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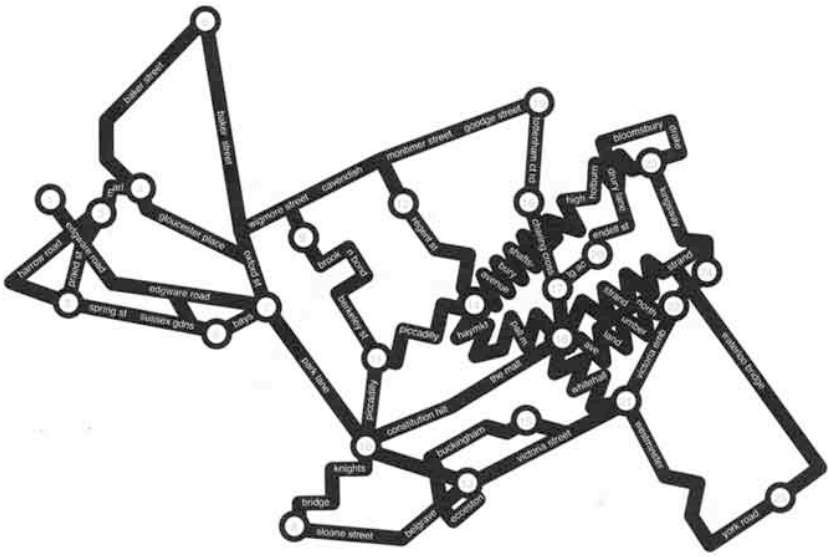

Moving realities

Michael Pinsky explores new ways of mapping the city

1936. Irritated by the complexity of navigating in London, one woman, Miss Phyllis Pearsall, undertook on her own, the ambitious enterprise of producing an indexed street atlas of London. The A-Z was born. Sixty-five years later, in the spirit of his predecessor, London-based artist Michael Pinsky questions our perception of metropolitan space. His mapping of London demonstrates that physicality doesn't lie at the heart of urban mobility anymore.

Five maps. One for each mode of transport: metro, bus, car, bicycle and foot. For the duration of one journey in London, let's forget the tube map and the A-Z. Both are deceptive in their own way: one ignores distances to favour a clear understanding of the tube network. The other, faithful to distances fails to provide any travelling time. Pinsky maps the invisible by methodically recording his commuting time between pre-defined nodal points. The result is an intriguing set of maps, whose dissimilarities reveal the complexity of the western metropolis. Their juxtaposition allows us to establish a comparison between the transport options.

By challenging the imagery imposed on us by conventional cartography, they coerce us to rethink the city-space. High-speed vehicles have abstracted physical distances. Remote locations may seem close if they can be reached in a short period of time. However, as cities have become increasingly congested, our understanding of their geography has become more complex. Journeys are not automatically shortened by the use of an engine; they can be stretched to the point that it would be faster to rely on simpler devices. They vary according the mode of transport, which is employed.

Rather than confronting us with a concept external to our existence, Pinsky's maps are shaped by our transit. They incarnate what most of us, urban nomads, experience daily: the reality of modern living.

Stéphanie Delcroix