

Neither Here nor There: Simulation and Urban Space

Computer simulations have become inextricably linked to the ways we understand urban space. Architectural models, image-based mapping, and navigation systems shape and filter how we build, use and study our cities. All these however operate within the traditional logic of representation; every tool necessarily shapes its product, and these forms suffer from the same reproduction of bias as traditional image making. At the other extreme, purely virtual systems where users create, manage and occupy online worlds empower the individual to actualize an ideal, but generally lack a critical framework to create meaningful engagement. This essay explores how computer simulation can move beyond this binary opposition in representing urban space, by way of an examination of a system entitled “[here][now]” which I have been developing for the past year with my collaborator, Marek Walczak. The project consists of workshops, where residents of a city collectively investigate their surroundings with psychogeographical methods such as mapping their paths through physical and social space, and photo-gathering *dérive*. The resulting constituent forms (diagrams and images) are then translated into a system of interactive visual elements in an immersive 3D virtual reality-based installation. The essay examines how, by empowering individuals to collectively articulate a typology of their actual/idealized spatial surroundings, the project creates a real/virtual equivalence that provides a new way of visualizing our urban spaces. This project has been shown in the International Digital Art Festival (INDAF) in Incheon, Korea, and the essay includes results from workshopping and installing the project there.