

BY
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CATEGORY
AGENCY

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FRICTION ATLAS,
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FRICTION ATLAS

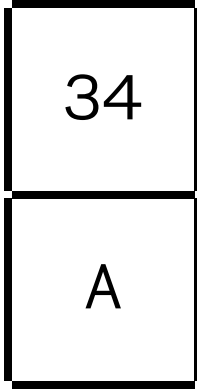
The scripts of law are drafted into our public bodies. They define movements and gestures, unconscious reactions, behaviours and anticipations. What happens when the laws become a game? What happens when we redefine the rules as the visible surface of a playing field, blurring the distinction between unthinking movement and a conscious submission as participants?

Everyday, citizens perform, on public surfaces, synchronised routines of elaborate moves. Through the simple act of walking in the city, we log into a system of rules and constraints, codes that regulate the circulation of citizens within urban space. They are sets of instructions, conditional statements, ultimately incorporating power; a structural force that plays into everyday life.

The act of assembling in public space is both an individual and a group activity, involving figures, interplay and synchronisation. The resulting patterns and choreographies extend beyond exceptional events, to the most mundane of activities. It is not uncommon in the media, for example, to spot demonstrators keeping their march to one line, standing on the sidewalk, in Washington DC. Any reading or picnic gathering over twenty persons in one of New York City's parks requires a special event permit. In Sweden, you might need to apply for a permit to dance in public. In Cairo one is allowed to spontaneously discuss public matters only if there are fewer than ten people. Some regulations surely sound sensible, some bizarre, many are contested and strongly conflictual.

Friction Atlas — a project initiated in 2014 in Ljubljana and expanded in Athens and Melbourne — aims to make regulations — always implicitly present in any public space — explicit and legible through graphical devices. Through the engagement of the public, we attempt to make the dynamics of authority become not only visually but also physically discernible.

In each city, we drew full-scale diagrams onto the pavement of public spaces to illustrate the rules that control their uses in overlay with rules of other cities, such as Genoa, Cairo, Washington, Stockholm, Sydney. We sampled from different cities in order to show not specific conflicts, but the pervasivity of minor and daily frictions. We deliberately designed and arranged situations — collectively organising an



environment and a play of events — that then resulted in actions, *dérives*, crossings of the city. We invited the public to assemble, to participate in staged choreographies, to discuss, and reread the urban space, highlighting some of its hidden aspects.

The way the urban is regulated still lacks tangible representation; law is often too murky, while ungraspable, to be discussed. Designed interventions can help in bringing to the foreground what is otherwise lost to view, neglected, or taken for granted as someone else's problem — too thin, shadowy, banal, and invisible. When the structure and the activity of a system is exposed it becomes legible. The experience of the urban environment grants citizens a degree of agency when the resulting mental maps can be operationalised, to enable reprogramming, hacking, and deconstructing.

Understanding law as a human artefact, Friction Atlas highlights some of the regulations invisibly traced upon any urban surface, as in a playing field. Through graphical devices and performative practices, it reshapes local laws into fully visible agents, providing possible models for opening up to new forms of civic and aesthetic engagement with hidden or abstract layers of the city.

Friction Atlas was initiated by Paolo Patelli and Giuditta Vendrame of design and research collaborative La Jetée for BIO 50, the 24th Biennial of Design in Ljubljana (18.9—7.12.2014). It was further developed within the Adhocracy Athens programme (29.4—4.7.2015) and the Performing Mobilities festival (17.9—31.10.2015) and in Melbourne, Australia.

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