distance made good:

FLOW LINES

Hamilton & Southern

distance made good: flow lines

Distance Made Good: Flow Lines is one in a series of exhibitions that explore the relationship between satellite navigation and an experiential sense of place; between technological representation and the lived, daily practice of moving about in an urban setting. This publication brings together images of our working process and the final installation as shown at Folly Gallery in Lancaster, September 2004. The two included essays are more theoretical in perspective. They articulate both the technological exploration of space, and the community based collaborative processes that together constitute our working practice.

The GPS* device is made for use in navigation around cities, across oceans, up mountains and through the skies. The *Distance Made Good: Flow Lines* installation adapts GPS data taken from walks and expresses it in a room to reveal flows of movement of walkers as they converge on landmarks and focal points, and diverge to locations of personal interest.

Our approach to the *Distance Made Good* series is to work with local people. We would like to thank all thirty-four people who walked with us, for their time and for the stories they told us about their lives and their home towns. Thanks to Annie Gerin and Derek Hales for their insights into the work, and to everyone at Folly for their help.

Jen Hamilton and Jen Southern, June 2006

Jen Hamilton received her M.F.A. in 1996 from Concordia University in Montreal. In 1997 she moved to Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada to develop and teach Intermedia at the university. She has been collaborating with fellow graduate school colleague UK artist Jen Southern since 2002 and for the last four years they have been working to develop a technology that uses mobile phones and GPS to make interactive drawings of lived space.

Jen Southern received her MFA from Concordia University, Montreal, Canada in 1996. Since then she has exhibited her installation work nationally and internationally, from her base in Huddersfield, UK. She is a senior lecturer in Multimedia Design at the University of Huddersfield.

**Global Positioning System*

walk

walk. This word comes from Old English wealcan, to roll; whence we get *wealcare*, a fuller of cloth, and thus the surname *Walker* has the same origin as *Fuller*.

> She curst the weaver and the walker
> The clothe that they had wrought.
> Percy: *Reliques (The Boy and the Mantle).* [1]

And to walk, indeed, is to roll along the landscape. And as the machine fulling cloth, on their daily wanderings people weave and felt their identities, memories and most routine practices into the fabric of a place.

We might ask geographers, architects, bus drivers and sanitation officers what constitutes a city. From each we would gather distinct answers: developed land, housing amalgamation, infrastructure network, and management of resources and excess. For myself, I share Roland Barthes' bias. Like him, "I can't get myself interested in the beauty of a place if there are no people in it."[2] By the same token, it is owing to communities that I discover the charm and individuality that constitutes a city. It is by following walkers on their preferred paths that I gain appreciation for a place. This is also the course by which I become aware of how richly unique urban cultures can be, and how the texture of locales contributes to our daily experience.

What does it mean, then, to be taken for a walk? This question is at the core of the aesthetic and theoretical research Jen Hamilton and Jen Southern conducted in Morecambe and Lancaster, North West England. In the early nineteenth century, Morecambe was just a small fishing village set on the coast of the Irish Sea. As the fishing and tourism industries developed, the city stretched laterally along the seafront, across the bay from the Lake District. The neighbouring Lancaster is much older. Bisected by the river Lune, its narrow Georgian streets are organised in winding patterns around and up to the perched medieval Lancaster Castle built in the thirteenth century. While the characteristic topography of each city organises potential mobility, what mostly sets these places apart is how their populations claim their streets and public spaces. They do this, in part, by walking, an embodied interaction between people and place that has been a key theme in the artistic practices of Hamilton and Southern.

For two weeks in the early autumn of 2004 the artists walked thirty-four routes, guided by local inhabitants who had woven habitual paths to accommodate their daily activities. Documenting these multiple wanderings by means of GPS technology,[3] Hamilton and Southern amassed a mesh of GPS-generated abstract line-drawings, which they reproduced in the gallery with a series of locational pegs and fibre webs. Michel de Certeau has meticulously described the difference between the abstraction that the city becomes when seen from the vantage point of a bird or a GPS satellite as voyeurism, or the pleasure of seeing whole as opposed to the total sensory experience of rolling down a street.[4] From above, the city appears as an irregular pattern that can be mapped and rationally embraced. From below, the movement of bodies, the competing sounds of street life and the contest of intermingling smells define any given encounter with a place in such chaotic ways that it becomes impossible to replicate one's brush with the city. At this human level of activity and vision, mobility is blind to the general organisation of a place. This is, undoubtedly, a challenge for any potential representation of walking in the city.

Indeed, when the artists—to their own surprise—were taken twice on the same itinerary by distinct walkers, they discovered that GPS abstraction tends to strip the humanity from geography. This is to say that in the succession of locations identified by the satellites and re-transmitted to the electronic device snugly held in the hand of a walker, something inevitably characteristic, and idiosynchratic of a place disappears. In the wanderings mapped in the spirit of psychogeography, directionality, loitering, skipping, looking, talking, laughing, sharing and touching all faded away. With the GPS they all transmuted and ossified into aesthetic

configurations composed of static broken lines… into a too literal sense of place.

Yet these walks in Morecambe and Lancaster were by no means walks for walks' sake. They represent people's habits. They mark the routes workers use on their daily travels to and fro their businesses. They correspond to the pleasant and necessary walkies taken with beloved pets. They trace a woman's meditative course involving favourite places collected over forty years of living in the same locale. These routes constitute threads that sustain the cultural fabric of two cities, places woven and felt while simultaneously fraying at the edges. Having said this, the problem that still arises is how to represent these dynamic encounters with people and with cities within the confines of four white gallery walls.

Points on a map are not meaningful until they are put in relation one with the next. In the gallery, the artists translated locational coordinates as pegs pricked constellation-like into blue and yellow surfaces of large wooden screens. On the reverse surfaces left rough and unpainted, strings were stretched between the pegs, and markings were made as mnemonic devices to recall the identity of walkers and the time they shared with the artists. The strings do not invoke a simple symbolic recreation of the walks, but a mise-en-séquence; one needs to order space to make sense of it. It is indeed the interpretation of sites by means of words, architecture or images that articulates a relationship to place—as imperfect as this representation might be. Paradoxically, the tangly, messy mesh of fibre produced by Hamilton and Southern creates this order.

In the gallery display, the cities have vanished, leaving only vestiges of the encounters the artists had with the peripatetic participants of the art experiment. But while the architecture and the streets of Morecambe and Lancaster disappeared, the spatial practices of the walkers materialized in unruly strands. Referring back to Michel de Certeau, these traces can only be seen as schematic alternates (or perhaps complements) to the experience of space one accesses through rolling along the streets of the city. This is because the pegs and twine will never tell us how someone is situated in a location or moving along a path.

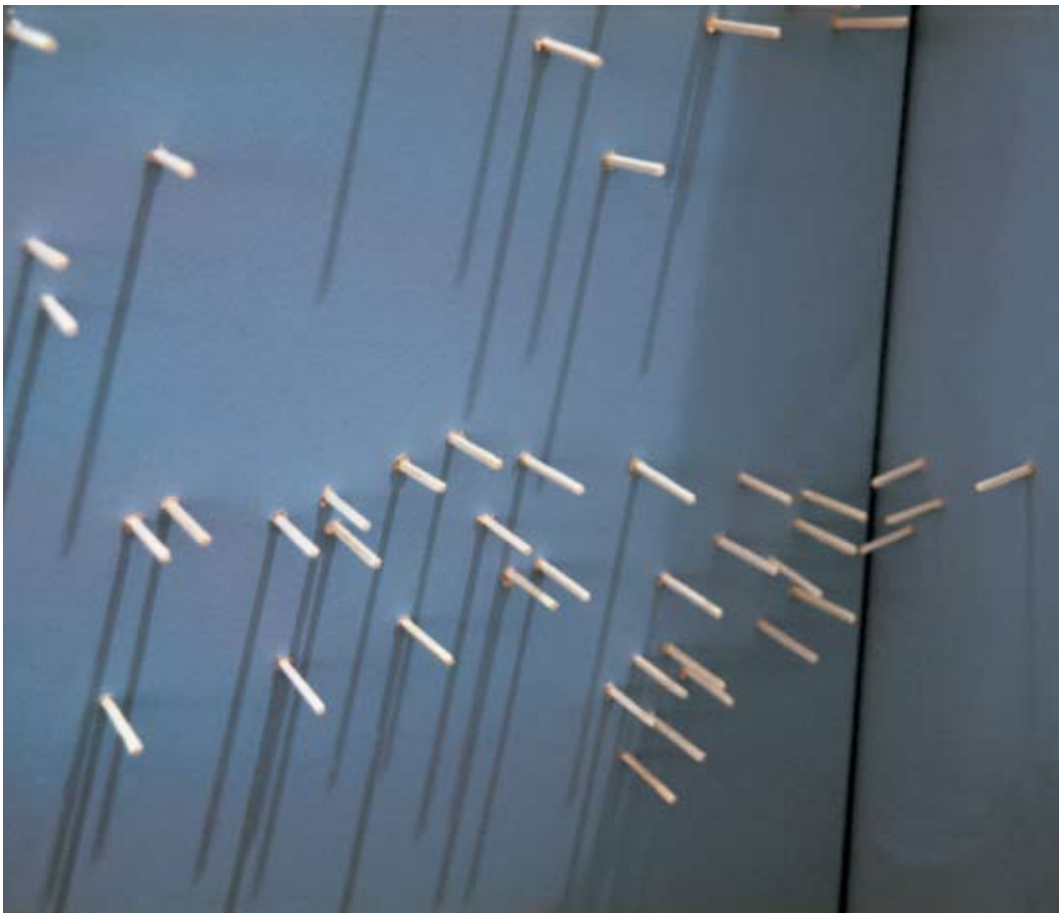
The strings nevertheless remain as evocative metaphors for each walking venture. The intertwining of fibres held steadily by friction and tension, yet ever ready to fray, articulates potentialities into distinct paths, paths developed by each individual walker. But if walking can be traced by twine and pegs, these only refer to past wanderings, to the now-consumed experience of place. This conundrum that appears as the weaving of absence reminds me of a beautiful description of an imaginary city by Italo Calvino:

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain a city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.[5]

The rolled and fraying nature of the medium the artists chose to represent their roving process allows for imaginative indeterminacy. It presents a lyrical approximation of the pedestrian movement and sensory experience that unravels in the gallery for the benefit of the viewer. It suggests that the routes taken everyday by discrete walkers is a fine point of departure for a discussion about the texture of place. It also invites the visitor of the exhibition to work and see beyond the image; because daily use of space is embodied as well as imaginary. Walkers and their witnesses weave and felt their identities, memories and most routine practices into the landscapes they choose to roll along.

Annie Gerin

1 Ivor H. Evans (ed.), Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, 14th edition (London: Cassel, 1982), 1157.
2 Roland Barthes, Incidents (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 65
3 GPS stands for Global Positioning System. The system uses twenty-four satellites positioned in orbit around the Earth to allow a person equipped with a GPS receptor to immediately have their position triangulated to determine their location in terms of latitude and longitude.
4 Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91-110.
5 Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities (London: Chaucer Press, 1974), 61-62.



satellites

This short essay discusses the use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) in locative media practice, with reference to the works of Hamilton and Southern and the geo-philosophical writings of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly their notions of smooth and striated space.[1] In the other text by Annie Gerin, a textile technological model for their work *Distance Made Good* is introduced. In writing on the smooth and striated, Deleuze and Guattari had already described textile fabrics by way of illustration, first of a striated space, produced through the apparatus of weaving and then in contrast to this with the production of felt, as a smooth space without separation of threads only an entanglement of fibres, in principle open and unlimited in every direction.

The apparatus that Hamilton and Southern use for their investigations from urban spaces to coastlines is the GPS device: both state apparatus and war machine. The GPS as a state instrument, a part of the military apparatus is a surveillance device, a device used in military operations. The GPS as a state apparatus is one that produces a striation, a homogenisation of the space over which the state reigns. It does this by controlling and containing migrations, in its capture of flows, by imposing restrictions on speed and direction, and in its measurement and capture of movements. But, to complicate things, the GPS device is also used in the work of Hamilton and Southern as a war machine of a different kind, in that it offers a creative resistance to the control and striation of space – it is used for other purposes. The GPS in locative media practice is a machine best characterised by movements across space rather than the grid that allows this movement to be plotted, reintroducing smooth elements that resist containment or evade spatial routine through simple acts such as walking to work through the city, putting out the lobster pots in a boat, or flying a kite on the beach.

This apparatus, this device, has association with drawing machines (and this is one of the things Hamilton and Southern use it for), with surveying machines and with a general expansion of perception through the use of technical devices. More interestingly it also has association with a projective geometry - one that opens multiple perspectives and subjectivities through a mobilisation of geometries of points of view.

…what makes me = me is a point of view on the world…through a mobilization of points of view… it's not points of view that are explained by the subjects, it's the opposite, subjects that are explained by points of view.[2]

The GPS comes with sets of conditions that are useful in the description of a 'striated' or otherwise metric space – it is a triangulation machine for measuring and registering the location of points of practice in a particular locale. This triangulation machine is part of a technological assemblage – an interconnected network of technologies which include actual linkages and other associations (mobile phones, PDAs, computers, the wireless internet, radio signals, traffic monitoring, road maps, the ordnance survey, the history of maritime navigational technology, dependency on electromagnetism, the accuracy of atomic clocks, and so on). Considering the GPS as an assemblage this also includes the 24 satellites in orbit around the earth, as well as the mathematics that resolve location through the temporal measurement of radio transmissions and through the processes of triangulation or trilateration. A further association that can be made lies within the problem for triangulation this poses - where all points to be measured are in motion, not as fixed or static points but vectors – we can speculate that this might require the generation and computation of some intermediary constructions based on, lets say, intersecting circles or the surfaces of volumes - very much in the same way that Bernard Cache has described Philibert de L'Orme's 'trompes' being resolved through a generalised system of two intersecting conical shapes composed of parallel rays with vertices at vanishing points, or in the invention of stereotomy and other developments of perspective technologies. This begins to move the GPS, positioning locative media practice, as an

architectural practice, somewhere between 1550 and 1872 AD, precisely where Cache locates the future of Computer Aided Design that other descendent of the perspective hinge in architecture.[3]

The collaborative and participatory locative media work of Hamilton and Southern illustrates how the sets of conditions that come with the GPS can limit the descriptions of space and can render a journey into a two dimensional depiction - the drawn line. Though their work is not as straightforward or limited as that - it involves the drawing around a neighbourhood, a place, a site, a locale, and the rendering of this space into a contour, a line. It is this, the 'becoming-line' that it is to participate in this process, that is useful; such lines can be used to draw maps full of reciprocal interactions, influences and experiences, like drawing around the buildings, roads, and public spaces to trace the figure-ground but instead becoming an expression of pure movements, variations, differentiations - becoming points of view described as vectors, not points, or at least not only points. But, as well as points of view, to participate is to be rendered as points on the Cartesian grid of the GPS display. The work produces both representations and a multiple perspectivism; it is this that helps the artists delineate differences of spatial opinion differentials of speed, delays and accelerations, changes in orientation, continuous variations...[4]

The GPS as assemblage manages space, movement through that space and conditions human behaviour in space - the GPS bends space around itself and develops an isomorphism with other elements across layers or strata. Through Hamilton and Southern's work we can see the stratification of social space as a layering of agency; the achieving of affects through exposed layerings or strata - language and technology, content and expression that cannot be reduced to a single plane, but instead become multiplicities of mutually determining layers. The GPS as wielded by Hamilton and Southern merges layers and re-introduces them as smoothing elements that cross and resist the containment of spatial routine. What one sees as a visitor - and in developing this work Hamilton and Southern have been first-time visitors to their respective home towns – what is experienced by one as an alien, as one type of space, will alter slightly from how another sees and experiences and knows from memory to be the one type of space they frequently occupy, inhabit or traverse. Hamilton and Southern's practice and their work with communities of participants, can be seen as processes of projective geometry, as a practice of resistance or war machine in an urban and striated space. The 'becoming-line' of participants via the apparatus of the GPS which describes, or better still projects their points of view as rays and shadows: onto the pavement; into the cracks between the paving stones; in the fissures of the stones; through the gaps and into the surfaces of the city or town. The GPS drawn line, as vectors in a field that is simultaneously smooth and striated, is a nomadic line that continuously smooths and makes malleable an always already striated space with multiple orientations that pass between points, figures and contours: it is positively motivated by the smooth space it draws.[5] The machinic aspect of the GPS as assemblage is in the habits and traits of participants in Southern and Hamilton's work and how these reveal and express the singularities of social space, the site and its becoming, those aspects that give a site, give architecture, its intensity and that actualise its virtuality.

Derek Hales

1 Deleuze.G, Guattari.F, 1987, A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia. University of Minnesota Press.
2 Deleuze lecture notes on Leibniz, taken from Cours Vincennes – 15/04/1980 HYPERLINK "http://www.webdeleuze.com" www.webdeleuze.com
3 Cache, B, Towards an Associative Architecture, in Leach. N, Turnbull. D, Digital Tectonics, 2004, Wiley Academy.
4 Deleuze lecture notes on Leibniz taken from Cours Vincennes – 15/04/1980 HYPERLINK "http://www.webdeleuze.com" www.webdeleuze.com
5 Deleuze lecture notes on Leibniz taken from Cours Vincennes – 15/04/1980 HYPERLINK "http://www.webdeleuze.com" www.webdeleuze.com

" some of our participants

Morcambe
Brian

Morcambe
Danny

Lancaster
Bert

Morcambe
Gwen & Carol

Lancaster
Josh

Lancaster
Steve

Lancaster
Clare

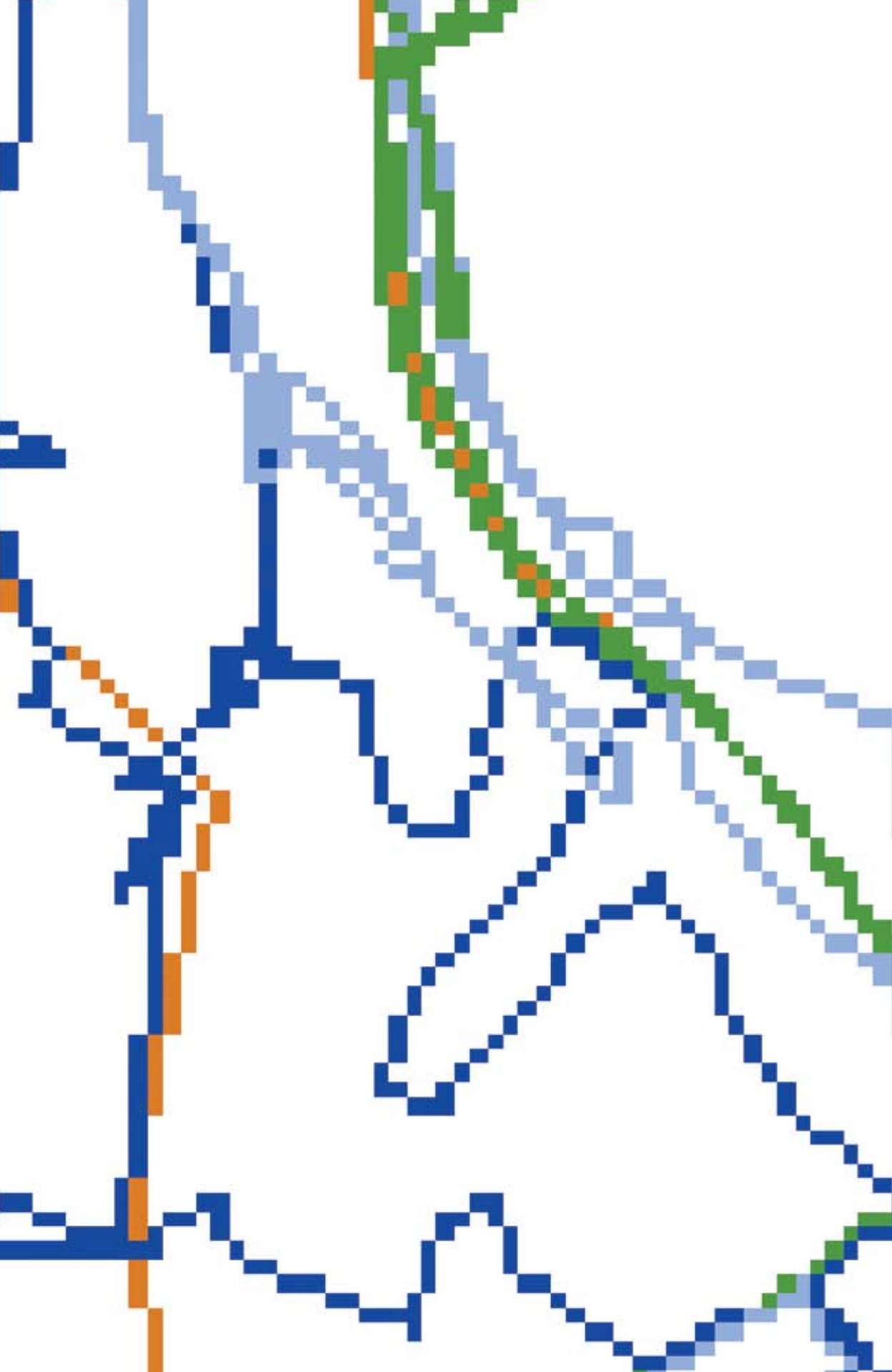
Morcambe
Judi

Morcambe
Chris & Jo

Morcambe
George

Lancaster
Roy & Kathy

Design: Rio Saxon Design Inc.



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