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CART 351 Reflection: *Dead Drops*

Dead Drops is a project by Berlin based artist Aram Bartholl, started in 2010. The project is a call to people to install “dead drops”, or storage devices intended to be offline and freely accessible in public space, along with a website where people can track dead drops and their current status on an interactive world map, on which hundreds of dead drops have been submitted.

The project concerns itself with themes of hacker culture and DIY projects, by making an open file sharing network and emphasizing its non-traditional structure. The fact that the dead drops are free to use by anyone, singular, have no additional software, unregulated and without oversight, just a USB storage device are all attributes mentioned in the *Dead Drops Manifesto*. By having to use the dead drop website to find an active dead drop to go to, using a dead drop more closely resembles geocaching than typical peer-to-peer file transfer. Ownership of data is also important to the project, and the manifesto mentions cloud services and “devices without access to local files” as things that the project is in response to. Since 2010, cloud computing and Internet of Things devices have grown in prominence, so the project is still highly relevant.

Although the Dead Drop project refers to itself as a network, each Dead Drop is singular and not connected to each other, and local. The content of any given dead drop will be contingent on who its users are, heightening the element of physical space in the project. This brings into question whether it by technical terms could be considered a network at all, since each dead drop has no connection to any other except in purpose and ideology. Because each dead drop is isolated, each dead drop can simultaneously be thought of as part of a larger dead drop network as catalogued by the project, and a “server” for a more local, centralized network of people visiting the dead drop.