

FRICION ATLAS
laJettee



Companion Curator > Laurene Vaughn

Always implicitly present in any public space, law tends to be algorithmic, quantitative and invisible. Local and national regulations discretise human behaviour; sometimes they are rigorous and mathematical, other times loose and under-defined. They lend themselves to be represented visually, and through staged choreographies.

Friction Atlas is an ongoing critical archive, where laws regulating behaviours and gatherings in public spaces, sampled from different contexts, are represented and collected. *Friction Atlas* is also the enactment of such choreographies through staged performances in public spaces. Addressing the issue of legibility of public space, it aims to make regulations explicit, through graphical devices. By drawing 1:1 diagrams, and enacting laws on public surfaces, the project makes legal prescriptions and loopholes debatable. Through the engagement of the public, the dynamics of authority become discernible.

The diagrams represent cases from different cities, including Athens, Genoa, Cairo, Washington, Stockholm, Sydney, New York, and Rome. We invite the public to participate in a choreographed debate, in a rereading of urban space, highlighting some of its hidden aspects. *Friction Atlas* was initiated in 2014 during *BIO 50*, the 24th Biennial of Design in Ljubljana, Slovenia. A second iteration took place within the programme of Adhocracy Athens, at Souzy Tros in July 2015.

Respondent > Smiljana Glisovic

To enter into a game means to put yourself at risk. These risks might be physical, fiscal or some other kind of personal loss. Play often involves public spectacle and danger, 'reworking paradigms of status quo by experimenting with artificial identities, self-expressive environments, and humorous scenarios'.¹ Witnessed play is a communal act of complicity and accountability in the making of these new imaginaries. Rules and fair-play underpin games. The players we enjoy to watch and become are the ones that play fairly whilst exceeding the boundaries of the game drawn by the rule-makers. These sorts of players enact wholly new scenarios which carry with them a sense of danger and a sense of excitement.

In *Friction Atlas* we are invited to play out laws that govern how bodies relate to one another in public space. The laws do not necessarily target transgressive intentions, they more generally target how bodies move in space. LaJeteé have schematised the language in which these laws are given by drawing diagrams that illustrate the laws: the distances, proximities and compositions that bodies enact. Typically the artists use tape to mark out shapes that articulate different laws from around the world. Participants are recruited to collectively enact the shapes with their bodies in public spaces. The performing bodies make visible and feel the laws that govern them, the permissible ways of being and relating to one another. By fixing the language into shapes and giving those shapes names, they use humour and poetry to transform the intention of the language – leaving clues for transgression and inversion.

For *Performing Mobilities*, the scene for this particular enactment was the State Library of Victoria. As the artists were drawing up the shapes on the ground, a security guard advised them that nothing was allowed to happen on these steps without prior permission from the Library, which they did not have. The markings had to be removed, and another plan concocted. Collectively, we (the artists and participants) decided we would use the maps in our hands, without the markings on the ground, to improvise a game. We didn't speak, we played, we followed the rules of the map and we broke them. We ran around the steps in confusion, and we sought different ways of being and moving together. We attracted spectators and participants and questions and quizzical looks.

The choreographies we enacted were a little hysterical, new to our bodies and the ways we related. These choreographies impelled us to move in new ways, think different thoughts and in different rhythms. This disruptive public spectacle was made more dangerous because our witnesses on the steps of the Library, together with us, did not know what predetermined lines we were following. The paths we were marking out on the ground and the compositions we created remained fluid, where the limits of what was and was not permissible were continually erased and redrawn.

This was not an act in simply following rules, but rather pushing play into that dangerous space of transformation and renewal: all that soft tissue and laughter, creating the possibility of leakage, of flowing over – revising the paradigms that govern our bodies and folding the spectators into this game of risk.

¹ M Flanagan, *Critical play: Radical game design*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2009.

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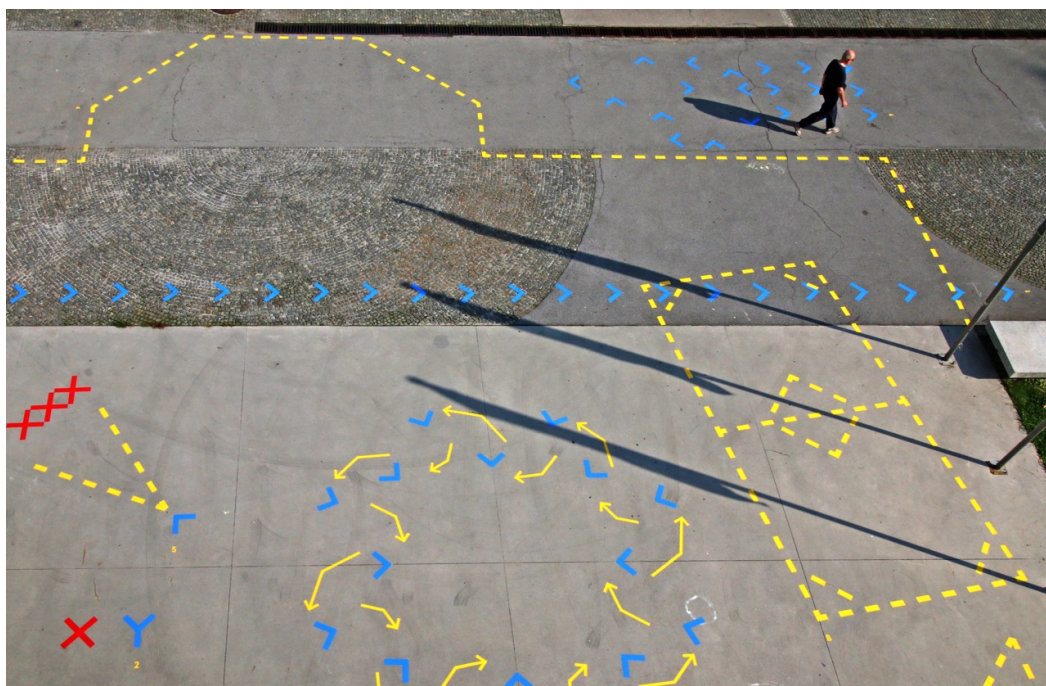


Friction Atlas, RMIT Gallery, 2015. Photography: Mark Ashkanasy.



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Friction Atlas, BI050, Ljubljana, September 2014.



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