of whether that "understanding" is factual or not. It becomes the viewers own personal understanding of the events and is to be respected as "factual" to that viewer.



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