

invisible cities

A project by Christian Marc Schmidt & Liangjie Xia

About Invisible Cities

By revealing the social networks present within the urban environment, Invisible Cities describes a new kind of city—a city of the mind. It displays geocoded activity from online services such as Twitter and Flickr, both in real-time and in aggregate. Real-time activity is represented as individual nodes that appear whenever a message or image is posted. Aggregate activity is reflected in the underlying terrain: over time, the landscape warps as data is accrued, creating hills and valleys representing areas with high and low densities of data.

Invisible Cities maps information from one realm—online social networks—to another: an immersive, three dimensional space. In doing so, the piece creates a parallel experience to the physical urban environment. The interplay between the aggregate and the real-time recreates the kind of dynamics present within the physical world, where the city is both a vessel for and a product of human activity. It is ultimately a parallel city of intersections, discovery, and memory, and a medium for experiencing the physical environment anew.

System requirements

Invisible Cities runs on Windows PCs and Macs. 2.66 GHz processor and at least 4 GB memory recommended.

Opening Invisible Cities

Invisible Cities requires an active Internet connection. After you open the application, wait for the title screen to appear—it may take a few seconds as archived data is downloaded. Once the data is loaded a prompt will appear and you can start using the application by clicking the title screen. Twitter and Flickr data is refreshed constantly during runtime.

Navigating

To navigate, pan around the visible area by clicking the left mouse button and dragging in any direction. You can rotate and tilt the view by either holding SHIFT while clicking the left mouse button and dragging, or alternatively by clicking and dragging using the right mouse button. Use the mouse wheel to zoom in and out. Click on any node to select and center it within view. If a node belongs to a topic path, navigation will appear at the top of the view with previous/next buttons to move chronologically along the path. Once selected, clicking on a photo or update will open the corresponding page on Twitter or Flickr. Selecting a topic from the list on the right edge of the view will center on the topic path. Roll over the timeline at the bottom of the view and drag the handle to move back in time up to 24 hours—nodes, topics, and terrain will change accordingly. The vertical slider underneath the orientation indicator on the left side of the view allows changing the opacity of the terrain. Press SPACE to toggle the controls on and off.

Support

Please email invisiblecities@christianmarcschmidt.com with any questions or feedback.