

For the final project my starting idea was graffiti. I was less interested in the actual technical act of spray-painting property in public spaces and more in the political and cultural significance of the non-consensual, anonymous markings in/on public space and how it contributes to political, cultural and creative discourse. In general, individuals who own and believe in private property tend to understand graffiti as vandalism, as an economic depressant. Discourse originating from this side tends to depoliticize graffiti by portraying its authors as hooligans acting in isolation. They also tend to characterize graffiti as an eyesore. On the other side of the spectrum, marginalized members of society tend to view graffiti as an empowering expressive and political act. Public space is recognized by many graffiti artists as a platform which must be hijacked or else it will naturally uphold the status quo. People from this camp tend to appreciate artistry of graffiti. In this way, Graffiti is understood as a culturally and politically productive act.

At first I was more interested in the expressive act of anonymously tagging a material and was interested in exploring a networked social space where players themselves were canvases able to accept the colour of some virtual dye. In this conception of the project players could walk around and mark other player avatars. I thought this lack of public space as a shared canvas became problematic because now the only space left to non-consensually appropriate were other players virtual bodies. From there I tried to find ways to reintroduce the public space back into the work. I thought of using augmented reality and allowing players to draw some image or animation or create some sculpture digitally, upload it to a server and link it via an appropriate QR code so when placed in a public space and viewed by a networked device the digital object would be visualized as though it were in the physical world attached to the surface the sticker was placed on. I liked that it would allow for graffiti on higher profile and higher security buildings and monuments because now the only physical damages were a temporary, removable sticker. While discussion would take place in another (networked) dimension than, it would still occur in relation to, real architectural space. I didn't like that the actual creation of the digital object would then be completely removed from the eventual surface it would be placed on, work could now be created independently of, instead of in response to, a particular location and surface in the city— this seems to remove some of the political potency of graffiti. Eventually these iterations brought me to my current conception of the project...

Project Description:

My project would allow users to virtually travel to various locations in Montréal: the summit of Mont Royal, Jean Talon market, Musée d'art contemporain... all rendered digitally via data from Google Earth. Players could explore and draw on any surface of these locations, permanently altering the colour of these models for themselves and others. "Marks" might turn out to be writings, splatterings of colour, illustrations, or anything in between. Players might find an untouched surface in a given *map* (to borrow vocabulary from video games); might add to, alter, or cover up a player's existing marks from the past; or if they find themselves online with another player in the same map, might work collaboratively. These maps would begin as recognizable, mundane, digital recreations of real-life places, as more and more players draw and mark the surfaces eventually the original textures of the city provided by satellite imaging would be dominated by the solid hues of players' digital spray cans. If the site receives enough activity eventually maps could become completely covered in player-made marks and environments might

cease to be recognizable as Montréal locations. As marks will always be made in relation to the textures which came before them the work would always remain rooted in and effected by the original representation of real-life city.

This project from a technical point of view is most effected by collaborative drawing websites like *anondraw.com*. Where players enter a shared infinite canvas and may pan or teleport to any place on the canvas and draw. I'm fascinated at how different collaborative and antagonistic relationships emerge on these anonymous sites. I am also interested in artwork created with strangers' overtime that you may never meet even virtually (as you may log in at different times but still add to the same piece). My project would differ most importantly in two ways. Firstly, in my project there would be a clear catalyst for discussion— real life Montréal locations, which would frame the work and orient it towards social, cultural and political discourse. The other main difference would come with the three-dimensionality of my work: this would hopefully make players feel like they're *in* the space; but also the three-dimensionality would lead to a significance loss of precision as there would no longer be a direct correlation between the two-dimensional movement of a mouse/stylus and its corresponding marks— therefore players might be less likely to focus on technical skill and creating high fidelity drawings.

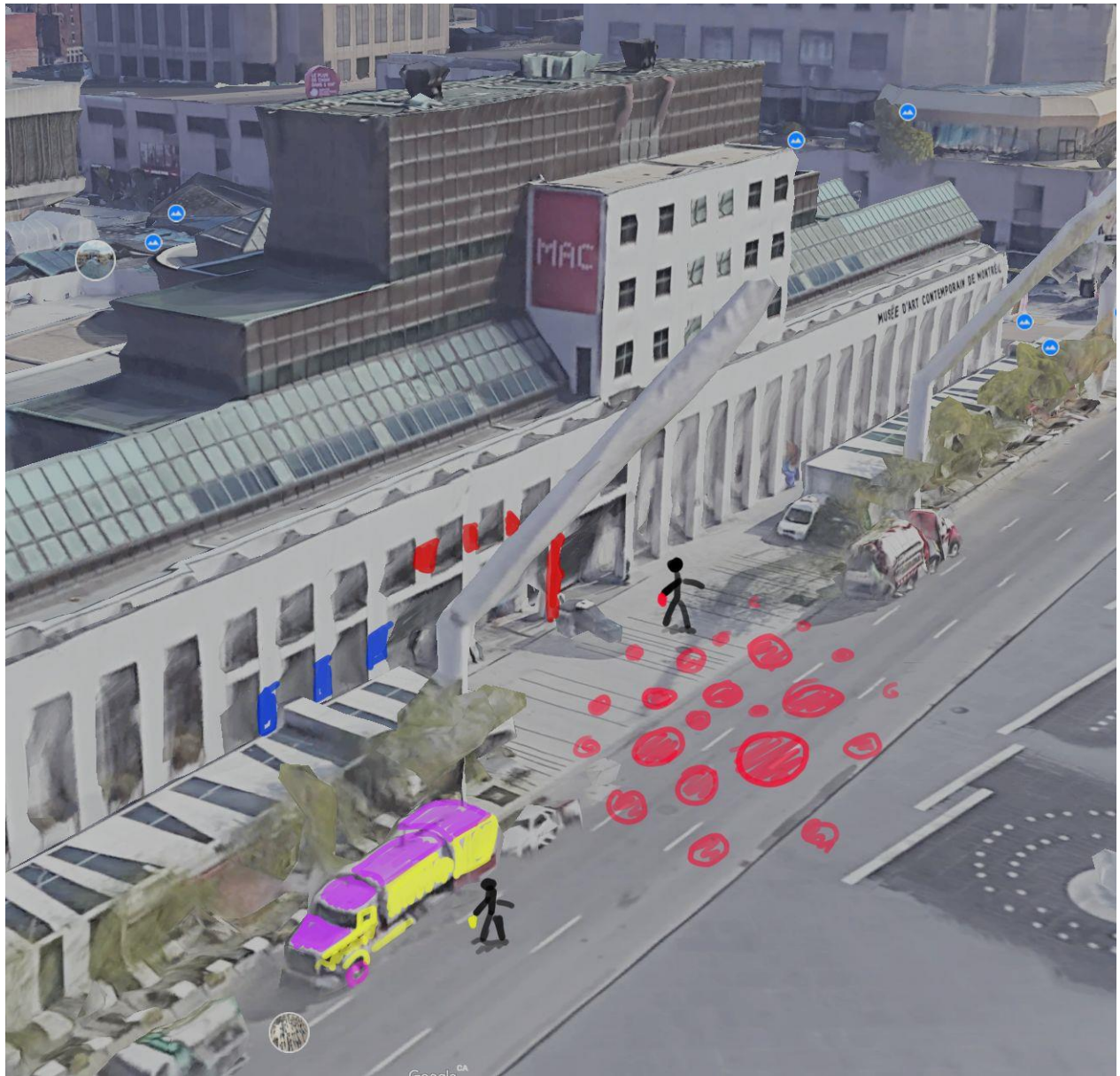
A real life, more political, equivalent to *anondraw.com* is *Talking Walls*, by Ingrid Bachmann, an artist working in Montréal. In *Talking Walls* the gallery space is black and chalk is laid out to allow visitors of the space to contribute to the writing and texturing of the walls. Ingrid talks about how she wanted to re-think the gallery space as a forum for ideas by working directly with the gallery space itself (<http://ingridbachmann.com/projects/47>). Conceptually this mirrors my interests with graffiti and the reappropriation of space which usually holds up one perspective (the property owner, the artist) and instead encourages the proliferation of other perspectives (urban residents, gallery goers). Similar to my project, *Talking Walls* is interested in *dialogue* between people over time facilitated by a finite, shared canvas paired with anonymity (afforded in Ingrid's case by the separations in time between visitors). However the work doesn't seem to contain a notion of the warping or perversion of a space *over time*, in Ingrid's work— the gallery space does not begin a proto-typical white cube and is then progressively transformed, mark by mark, into something unrecognizable as a gallery space— instead it begins a dark room with a small amount of white marking placed by the artist herself, and ends up a dark room with a large amount of white markings placed by both artist and visitors. On the other hand a map in my project could begin a representation of a Montréal location, and might end up a psychedelic mess of patterns and marks.

I think of Billboard hijacking as sort of a subcategory of graffiti in which the surface to be appropriated is always a billboard. Doing research into billboard hijacking was fruitful because it is a form of graffiti that focuses almost entirely on socio-political critique. Often certain words in advertisements are redacted or others inserted to satirically twist the message of the poster against the original intent of the authors— a typical example is an advertisement which through some clever alteration is transformed into a capitalist critique. I think offering people 3D representations of actual places in the city which anyone can write on would create for situations ripe for social-political satire. Unlike billboard hijacking, my project would represent an *ongoing* dialogue, not simply a single response, and thus while at its beginning untouched maps with clear representations may offer situations ripe for satire, as the environments become less and less recognizable these sorts of socio-political critiques might lose some of their potency.

The artist I encountered earliest in my project and the one which conceptually was the most influential to the development of this proposal is Krzysztof Wodiczko— a polish artist who among other things experiments with work involving large-scale projections on facades in public spaces. His projection work is often interested in socio-political role of public spaces in society, and he often works to retake these spaces through his projections to establish the presence and legitimacy of marginalized peoples, sometimes literally offering them voices. For instance, in 2014, in Place des Arts, the exhibition *Homeless Projection* began in which the bodies and voices of some of the Montréal homeless were projected on to the Maisonneuve Théâtre. Through researching Krzysztof Wodiczko I began thinking of this project as sort of a platform for individuals to state their presence. Rather than a work in and of itself. Obviously it's a very different thing stating your presence in a digital community which exists on an unknown domain compared to establishing a presence in a public space directly. However I do think that my work might offer some of the expressive and political benefits of graffiti to those individuals who do not want to break the law for whatever reason— for instance, if you're an immigrant or have a family the stakes of getting caught would be much higher.



*POV of player



*Birds eye view