

## **Noughts and Crosses**

### **Jane Rendell**

Two players, two pencils and a piece of paper: all the ingredients necessary for a game of noughts and crosses. Except, of course, for the noughts and crosses – the signs – themselves. To play the game, one must construct a grid by drawing four lines, two vertical crossed by two horizontal. This nine-squared composition creates the space for play.

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On approaching London Bridge Station ticket barrier on Sunday 8 July 2007, the day that the Tour de France cycled from central London to Canterbury, we were confronted by an unexpected sign – a white symbol of a bicycle on a sky-blue square on which was superimposed a large red cross. The visual message was clear and the ticket inspector at the barrier confirmed it verbally – no bicycles today due to the large number expected! Emerging from the station at Ashford, to watch the logo-clad *peloton* of the Tour de France speed round the town's ring road, we noticed a trio of men dressed in not-quite recognizable green uniforms with bicycles whose handles appeared to be antlers. Heading for the traffic lights to cross the road in order to scrutinize the trio more closely, we found the button at the zebra crossing too high to reach.

Something in Ashford was not quite right.

*Lost O* is an exhibition of site-specific art curated by Michael Pinsky. The show was created in response to a very specific condition, the removal of the circular ring road around Ashford. This is part of the decision, taken by town planners and traffic engineers, to continue the Shared Space Scheme, an experiment carried out in seven cities across Europe to produce a new kind of urban place where there is no separation between pedestrians, cars and

bicycles, and no road signs giving instructions which distinguish between those different modes of transport. In this scheme, the relation of one road user to another is not determined in advance but established through live interaction. With this context in mind, Pinsky commissioned 11 international artists to make works in Ashford, temporary site-specific installations in response to the loss of the ring road and in anticipation of the new social space.

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Pinsky is clearly interested in the patterns that repetition produces, both in the subject matter he observes such as the movement of people caught on camera, as in *Crawl*, as well as the remaking of a work of his own like *Viral Planting*. Through his documentation of repetitive forms of movement, and his manipulation and representation of them over time, Pinsky makes patterns that combine spatial configurations with temporal rhythms. *Elevation*, for Lewisham Hospital, shows activities of the people in the next-door park projected behind the glass wall of the hospital façade allowing patients to discover what he calls a 'parallel universe behind the walls'. For the *Race* in Doncaster, Pinsky filmed everyday life in a town he associates with drinking, racing and shopping. He recorded people walking down shopping streets, and then edited their movement, slowing it down and speeding it up to create a different scenario, one where each figure becomes a character in a race.

The act of recording removes those whose movement is documented from their original settings. When combined with the edit, repetition produces difference, repositioning the figures as new signs in contexts composed by the artist but also informed by their cultural location. The replication of certain gestures hints at infinite expansion, but the geometry of the frame marks one kind of limit and the time you spend watching the work makes another. How long does it take to find out if the pattern will be repeated? The

choice of duration from the point of view of the spectator adds an important way of distinguishing between repetitions of the same and those that contain difference. These patterns fabricated by Pinsky are choreographies, rhythms as well as configurations, which fascinate because although one knows that the combination of moves played out through the changing positions of signs will be repeated, one is never sure what will remain the same and what will differ.

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To win Noughts and Crosses it is not important whether you are a nought or a cross, but how you play the game. You try to take up the middle square at the start, to occupy the position of the most possible options, or if not, then a corner, that way you can construct a line on the diagonal, as well as the horizontal or vertical. Like a super-simplified version of chess, within a few games you start to recognize the set of patterns created. This is the real pleasure of the game, not the desire to win, but the obsession with whether you will ever repeat a game you have played before, and if you do, whether you will remember it.