Seven Problematics for Neoliberal Times

Jane Rendell

Problématique is a French term, defined as 'the art of formulating a problem'.[1] In English, the word 'problematic' can be used as an adjective to describe the nature of a problem, as 'difficult to resolve; doubtful, uncertain, questionable', or as a noun to indicate: 'A thing that constitutes a problem or an area of difficulty, esp. in a particular field of study'.[2] If the term 'liberal arts' refers to the seven subjects of the medieval university curriculum, which included the Classical *Trivium* of grammar, rhetoric and logic, and the Renaissance *Quadrivium* of mathematics, geometry, music and astronomy; what kind of arts education do we need for the neoliberal times in which we live?[3] I suggest here that Apolonija Šušteršic's practice engages material objects in the generation of specific modes of exchange, particular to the institutional sites in which they are located. Understood as 'things that constitute problems', I argue that the projects present seven problematics – critical, spatial, pedagogical, functional, relational, performative and transitional – as sites for debating and enacting alternatives to neoliberalism.

The Critical, or, how to oppose and propose?

In his 1984 paper 'Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form', K. Michael Hays argued that critical architecture operated between two poles, resisting cultural determinism on the one hand and recognising that autonomy is required for engagement on the other.[4] Almost twenty years later, Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting rejected the autonomous disciplinarity and oppositional dialectics of critical architecture as 'hot representation', and advocated an architecture linked to 'the diagrammatic, the atmospheric and cool performance'.[5] At the same time, Hays reasserted that for him the term critical

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problématique (accessed 2 March 2012).

[2] http://www.oed.com/ (accessed 5 March 2012).

[3] For a definition of neoliberalism, see for example, Dag Einar Thorsen, 'The Neoliberal Challenge: *What is Neoliberalism?',* University of Oslo, Working paper (10 October 2009). http://folk.uio.no/daget/neoliberalism2.pdf (accessed 2 March 2012). See also David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[4] K. Michael Hays, 'Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form', *Perspecta*, 21, (1981), pp. 14–29, p. 27.

[5] Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, 'Notes Around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism', Michael Osman, Adam Ruedig, Matthew Seidel, and Lisa Tilney (eds), *Mining Autonomy,* a special issue of *Perspecta*, 33, (2002) pp. 72–7, p. 74.

derived from critical theory and could be summed up as: 'the constant imagination, search for, and construction of alternatives …'[6]

In discussing the Frankfurt School, Raymond Geuss writes that critical theories are forms of knowledge, which differ from theories in the natural sciences because they are 'reflective' rather than 'objectifying' – in other words they take into account their own procedures and methods.[7] Critical theories aim neither to prove a hypothesis nor prescribe a particular methodology or solution to a problem; instead critical theorists offer self-reflective modes of thought that seek to change the world, or at least the world in which the inequalities of market capitalism, as well as, I would argue, patriarchy and colonialism, dominate: 'A critical theory, then, is a reflective theory which gives agents a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation.'[8] I have proposed that this definition of the term 'critical' be extended to encompass practice – particularly those critical practices that involve self-reflection and the desire for social change, that seek to transform rather than only describe.[9]

In fine art, debates around the critical have recently tended to coalesce around the term 'institutional critique'. Following Marcel Duchamp's questioning of the aesthetic criteria used to categorize and position objects as art, a strand of conceptual practice, developed through the work of artists such as Hans Haacke and Michael Asher in the 1960s and 1970s, was later described by critic Benjamin Buchloh as 'institutional critique'.[10] Šušteršič has suggested that this kind of work 'doesn't produce any

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[6] K. Michael Hays, Lauren Kogod and the Editors, 'Twenty Projects at the Boundaries of the Architectural Discipline examined in relation to the Historical and Contemporary Debates over Autonomy', *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[7] See Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[9] Jane Rendell, 'Critical Architecture: Between Criticism and Design', Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian (eds) *Critical Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2007).

[10] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh identifies the work of certain artists after 1966 as 'institutional critique'. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Conceptual art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, Winter (1990) p. 528. Michael Asher's work, for example, has utilized the principle of material subtraction in a number of projects in order to draw attention to the architectural and institutional space of the gallery. In the Claire Copley Gallery, Los Angeles (1974), he removed the partition between the office and exhibition space, revealing to the public viewer the usually hidden operations that allow the gallery to function economically. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (ed.) *Michael Asher, Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979* (Novia Scotia College of Art and Design and Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 1984), pp. 76–81.

constructive resolution, when it doesn't effect changes in our political and cultural structures'.[11] Her comment was made in conversation with the curator Maria Lind, who has put forward the idea of 'constructive institutional critique' to describe the work of Šušteršic and others, which, rather than being 'based on negativity', in her view, 'offer[s] a proposal for change, possibly an improvement, or a test of how to do things slightly differently … based on dialogue between the artist and the institution, rather than an inherent conflict.'[12] This expressed preference for dialogue rather than negativity and conflict in critical fine art, and in architecture the valuing of cool performance over hot dialectics, touches on issues which have long been at the heart of feminist and left politics, concerning whether it is more productive to adopt a critical stance of opposition or to offer an alternative, and how the situating of such positions influences the possible range of outcomes.

In Šušteršic's work we see her engage with how opposition can become productive and generate new forms of interchange: from earlier projects which, for example, respond to state-imposed restrictions on film content or the demolition of alternative cinema venues, by producing other sites for collecting, selecting, and watching films, such as *Non-Stop Video Club* (1999), *VideoCinemaCity or what to do after 7pm* (1999) and *Video Home Video Exchange* (2000); to later projects which feature gardening, food production and sale as practices that bring people together, and allow them to enact and imagine new forms of community and exchange, and to occupy space differently, such as *Prototype for Self Organised Economic Unit* (2002), *Bonnie Dundee: A Meeting Place in the Garden (after Patrick Geddes)* (2005) and *Garden Service* (2007). These projects by Šušteršic are not set in opposition to problems, but rather address issues by generating discussion and negotiation through programmes of activity. The extent to which these interactions offer a potential for change depends upon the ways in which they are positioned with respect to dominant ideological structures and other existing practices.

The Spatial, or, where to practice the critical?
In Michel de Certeau's discussion of spatial practices, strategies seek to create places that conform to abstract models, whereas tactics do not obey the laws of places.[13] For Henri Lefebvre, spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation, form a trialectical model where space is produced through three inter-related modes.[14] According to Lefebvre, spatial practices can be

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[11] 'Conversation between Maria Lind and Apolonija Šušterši ', *Apolonija Šušteršič, Moderna Museet Projekt, 4.2–14.3.1999',* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet Projekt, 1999) pp. 41-57, p. 56.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) p. 29.
[14] See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

understood in terms of perception and representations of space in terms of conception. Lefebvre also makes a careful distinction between representations of space and spaces of representation; the first he sees as operations which involve a systematized set of abstract and dominant codes, the second as the spaces of resistance, where invention and imagination flourish. It is possible to draw connections between de Certeau's strategies and Lefebvre's representations of space on the one hand, and de Certeau's tactics and Lefebvre's spaces of representation on the other, in order to make a distinction between those strategies that aim to maintain and reinforce existing social and spatial orders, and the tactics that seek to critique and question them. I have defined the latter – those practices, both everyday and creative, which seek to resist the dominant social order of neoliberal capitalism – as 'critical spatial practice'.[15]

Appearing as spaces, human subjects, and metaphors in geography, anthropology and sociology, and as terms of ownership and political spheres in economics, philosophy and law, the terms 'public' and 'private' have featured as key terms in spatial discourse. Interdependent and mutually determining, culturally constructed and historically conditioned, the way in which both terms are positioning in relation to one another, comes to stand for specific value systems. In the Western democratic tradition, for example, the public signifies democracy, accessibility, participation and egalitarianism, set against the private world of ownership and elitism. For those who support this version of the public, privatization has been associated with the appropriation of public places and organisations by private interests with exclusive rules governing entry and use. But if we take instead a liberal-rights-based perspective, then privacy is understood to provide positive qualities, such as the right to be alone, to confidentiality and the safeguarding of individuality.[16] For those who support a private realm of this kind, the public – both in terms of human subjects and as spaces – is seen as potentially threatening, whether as a mode of state coercion that needs to be de-regulated or as a site of dissidence, which is also in need of control, but for a different reason.

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[15] I first introduced the term 'critical spatial practice' in my article Jane Rendell, 'A Place Between Art, Architecture and Critical Theory', *Proceedings to Place and Location* (Tallinn, Estonia: 2003) pp. 221-33 and later consolidated and developed the concept in my book Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture* (London: IB Tauris, 2006). Since that time, the same term has been taken up by individuals such as Judith Rugg in her seminars at the RIBA, London, from around 2008; Eyal Weisman to describe activities as part of the 'MA: Research Architecture' at Goldsmiths College of Art, London; and most recently by Marcus Miessen to identify the 'MA: Architecture and Critical Spatial Practice' launched in 2011 at the Städelschule, Frankfurt.

[16] See Judith Squires, 'Private Lives, Secluded Places: Privacy as Political Possibility', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, v. 12 (1994) pp. 387–410.

During the 1990s the public was understood as the site of possibility for critical art. Artist Suzanne Lacy coined the term 'new genre public art' to describe what she saw as a new trajectory where public art could include conceptual and critical work with a focus on collaboration, interaction, process and context,[17] and others pointed to the potential of socially-engaged public art practice as a tool for political critique.[18] But 'public art' has more recently come to be considered a 'contested' practice.[19] Malcolm Miles has outlined two of the main pitfalls of public art: its use as 'wallpaper' to cover over social conflict and tensions and as monuments to the aspirations of corporate sponsors.[20] In order to fully engage with these issues, terms such as site-specific and contextual art have been taken up in the last decade as more productive for the development of critical art located outside galleries.

However, today in 2012, we live in a specific moment. We are witnessing the aggressive operations of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank – the creation of debt via the offering of loan schemes – extend from the majority into the minority world, specifically to the 'Eurozone', involving for certain sovereign states the replacement of democratically elected politicians with financial technocrats empowered to dismantle the public sector in order to satisfy the financial demands of external creditors. And in countries where the welfare state has traditionally intervened to alleviate inequalities, we are also seeing moves to transfer wealth from poorer to richer, from public to private, via mechanisms such as quantitative easing and regressive taxation. Our responses to these attacks vary, depending on our cultural histories and our political positions regarding the state. Some have chosen to go the way of the commons, a site seemingly not caught in the difficult public-private dialectic, but for others, the powerful resistance shown by new Social Movements including the Arab Spring and Occupations have reminded many of the importance of protecting the public in the face of the increasing attacks of privatization advanced in many instances by none other than the state.[21] Both approaches – a defence of the public and a reclaiming of the commons – are valid and work well together; both can be reclaimed as modes of art practice in their own right.

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[17] Suzanne Lacy (ed.) *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

[18] See Nina Felshin (ed.) *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

[19] See David Harding (ed.) *Decadent: Public Art – Contentious Term and Contested Practice* (Glasgow: Glasgow School of Art, 1997).

[20] Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and the City* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[21] See for example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

Šušteršic's work presents what it means to actively generate different publics – both subjects and spaces. She organises activities that bring together groups of people in specific sites and choreographs their interactions through staged events – formal and informal. In some, most specifically *Suggestion for the Day* (2000) and *MUSU – Muzej Sodobne Umetnosti* (2006) vehicles of transportation are the location – bicycles in the former and a coach in the latter – for connecting dispersed cultural venues and bringing together practices and communities usually kept apart. Her projects are distinguished by the way in which she designs her spaces of hospitality in careful relation to their hosts, in some cases, like *Guest Curator's Office* (2000), these are situated within the cultural institution that extended the original invitation, and in others, such as *Visual Cookie – Simulation Café* (2002), they are positioned at a distance. In the interesting case of *Sputnik Lobby/Entritt, Kunstverein München* (2002), Šušteršic's work occupies a threshold zone – the entrance to the gallery. The importance of a threshold position such as this is paradigmatic of the problematic her practice presents to us, namely, the need to respond to demands from different directions, and to adapt to contradictory forms of address.

The Pedagogical, or, who produces knowledge?

Often extending out of critiques of public art, the theory and practice of 'site-specificity' has developed an understanding of site beyond an indication of the physical location of a work and instead in relation to performance and ethnography.[22] Self-critique, along with culture, context, alterity and interdisciplinarity, have been noted as aspects of anthropological site-specific research to impact on fine art practice.[23] Akin to James Clifford's notion of site as a mobile place, located between fixed points, Miwon Kwon has pointed to Homi Bhabha's concept of 'relational specificity', to suggest an understanding of site that is specific but also relational.[24]

In the last decade in the UK, many contemporary galleries have adopted the term 'off-site' to describe the commissioning and curatorship of works situated outside the physical confines of the gallery where,

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[22] See Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Alex Coles, (ed.) *Site Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000). See also Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999). Reiss argues that site-specificity is one of the key characteristics of installation art.

[23] See Hal Foster, The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

[24] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002) p. 1. See also James Clifford, 'An Ethnographer in the Field', interview by Alex Coles, in *Site Specificity,* pp. 52–73.

in a strange reversal of Robert Smithson's concept of the gallery as non-site to the work as site,[25] the gallery reclaims its position as site. Here relational specificity provides a helpful way of considering multiple sites as part of an inter-related network or pattern, including off-sites and non-sites: highlighting their distinctions and qualities of difference as well as mobilizing circuits of connection between them. My own intellectual approach and practice of 'site-writing' takes research and writing to be a form of situated practice, and operates using site-specific techniques to critique disciplinary methods of enquiry and interpretation, creating spatial texts which respond to and encourage the encounters between artist, work and critic; writer, text and reader.[26]

The recent recognition of practice – in art, design and architecture as well as writing – as a form of research legitimated by the academy has raised interesting questions about the relation between process and product, and the role material objects, as well as ideas, play in the production of knowledge. While the kinds of objects produced through practice-led research might differ in their purpose, role and affect, they provide the possibility for rethinking some of the research methodologies traditional to the humanities, social and natural sciences, in particular the ordering of the key elements of research – questions, contexts and methods. It is often by shifting the sequence of activities, for example, by discovering research questions through, rather than before, the generation of an artefact that practice transforms existing research paradigms.[27] And until very recently, the academic context, offered practitioners the opportunity to make 'problematic' objects – those that provide questions rather than answers – and an environment other than the market where it was not necessary to anticipate in advance the application of an invention or to predict the economic or cultural impact of a work.[28]

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[25] For a definition and discussion of Smithson's site and non-site dialectic, see Robert Smithson, '"Earth" (1969) Symposium at White Museum, Cornell University' and Robert Smithson, 'Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site' (1967), Jack Flam (ed.) *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

[26] See Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*, (London: IB Tauris, 2010).

[27] See Jane Rendell, 'Architectural Research and Disciplinarity', *Architecture Research Quarterly*, v. 8, n. 4 (2004) pp. 141–7. See also Jane Rendell, 'Architecture and Interdisciplinarity: Modes of Operation', *Building Material*, *Journal of the Architectural Association of Ireland* (2010).

[28] 'Impact' has recently been introduced in the UK as a key criterium in assessing the quality of research applications and outcomes. This involves providing evidence of the contribution of research makes to the national economy in order to justify its public funding. Despite widespread resistance and critique, the culture of impact has already begun to shift the research activities of the academy towards models of application and prediction. See Jane Rendell, 'Sudden Impact', *Architecture Research Quarterly*, v. 14, n. 1, (2010) pp. 5–7.

The recent 'pedagogical turn' has focused on the relation between art and practice-led research, including examining the educational potential of off-site gallery programmes, and the value of fine art and design doctorates.[29] For example, a practice-led PhD is often considered to confer an additional status on a fine artist as an academic, but questions have been raised as to the kind of difference a research-based approach focused on the generation of a 'thesis', makes to an art work. In architecture, practice-led or so-called design research occupies a different role, as a site of critical possibility for advancing forms of practice less easily supported by the profession's closer relation to the market, yet at the same time frequently considered as irrelevant to the mainstream activities of the construction industry.

The debates around these issues are fascinating, and yet far from delivering a just or practical solution to the disastrous profligacy of the financial sector, we find the UK and other European governments moving to slash the funding of public education – removing in the UK the entire teaching grant for undergraduates studying arts and humanities (though given the tiny sums of money involved in funding the academy compared to the sums assigned to private interests it is clear the aim is not economic but ideological). We are now seeing just the beginning of engineered austerity in Europe, where the agenda of education and research becomes increasingly tied to the market. In such a precarious moment debates concerning the sites of pedagogy and research are rapidly transforming into more urgent discussions regarding the role of art education as part of larger social movement of resistance and emancipation. We find a strong interest in sites for alternative 'artistic' research and culture a feature of Šušteršic's work, in particular in her project *Research Department. Meeting Room* (2005) where participants exchanged ideas around education and knowledge production, and discussed free, anti and alternative universities around Europe, highlighting the relation between art and radical pedagogy as a problematic in itself.

The Relational, or, how do subjects make objects (and objects make subjects)?

A feature of much contemporary art practice and criticism has been a shift towards understanding art as relational[30] or dialogical.[31] 'Relational aesthetics', despite important critiques put forward regarding the

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[29] See for example Paul O'Neill & Mick Wilson (eds) *Curating and the Educational Turn* (Amsterdam/London: De Appel/Open Editions, 2010).

[30] Nicolas Bourriaud argues that the work of particular artists produces open-ended conditions that invite the viewer to participate in the construction of the work, where the work of art operates as a partial object, a vehicle of relation to the other. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, (Dijon: Presses du reel, 2002), p. 47 and p. 99.

[31] Grant H. Kester provides a way to consider art and the making of relationships through discussions

often non-critical attitude adopted towards the social, has risen to a position of the new orthodoxy in fine art practice,[32] and its ascendency has served to displace a number of historical precedents: for example, various live art movements of the 1970s, the writings of feminists such as Suzi Gablik on aesthetic practices of connection and listening,[33] and Joseph Beuys' concept of social sculpture which also places emphasis on the role that physical objects can play in prompting and tracing relationships between those people – artists, architects, users and participants – involved in producing a work.[34] In the 1990s, in their re-positioning of architectural process as product, the art-architecture collaborative muf asked 'what does it take to make a relationship to make a thing?' We are now experiencing the question from the other direction, in, for example, the ECObox project based in the La Chapelle area of Paris, where aaa (*atelier d'architecture autogérée*) use the production of architecture as a vehicle for the enabling of new subjectivities – those with the agency to develop their own urban spaces – so seeming to ask in inversion: 'what does it take to make a thing to make a relationship?'[35]

Yet when the relationship between subjects rather than things – or objects – becomes the focus of attention, the provocative questions raised by the aesthetic choices artists and architects are often left out of the discussion. The materials and colours chosen by Šušteršic, for example, seem to slip away from most critical accounts of her work, with the exception of Peio Aguirre who has commented that Šušteršic's choice of orange and 'cappuccino-colour' in *Sputnik Lobby* (2002) reveals the 'subtlety' of her 'decodification of the detail and sign'.[36] At times Šušteršic intentionally employs the direct meaning of a

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around dialogue following the writings of Emmanuel Levinas on 'face-to-face' encounter which provide an ethical dimension to the debate, in particular his concept of the figure of the irreducible 'Other', and invoking literary critic Mikhail Bahktin to argue that meaning is constructed between the speaker and the listener, rather than simply given. See Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) pp. 118–23.

[32] For the most influential of these criticisms, see Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, n. 110 (2004) pp. 51-79.

[33] See Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) and Suzi Gablik, 'Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism', in Suzanne Lacy (ed.) *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) pp. 74–87.

[34] Joseph Beuys, 'I am Searching for a Field Character' (completed in 1974 and translated by Caroline Tisdall), in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds) *Art in Theory 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) p. 903. This article was originally published in the exhibition catalogue *Art into Society, Society into Art* (London, Institute of Contemporary Art, 1974).

[35] Doina Petrescu, 'Losing Control, Keeping Desire', Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till (eds), *Architecture and Participation* (London: Spon Press, 2005) pp. 43–64.

[36] Peio Aguirre, 'Apolonija Sustersic's Artistic Research', Pablo Fanego (ed.) *A Cidade Interpretada* (Santiago de Compostela: Concello de Santiago, 2006).

sign, for example, her use of colour is obvious, and necessarily so, in the choice of a particular blue and yellow to indicate Ikea in *MUSU – Muzej Sodobne Umetnosti* (2006). Less obvious, and perhaps more fascinating, is her frequent selection of the building material 'betonplex' – a kind of plywood often employed as shuttering for the pouring of concrete – suggesting activities like casting and moulding, so pointing to the fluidity of outcomes yet to be formed. By also indicating gestures of holding and containing, the material substance hints at the role the carefully configured artefacts constructed out of it, might play a role as devices which certainly facilitate but also to a certain extent determine the shape of the future relations they engender. However, in other projects, the associations set forth by Šušteršic's aesthetic palette, seem even more subtle and illusory, perhaps unconscious, for example, what is one to make of the blood-red colour of the furniture used in *Showroom/Meeting room, Backroom* (2003) located in what was once a military barracks?

In many works Šušteršic selects objects and materials which communicate multiple and potentially destablising meanings, as, for example, in the blackboard in *Research Department. Meeting Room* (2005), which, as well as signalling the more conventional connections with didactic modes of education also hints at alternative pedagogies for those aware of its use in Beuys's works around the Free University. The use of 'astroturf' in many of Šušteršic's early works is also ambiguous, pointing both romantically to the collective space of a village green and more playfully as an ironic use of a 'retro' 1970's material. But 'astroturf' also carries connotations of substitution, artificiality and falsehood, indeed the phrase has come to refer to the corporate practice of appropriating the credibility of community activism through the setting-up of fake 'grassroots' initiatives. So the choice of plastic grass might therefore be pointing, in a self-critical fashion, to the notion of substitution itself. One could argue that the deployment of certain materials as gestures of parody, or 'self-ironisation' in the work of Cornford & Cross,[37] can serve as a possible line of defence against appropriation. The resignification of materials with respect to their context locates the aesthetics of *détournement* and its opposite – recuperation – as a problematic that subjects contest through the object.

The Functional, or, why does art use architecture?
Art and architecture are frequently differentiated in terms of their relationship to 'function'. Unlike architecture, art may not be functional in traditional terms, for example in responding to social needs,

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[37] The critic John Roberts has used the term 'self-ironisation' in this regard, while also noting that: 'But by ironising the category of public art, they do not thereby dissolve its partisan claims for the social meaning of art'. See John Roberts, 'Fade Out', *Cornford & Cross*, (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009), pp. 11-18, p. 16.

giving shelter when it rains, or designing a room in which to perform open-heart surgery, but we could say that art is functional in providing certain kinds of tools for self-reflection, critical thinking and social change. Art offers a place and occasion for new kinds of relationship 'to function' between people. If we consider this expanded version of the term function in relation to architecture, we realize that architecture is seldom given the opportunity to have no function or to consider the construction of critical concepts as its most important purpose.

Further, if architecture can be considered a form of practice conducted in response to a brief or a set of requirements and architects are expected to provide solutions to problems, albeit creative ones within a given set of parameters, and if fine art is defined by its independence from such requirements and artists are encouraged to rethink parameters and the terms of engagement they offer, then practices such as Šušteršic's, which address the procedures of both fine art and architecture, and draw on their differing approaches, could be described as interdisciplinary.[38] This might involve critiquing some of the functionalities inherent in architectural design, such as the frequent command to alleviate social problems, to comply with health and safety requirements, or be accessible to diverse audiences and groups of users, but also at the same time to choose other aspects of the functional, for example, the provision of a specific function or use, perhaps a service to the public.

The relation Šušteršic makes to function in her work is not really ambivalent, rather she positively embraces function as a way of addressing issues around art's use value (maybe as a critique of the very definition of art by some as useless). An early project *Light Therapy* (1999) remains indicative of her ongoing interest making art works, which provide certain services, and thereby reposition the viewer as a user. This practice prompts me to wonder whether work such as this, that is framed institutionally as art, and which also marks itself as functional, may not only be making users of art, but also, in the manner of an interdisciplinary critique, making use of architecture in some way. In such a mode of critical spatial practice, when art's viewer becomes a user, do such users regard the objects they are invited to engage with differently from viewers? For me, this unstable relation between viewing and using subjects presents an interesting problematic for contemporary practice which positions itself between art and architecture.

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[38] See Jane Rendell *Art and Architecture* (London: IB Tauris, 2006) and Jane Rendell, 'The Transitional Space of Interdisciplinarity', Daniel Hinchcliffe, Jane Calow and Laura Mansfield (eds), *Speculative Strategies In Interdisciplinary Arts Practice,* (forthcoming 2012).

Jane Rendell
Comment [1]:

Jane Rendell
Comment [2]: might it be that fine art is subject to controls, that are all the more effective for the fact that they are rarely discussed, much less explicitly articulated in a brief?

Jane Rendell
Comment [3]:

The Performative, or, when is the time of critical spatial practice?

The 'reassertion of space in critical social theory', the subtitle of Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* of 1989, refers to one of the main projects for cultural geographers in the 1970s.[39] A number of Marxist geographers in that period took issue with the dialectical processes of historical materialism, where history was taken to be the active entity in shaping social production; and space was considered merely as the site in which social relations took place. Geographers such as Soja, David Harvey and Doreen Massey argued for the importance of space in producing social relationships and in so doing turned to the work of Lefebvre,[40] and his understanding of the two-way relation between the spatial and the social: 'Space and the political organization of space […] express social relationships but also react back upon them.'[41]

The 'spatial turn' in the late 1980s and early 1990s highlighted the importance of space rather than time in the postmodern period. In offering a review of the 'seminal' theorists whose 'spatial thinking' had influenced geographers, a number of new themes in spatial thinking, such as deferral, experience, mobility, performance, practice, trace, and travel, were identified by Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift.[42] It is interesting to note that in acknowledging the *time* of space, place and site, and alluding to the performative arts, scenography, film and theatre, several of these thematics are integral features of the more recent 'performative turn'.[43]

I have been interested recently in rethinking Soja's call for the 'reassertion of space in social theory' as the 'reassertion of time into critical spatial practice', leading me to consider not necessarily time as history, the history which dominated historical materialism, and which led geographers to call for the reassertion of space, nor necessarily a full philosophical investigation into all of time's modalities – duration, ephemerality, event, flow, and flux – but rather how time operates through the spatial practices of Lefebvre and de Certeau, as well as the self-reflective and emancipatory impulses of

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[39] Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

[40] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) and Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

[41] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* op. cit., p. 8. This quote from emphasized by David Harvey, is discussed in Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989) p. 81. See footnote 4.

[42] See Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, 'Introduction', Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (eds) *Thinking Space* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1–30, especially pp.19–24.

[43] Jane Rendell, 'Constellations (or the Reassertion of Time into Critical Spatial Practice)', Claire Doherty and David Cross (eds) *One Day Sculpture*, (Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2009).

Frankfurt School 'critical theory',[44] and how, in time, as curator Claire Doherty has proposed, sites become situations.[45] Practice is a process, it is time-based: to practice is a verb, verbs are words of action – they make or take place over time. Considered over time, we notice how self-reflection ebbs and flows around confidence and doubt, and how social emancipation requires patience, as well as the more urgent and fleeting shocks of revolt and rupture.

Šušteršic suggests that if a choice were to be made between revolution and evolution, she would place her own work on the side of evolution: 'I don't really believe in revolution', she says candidly, 'evolution might be difficult enough'.[46] Present from early projects like *Suggestion for the Day* (2000), *City Lounge* (2001), *Home Design Service* (2001) and *Community Research Office* (2003), is her ongoing wish for art to engage with the future through long-term planning processes, and her invention of different ways in which this might take place. Her most recent project *Hustadt* is evolving over a longer time-frame than many previous works, related to a practice-led doctorate she is now researching. I think her practice gains a different kind of credence from this kind of slowness, with the designed artefacts operating less as well-intended props for action put in place by the artist, and more as accretions, where the physical structures appear over time to have both grown into and out of a community. The problematic raised here is how an open-ended artistic practice might inform and guide the more pre-determined discipline of planning in ways which can allow for the unpredictability of the future with respect to potential fiat currency collapse, climate chaos, peak resources and the volatilities created by enforced austerity.

The Transitional, or, how can change take place?
Psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott introduced the idea of a transitional object, related to, but distinct from, both the external object, the mother's breast, and the internal object, the introjected breast. For Winnicott, the transitional object or the original 'not-me' possession stands for the breast or first object, but the use of symbolism implies the child's ability to make a distinction between fantasy and fact, between internal and external objects.[47] This ability to keep inner and outer realities separate yet inter-

[44] See Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture* (London: IB Tauris, 2006), part 2.

[45] I would argue that this is an outcome of the conceptual shift from studio to situation made by curator Claire Doherty. See for example Claire Doherty (ed.) *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004) and Claire Doherty (ed.) *Situation* (Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press, 2009). See also http://www.situations.org.uk/ (accessed 2 March 2012).

[46] 'Conversation between Maria Lind and Apolonija Šušteršic', op. cit., p. 49.

[47] D. W. Winnicott, 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena – A Study of the First Not-Me Possession', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, v. 34 (1953) pp. 89–97, see in particular pp. 89

related results in an intermediate area of experience, the 'potential space', which Winnicott claimed is retained and later in life contributes to the intensity of cultural experiences around art and religion. Winnicott discussed cultural experience as located in the 'potential space' between 'the individual and the environment (originally the object)'.[48]

André Green has considered the analytic setting a 'homologue' for what he calls the third element in analysis, the 'analytic object', which in his view 'corresponds precisely to Winnicott's definition of the transitional object'.[49] For Green, the analytic object is formed through the analytic association between analyst and analysand;[50] it is 'neither internal (to the analysand or to the analyst), nor external (to either the one or the other), but is situated between the two' and located 'in the intermediate area of potential space, the space of "overlap" demarcated by the analytic setting.'[51]

The concept of the setting as a transitional and potential space, offers a consideration of Šušteršic's work in a theatrical sense as the design and staging of potentiality.[52] Many of her projects adopt a scenographic approach, where the choreographing of artefacts through space creates scenes for possible actions – sites and events that are often reconfigured and so transform over time. In *Showroom/Meeting room, Backroom* (2003) Šušteršic explicitly plays on the interaction typical in theatre architecture of 'on stage' and 'back of house'. Here, between two differing modes of presentation and conversation, one a performance anticipating an audience, and the other a casual and intimate event, locate the project as a setting between these two adjacent sites. Yet the psychoanalytic notion of the setting emphasizes the psychic element of the overlap between two people – their communication

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and 94. See also D. W. Winnicott, 'The Use of an Object', *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, v. 50 (1969) pp. 711–716.

[48] D. W. Winnicott, 'The Location of Cultural Experience', *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, v. 48 (1967) pp. 368–372, p. 371. See also D. W. *Winnicott: Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[49] André Green, 'Potential Space in Psychoanalysis: The Object in the Setting', Simon A. Grolnick and Leonard Barkin (eds) *Between Reality and Fantasy: Transitional Objects and Phenomena* (New York and London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1978) pp. 169–189, p. 180.

[50] André Green, 'The Analyst, Symbolization and Absence in the Analytic Setting (On Changes in Analytic Practice and Analytic Experience) – In Memory of D. W. Winnicott', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, v. 56 (1975) pp. 1–22, p. 12.

[51] Green, 'Potential Space in Psychoanalysis", op. cit., p. 180.

[52] For interesting new work on the relation between design, performance and scenography from a critical perspective, see Dorita Hannah and Olav Harsof (eds) *Performance Design* (University of Copenhagen: 2008) and Thea Brejzek (ed.) *Expanding Scenography* (Czech Theatre Institute: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2011).

occurring via the linkage of two functions – the analysand's free associations and the analyst's evenly suspended attentiveness.[53] Perhaps then the full implications of Šušteršic's interventions are not only to be found in the immediate moment and the visible and documented interactions, but also through the invisible traces suggestive of actions yet to come that these encounters leave within their participants.

Another definition of the transitional object or potential space is to be found in the concept of the social condenser developed through the theoretical and then practical work of the Russian constructivists in the 1920s. The constructivist design methodology was developed in the designs for apartment types 'A-F' for STROIKOM, the Russian Building Committee, and then realized in six schemes, including the Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow, designed by Moisei Ginzburg with Ignatii Milinis in 1928-1929.[54] Victor Buchli explains that the Narkomfin was a 'social condenser' of the transitional type. This meant that the accommodation allowed for both preexisting bourgeois living patterns (K and 2-F units) and fully communist F units.[55] The former included kitchens and a family hearth, while the latter was primarily a sleeping unit with minimal facilities for preparing food, since cooking and eating were to take place in the communal block. Buchli stresses that the variety in the design was not an expression of tolerance, but rather reflected the belief that architecture had a transformative power, capable of 'induc[ing] a particular form of social organization', and that the intention was that the building would help ease those following bourgeois living patterns into adopting socialist ones.[56]

Aligned with many modern housing schemes which have failed in their intentions – though often through structural and material failure or the lack of investment in the communal spaces rather than aspects of the design philosophy – today the proposition that architecture should intend to, and can, change social relations is a design approach discredited as determinism by contemporary practitioners. Critical architects in the 1990s and first decade of the twenty-first century were more interested in

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[53] See Christopher Bollas, 'Freudian Intersubjectivity: Commentary on Paper by Julie Gerhardt and Annie Sweetnam,' *Psychoanalytic Dialogues,* v. 11 (2001) pp. 93–105, p. 93.

[54] See Catherine Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde: Theories of Art, Architecture and the City* (London: Academy Editions, 1995), pp. 44–5. See also Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

[55] Buchli notes that the original design was the A-1 *Don Kommuna* entered in a competition and exhibition of *Don Kommuny* organized by OSA in Moscow in 1927. Victor Buchli, 'Moisei Ginzburg's Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 57, 2 (1998) pp. 160–181, p. 162 and p. 179, note 13.

[56] Buchli, 'Moisei Ginzburg's Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow', op. cit., p. 162.

situations where occupants thwarted designers' aspirations to control them,[57] and focused instead on unruly forms of use against the grain as modes of resistance. However, in order to address the pressing issues of our times – potential financial collapse, certain resource scarcity and unpredictable climate change – many designers are aligning themselves with programmes that response ethically to the challenges created by the principles of inequality inherent in the neoliberal project. Here we find in architectural design the return of social agendas and hope for future change, but operating through notions of 'agency' and 'alterity', rather than the social determinism of the modern period.[58]

Two radical social projects I greatly admire – the Transition Towns movement and the New Economic Foundation's blueprint for change, *The Great Transition* – deploy the word transition to indicate the kind of transformation they advocate.[59] This interests me greatly as the term transition situates change both spatially and temporally as the passage from one condition, action, place or state to another,[60] allowing for incremental alterations rather than seismic ones. According to the psychoanalytic principle I have outlined above transitional space takes into account emotional conditions as well as material and economic ones. We might then think of Šušteršic's work as part of this current paradigm shift in critical design – as a refunctioning of the 'social condenser of the transitional type' – ready for the challenges we face in the twenty-first century. Her projects provide settings, which engage with the problematics of our times, not by predicting outcomes, but by allowing people to come together to negotiate what might be.

[57] See for example, Jane Rendell, 'Doing it, (Un)Doing it, (Over)Doing it Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse', Jonathan Hill (ed.) *Occupying Architecture* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 229–46 and Jonathan Hill, *Actions of Architecture***:** Architects and Creative Users, London: Routledge, 2003).

[58] Recent architectural research and practice has focused on the 'agency' of critical architects and their potential to act 'otherwise' or against the grain. See for example Doina Petrescu (ed.) *Altering Practices* (London: Routledge, 2007) and Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till (eds) *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[59] See Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience* (Foxhole, Dartington: Green Books Ltd., 2008) and http://neweconomics.org/publications/great-transition (accessed 2 March 2012).

[60] http://www.oed.com/ (accessed 7 March 2012). For a longer discussion of transitional spaces in architecture and psychoanalysis, see Jane Rendell, 'The Setting and the Social Condenser: Transitional Objects in Architecture and Psychoanalysis', Adam Sharr (ed.) *Architecture as Cultural Artefact*. (London, Routledge, forthcoming 2012) and Jane Rendell, 'May Mo(u)rn: A Site-Writing', Nadir Lahiji (ed.) *Essays in Honour of Fredric Jameson*, (London: Ashgate, 2011).