

Participants setting out on a walkshop as part of *Long Time, No See?*
Photo: Keith Armstrong

Feature

Long Time, No See?

On making time, reorienting and a future with a future

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Long Time, No See? is a participatory art project addressing the challenge of futuring, which as design theorist Tony Fry argues, demands that we face an imperative for change – a need to tell a new story. In part, the old story is characterised by ‘the storm we call progress’ which has wrought havoc across the planet, stressing and destroying socio-ecological systems and resulting in uneven and unjust patterns of development.

The project seeks to respond to Fry's contention that "We can try to maintain our existing way of life or we can create another more viable one of which there is still no imaginary." The project's approach to developing this needed imaginary is to engage people in participatory processes that result in contributing to this networked artwork.

Long Time, No See? (LTNS) was developed by an interdisciplinary creative team, led by Artistic Director Dr. Keith Armstrong, and was funded by the Australia Council's Broadband Arts Initiative as one of only four projects across the nation. After a year of development with iterations presented at local and international events including a launch at ISEA2013 Sydney, LTNS is screening at The Cube, QUT for the next two years as part of a library of rotating works. As a multiplatform project comprised of several processes, it involves an interactive website, an app, community dialogues and workshops. Each is intended to engage participants (or users) in critical and creative practices that engender ecological engagement and futures thinking. Since its inception, the project was designed with a view to developing computer-based generative data, using large, layered and diverse datasets.

At its core, participants are guided on a walk using an app (also available as a book) that sets out nine stopping points at which participants contribute text, image and/or sound. Each completed walk is then remapped, through mobile GPS, to create a visual representation of the territory that has been walked. Once

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posted online, keywords (or tags) link the walks to each other revealing a networked cartography of experience, place and thought. This is set against a backdrop of image and audio that is generated by massive environmental and demographic datasets.

The poetics of the work are based on cartographic and meteorological metaphors that endeavour to reveal contours, wayfaring and patterns.

The project intentionally grounds people in place eliciting and sharing 'micronarratives' of care and commitment. The philosopher Tim Morton argues that "the ecological crisis makes us aware of how interdependent everything is. This has resulted in

a creepy sensation that there is literally no world anymore. We're losing the very ground under our feet." Such disorientation calls for reorientation. The walk is also developed with some reference to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*, creating moments where users can be more conscious of their life and place scripts and myths. The ponderous nature of the process provides some mental space in which participants reveal, create and share meaning. There is also an attempt to enable participants to engage beyond everyday concerns, entanglements and urgencies. It makes time. Futuring, as Fry explains, is the idea of 'a future with a future'. The project purposefully asks participants to take a break from busy-ness and commit to an engagement with dialogue, walking, reflecting and responding which is, by necessity, slow and takes time. Participants give the project the gift of their time as a way of grappling with the idea of futuring – or 'making time' – and care.

Some aspects of the project, such as the DIY process, workshops and dialogues, remain in development with a view to realising a set of resources for DIY iterations of LTNS workshops. It was developed with a legacy in mind – after experiencing an LTNS workshop or dialogue and accessing the online resources, community members would be able to develop other dialogues that could form the basis for ongoing self-organisation and redirection. Dialogue, as David Bohm proposes, refers to the "stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us". It is not just talking or discussion, but a creative process of shared meaning. The purpose of the dialogues, as social sculptures, is to create convivial settings for exploring difficult ideas and for orienting people to thinking, practicing and being otherwise. It does not direct people how to think. Care, as a central thematic of the project, is attentive to care for the world, others and ourselves – this is the focus of the dialogue (or workshop) and this flows into the walk. Care occurs in webs, along lines. Walking encourages participants to see and feel themselves in their environments, as part of a relational field.

The project team has held several dialogues – in Brisbane, Parramatta and Noosa – drawing people together prior to heading out for a walk. In each iteration, the dynamic is different requiring some fluidity and openness in the facilitation mode. While shared meaning can be difficult to develop in short bursts, these processes can seed something else for participants, something other. In Brisbane one participant said "I want to be free from

want", expressing her exasperation at the trap of consumerism. During walking, other talking points emerge. In Noosa, participants were guided to a significant Gubbi Gubbi site next to the hospital which features an arrangement of rocks representing the Rainbow Serpent. In Parramatta, the narrative of the dialogue was described as "subtle, abstract and oddly compelling". In other feedback, participants have responded positively to project:

• **Walking, thinking, recording – a raised level of consciousness when a series of concepts are addressed in a personal and a shared way – great to see the way that other folk engage with the project – makes me want to continue the activities on a regular basis.**

• **It's an interesting and optimistic process that uses dialogue, food, laughter, and walking to develop an online map of connective values. And it was a great group who participated: such a delight to have a space enabled where we take time out and discuss both ideas and futures.**

• **Seeing *Long Time, No See?* in action proved to be a complex sensory experience – highly sculptural and extremely thought provoking. We found ourselves eagerly discussing how our individual explorations fitted in to the broader picture described on the map and identifying where our thoughts coincided with those of others.**

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Presently, the LTNS project team is working with groups to run dialogues, workshops and present the work. This can occur at The Cube at QUT's Gardens Point

campus, where the work is screening, or elsewhere. This includes exploring how such projects can be used as part of environmental awareness, and inquiries are welcome. In creating different kinds of 'storying' spaces which fold and unfold through personal experiences, LTNS is endeavouring to create a new imaginary in which lived and living spaces yield an alternative and living geography of connection. LTNS is an artwork that is ultimately created by its participants and the call for 'a future with a future' is a call for careful and committed action.

MORE INFORMATION

Blog: www.community.long-time-no-see.org

Online (please use Google Chrome): <http://long-time-no-see.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/longtimenoseepilot>

Long Time, No See? at The Cube, QUT. The project underwent further development so that it could screen on the massive media wall. Photo: Keith Armstrong

