

Space, Place and Site in Critical Spatial Arts Practice¹

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In producing artworks outside the gallery new forms of curating have increasingly emphasized the importance of space, place and site. This chapter relates current discussions concerning off-site curating and site-specific art to the critical debates around site that emerged in connection to minimalist and land art in the late 1960s and theories of space and place in contemporary cultural geography.

Today's interest in 'site-specific' art has developed an understanding of site beyond its location as the place of the work in relation to performance and ethnography. Nick Kaye, for example, has made an argument for site as a performed place, while various other authors have positioned site within an ethnographic perspective that includes the research processes of field-work as well as the artist as a contemporary ethnographer.² These new understandings do not define sites in terms of geometry but in relation to the cultural and spatial practices that produce them including the actions of the critics and artists themselves. Indeed Hal Foster has noted self-critique, along with culture, context, alterity and interdisciplinarity, as particular aspects of anthropological research to have impacted on fine art practice.³

In her recent publication, *One Place after Another*, Miwon Kwon suggests that site-specificity has been 'embraced as an automatic signifier of "criticality"' in current art practice'.⁴ In her

¹ This chapter is based on material from my sole-authored book on the subject of critical spatial practice. See Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: IB Tauris, 2006).

² See Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*, (London, 2000) and Alex Coles (ed.), *Site Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, (London, 2000). Julie H. Reiss, argues that site-specificity is one of the key characteristics of installation art. See Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*, (Cambridge Mass., 1999).

³ Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (and other diatribes)*, (London, 2002), p. 91.

⁴ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), p. 1.

opinion, much site-specific work lacks criticality, since, for Kwon, the radical potential of site-specific practice is always open to co-option by institutional and market forces. The very title of the book sounds a warning of what Kwon calls 'undifferentiated serialisation', one of the dangers she associates with taking one site after another without examining the differences between them.⁵ Instead, Kwon points to Homi Bhabha's concept of 'relational specificity' as a way of thinking about the particularity of the relationships between objects, people and spaces positioned, like James Clifford's notion of site, as a mobile place located between fixed points. Such an understanding develops site as a specific but also relational term.⁶

Perhaps Robert Smithson's dialectic of 'site' (non-gallery) and 'non-site' (gallery), manifest in artworks and writings in the 1960s and early 1970s, could be described as an earlier exploration of relational sites through art practice. In the first section, I examine the current interest in locating work outside the physical confines of the gallery in relation to Smithson's dialectic. The Dia Center for the Arts, located at 548 West 22nd Street in Chelsea, New York City, part of a much larger network of artworks sited across the city and the US, is taken as a point of departure. The section also looks at the UK, where recent curatorial practices have located art outside the gallery in multiple sites, city-wide or even country-wide. The term 'off-site' has been adopted by many contemporary galleries to describe the commissioning and curating of works situated outside the physical confines of the gallery, where, in a strange reversal of Smithson's dual relationship, the gallery is the 'site'.

If the spatial organization of artworks in the first section could be described as dispersed from an originating point, in the second section there is no reference to the central, if absent, site of the gallery. Instead the second section examines projects, such as 'In the Midst of Things' (1999) in Bourneville, where the decision to locate a number of specially commissioned artworks across a specific territory is the strategic and conceptual decision of independent

⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

⁶ James Clifford interviewed by Alex Coles, 'An Ethnographer in the Field' Coles, ed., *Site Specificity*, pp. 52-73.

curators. This kind of work takes its inspiration from the on-going projects at Munster and Documenta at Kassel where artworks are curated throughout the city.

This simultaneous production of a number of artworks across multiple sites can be considered in relation to Rosalind Krauss' notion of an 'expanded field' first introduced in 1979 to describe the work of artists producing interventions into the landscape. When Krauss expanded the term sculpture in relation to architecture and landscape, she did so by examining individual artworks. But contemporary practice seems to raise new questions concerning terminology and method. Is the expanded field best understood in terms of site, place or space? Can the processes of art, architecture and landscape design be better described in an interdisciplinary way as spatial practices?

In the 1970s one of the main projects for cultural geographers was the 'reassertion of space in social theory'.⁷ In marxist thought, time had been taken to be the active entity in shaping social production; space was merely the site in which social relations took place. For the first time, geographers such as David Harvey, Doreen Massey and Edward Soja, argued for the importance of space in producing social relationships and in so doing turned to the work of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre.⁸ In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre noted that one of the key problems with studies of space was the understanding of spatial practice as the 'projection' of the social onto the spatial field. Lefebvre suggested instead that this relation was two-way:

Space and the political organization of space express social relationships but also react back upon them. ⁹

⁷ Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Social Theory*, (London, 1989).

⁸ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Oxford, 1989) and Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, (Cambridge, 1994).

⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Oxford, 1991), p. 8. This quote from Henri Lefebvre emphasised by David Harvey is discussed in Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 81. See footnote 4.

Soja described this concept of Lefebvre's as the 'fundamental notion of the socio-spatial dialectic: that social and spatial relations are dialectically inter-reactive, interdependent; that social relations of production are both space-forming and space contingent'.¹⁰

In highlighting the importance of space rather than time in the postmodern period, cultural geography's 'spatial turn' attracted academics from all kinds of disciplines. And by 2002, the time had come to reflect upon what could be called the 'geographic turn'. In *Thinking Space*, a collection of essays edited by geographers Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, authors reviewed the 'seminal' theorists whose 'spatial thinking' had influenced geographers.¹¹ *Thinking Space* identifies a number of new themes in spatial thinking, such as experience and travel, trace and deferral, mobility, practice and performance. Interestingly, such themes could also describe the focus of much recent art theory and practice, marking a new intersection between art and geography around spatial practice.¹²

Along with Lefebvre, the other equally influential thinker in the field of spatial theory, is anthropologist Michel de Certeau, who in his seminal text, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, develops an understanding of place and space connected to linguistic practice.¹³ Drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure's notions of langue and parole, where langue is the complex of rules and conventions that constitute a language and parole is the practice of speech, for de Certeau, 'space is a practiced place'.¹⁴ While de Certeau's understanding of space, as socially

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

¹¹ Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, eds, *Thinking Space*. (London, 2000).

¹² Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, 'Introduction', Crang and Thrift, eds, *Thinking Space*. pp. 1-30, pp. 19-24.

¹³ Michael de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley, 1988). See also Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking*, (trans. Timothy J. Tomasik), (Minneapolis, 1998).

¹⁴ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 117.

produced and experienced, resonates with the work of cultural geographers, his arguments concerning 'place' seem to be more problematic. In arguing for space as dynamic and constituted through practice, place somehow becomes fixed and passive in his writings, indeed at one point de Certeau compares place to a 'tomb'.¹⁵

The third section of this chapter looks at site-specific art in relation to de Certeau's notion of 'space as a practiced place' and argues that in 'practicing' specific places certain art works produce critical spaces. This last section examines the work of commissioning agencies such as Artangel who work with selected artists to produce art in unexpected places in the city. The artworks produced by such commissioning agencies can be considered constellations, a little like a view of the night sky, where each one of the many stars we can see has a different life span. At a given moment, each individual artwork can be understood as an isolated spot, however when viewed as a constellation over time, places in the city are positioned in relation to one another, temporally as well as spatially.

Such a view fits very well with the understandings of place put forward by many of the authors in Steve Pile and Michael Keith's edited collection of essays, *Place and the Politics of Identity*.¹⁶ And Doreen Massey has argued for an understanding of place as 'unfixed, contested and multiple'. For Massey, although a place may comprise one articulation of the spatial or one particular moment in a network of social relations, each point of view is contingent and subject to change.¹⁷ 'Unfixing' place operates as a critique of writings in recent human geography and architectural theory that have emphasized the specific qualities of particular places, as if they are somehow pre-given and not open to change or connected to wider conditions.¹⁸ This work, including Yi-Tu Tuan's notion of topophilia and Gaston

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁶ Michael Keith and Steve Pile, eds, *Place and the Politics of Identity*, (London, 1993).

¹⁷ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ See for example, Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, [1958], trans. Maria Jolas, (Boston, 1969) and Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception*,

Bachelard's concept of topoanalysis, has been invaluable in emphasizing a humane, imaginative and sensual understanding of place. Yet the focus on 'genius loci', in architecture in particular, has had essentializing tendencies.¹⁹ As Harvey has pointed out, highlighting the specific qualities of particular places is particularly problematic within the context of the expansion of post-modern global capitalism:

. . . the less important the spatial barriers, the greater the sensitivity of capital to the variations of place within space, and the greater the incentive for places to be differentiated in ways attractive to capital.²⁰

The writings of Harvey and Massey, as well as Kwon and others, stress the importance of understanding the specifics of particular sites and places but only in relational terms as parts of larger networks, systems and processes, physically and ideologically.

Site, Non-Site and Off-Site

Robert Smithson's 'Spiral Jetty' (1970) was the focus of a conference held at Tate Britain in London in 2001. One of the key issues that emerged was our 'distance' today from works of land art produced in the 1960s and '70s, both historically and physically. It was mooted that this very remoteness has allowed the work to resonate in more speculative ways. Indeed the imagination of the audience might today be the most potent place land art occupies.²¹ (illus. 1)

Attitudes, and Values, (New Jersey, 1974). See also Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, (Berkeley, 1997).

¹⁹ See for example Paul C. Adams, Steven Hoelscher and Karen E. Till, eds, *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, (Minneapolis, 2001), p. xix.

²⁰ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 296.

²¹ 'Land Art: The Enigma of Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty"', Tate Britain, London, (23 March 2001).

'Spiral Jetty', located on the Great Salt Lake in Utah, is an enormous coil that reaches into the lake counter-clockwise. 1500 feet long and fifteen feet wide where it joins the shore, the jetty is made of 6650 tons of black basalt rocks and earth taken from the site.²² As part of his desire to 'return to the origins of material' held in the site, along with other so-called land artists, such as Michael Heizer, Nancy Holt, Walter de Maria, Mary Miss, Robert Morris and Dennis Oppenheim, Smithson intervened in the landscape on a huge scale, often moving massive quantities of natural material.²³ 'Spiral Jetty' has been discussed in terms of its impressive size and also, having been submerged by the lake for a long period, its visibility. Smithson's death in a plane accident in 1973 while surveying the site of another piece of work, 'Amarillo Ramp', (1973) lends 'Spiral Jetty' a heroic quality. Stimulated largely by the film Nancy Holt and Smithson made of its construction, more recent criticism has focused on the performative aspects of the work. While Tacita Dean's journey to find the jetty, 'Trying to find the Spiral Jetty' (1997), locates 'Spiral Jetty' as a site of pilgrimage.

Between 1965-6 Smithson worked as a consultant artist to the architecture firm TAMS on designs for Dallas Fort Worth Airport. This project alerted him to ways of working outside the gallery, to consider how works might be viewed from the air and to think about how to communicate aspects of exterior works to passengers in the terminal building. This latter aspect Smithson termed the 'non-site'.²⁴

I was sort of interested in the dialogue between the indoor and the outdoor and on my own, after getting involved in it this way, I developed a method or a dialectic that involved what I call site and non-site. . . so I decided that I would set limits in terms

²² Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Los Angeles, 2002), pp. 202.

²³ Robert Smithson, 'The Spiral Jetty', (1972), Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson, The Collected Writings*, (Los Angeles, 1996), pp. 143-53.

²⁴ Boettger, *Earthworks*, pp. 55-8. See Robert Smithson, 'Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site', (1967), Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson*, pp. 52-60 and 'Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution (1972), Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson*, pp. 270-96, p. 291.

of this dialogue (it's a back and forth rhythm that moves between indoors and outdoors).²⁵

Through his interest in entropy, readymades and the monumental forms of industrial architecture, Smithson had been exploring specific sites since 1965.²⁶ His first non-site was made in relation to Pine Barrens, New Jersey, 'A Nonsite (an indoor earthwork)'.²⁷ Later re-titled 'A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey' (1969), this work consisted of bins filled with sand taken from the runways of a little used wilderness airfield laid out in a hexagonal pattern in the gallery with a photostat map and a text that read:

31 sub-divisions based on a hexagonal 'airfield' in the Woodmansie Quadrangle - New Jersey (Topographic) map. Each subdivision of the *Nonsite* contains sand from the *site* shown on the map. Tours between the *Nonsite* and *site* are possible. The red dot on the map is the place where the sand was collected'.²⁸

Over the same time period Dennis Oppenheim had also been developing a similar interest in site. For example, in 'Site markers with information', (1967) Oppenheim marked sites with aluminium posts which he photographed and described in writing.²⁹

²⁵ 'Earth', (1969), Symposium at White Museum, Cornell University', Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson*, pp. 177-87, p. 178.

²⁶ See Robert Smithson, 'Entropy and New Monuments', (1966), Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson*, pp. 10-23 and Robert Smithson, 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey', (1967), Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson*, pp. 68-74.

²⁷ Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim and Smithson/Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp, Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson*, pp. 242-52, p. 244. This discussion was first published in *Avalanche Magazine*, (Fall 1970), p.3.

²⁸ Boettget, *Earthworks*, p. 67.

²⁹ *Dennis Oppenheim*, by Germano Celant; Charta, Milan, (Milan, 1997), pp. 28-9. See also Germano Celant, 'Dennis Oppenheim: Explorations', *Dennis Oppenheim: Explorations*, by Germano Celant; Charta, Milan, (Milan, 2001), pp. 9-27.

The site markers effectively clouded the traditional distinctions between the artwork and the utilitarian object, and between the art context and the outside world.³⁰

Yet Smithson saw a number of differences between his own and Oppenheim's approaches to 'the dialectic between the outdoors and the gallery':

I think that what Dennis is doing is taking a site from one part of the world and transferring the data about it to another site, which I would call a dis-location . . . Where I differ from Dennis is that I'm dealing with an exterior and an interior situation as opposed to two exterior situations. . . I like the artificial limits that the gallery presents I would say my art exists in two realms – in my outdoor sites which can be visited only and which have no objects imposed on them, and indoors, where objects do exist. . .³¹

The most comprehensive description of Smithson's concept of the dialectical relationship between site and non-site can be found in his 1972 essay on 'Spiral Jetty'. Here he lists the qualities of sites and 'nonsites': the former have open limits, a series of points, outer co-ordinates, subtraction, indeterminate certainty, scattered information, and some place (physical) while the latter have closed limits, an array of matter, inner co-ordinates, addition, determinate uncertainty, contained information and no place (abstraction).³² Although Smithson stressed the relational or dialectical aspect of site and non-site, by using the term 'non' the implication is that the site is assigned the more privileged position in the relationship. The inconsistent use of the hyphen complicates things further, 'non-site' suggests a term

³⁰ *Dennis Oppenheim, Selected Work 1967-90*, by Alanna Heiss; ICA, London and PS1, New York, (New York), p. 10.

³¹ Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson*, p. 244.

³² Jack Flam, ed., 'The Spiral Jetty', (1972), Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson*, pp. 143-53, pp. 152-53.

whose identity is always related to a site and only by not being identical to it, whereas in 'nonsite' the identity of the site and its negation are terms less clearly held in opposition.

From 1987 to 2006, the Dia Art Foundation had an exhibition programme at the Dia Center for the Arts in a four storey renovated warehouse at 548 West 22nd Street in Chelsea, New York, but this gallery space was only one of a much larger collection of art works sited in other parts of the city and state, as well as diverse locations in far flung corners of the US. From its early days Dia has supported projects that because of their nature and scale require unusual locations.³³ For example, one of De Maria's sculptures funded by the Dia Art Foundation is to be found in the high desert of south-western New Mexico. 'The Lightning Field' (1971-7) consists of 400 stainless steel poles situated in a rectangular grid measuring one mile by one kilometre. To experience the work, you must book in advance to stay in a residence at the site that takes a maximum of six visitors and visit at a time of year when lightning is expected. The artist describes how the work is to be viewed:

The land is not the setting for the work but part of the work.

A simple walk around the perimeter of the poles takes approximately two hours.

Because the sky-ground relationship is central to the work, viewing 'The Lightning Field' from the air is of no value.

³³ The original patronage of Philippa de Menil and Heiner Friedrich founded the Dia Foundation in 1974. Their interest was in commissioning and funding exceptional projects, such as 'The Lightning Field' by Walter de Maria and works by Judd, Heizer, Turrell and Beuys among others. The Lone Star Foundation, set up in 1976, had a different objective – to make a collection. In 1987 Dia opened an exhibition space in Chelsea in Manhattan whose exhibition program included the commissioning of new works by artists who came to maturity in the 1960s as well as younger and mid-career artists. The premise was long-term single artist projects. Some of these works have entered the collection, for example works by Irwin and Bridget Riley. In May 2003 a new space, Dia:Beacon, opened in upstate New York to put more of this permanent collection on display, to provide long term and in depth presentations of works by single artists. The building was renovated in consultation with American artist, Robert Irwin, and the architectural team Open Office. Artists were consulted regarding the choice of gallery space and disposition of their works. These comments are based on a discussion with the curator of the Dia Art Foundation, Lynne Cooke, in February 2003. See also www.diacenter.org (accessed 14 March 2006).

It is intended the work be viewed alone, or in the company of a very small group of people, over at least a 24-hour period.³⁴

Inseparable from its context, much land art was intended as a critique of the gallery system and the role of art as commodity. However, resisting the site of the gallery by locating work outside its physical limits, does not necessarily involve operating outside the institution of the gallery, economically and culturally. Indeed many works of land art would not exist without the funding of private patrons.³⁵ And although land art is often cited as a precedent for public art today, it was not always the aim of the artists of the 1960s and 1970s that their work be accessible. De Maria claimed that, 'Isolation is the essence of land art', and tightly controlled the photographic documentation of his work and the conditions under which it was to be viewed.³⁶ Many works of land art, like 'Spiral Jetty' and 'The Lightning Field', positioned in remote sites, have resulted in audiences composed only of dedicated specialists. Robert Morris suggests that land art is a paradoxical precedent for the rationale of accessibility that accompanies the 'off-site' programmes of many contemporary galleries:

It would not be accurate to designate privately funded early works of Smithson or Heizer or De Maria in remote parts of the desert as public art. The only public access to such works is photographic.³⁷

Located in Soho, the art district of New York that preceded Chelsea in the history of gentrification, are two other works by de Maria: 'The Broken Kilometer' (1979) and 'The New

³⁴ Walter de Maria quoted in Michael Archer, Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petri, *Installation Art*, (London, 1994), p. 34.

³⁵ Boettger, *Earthworks*, pp. 111-5 and p. 215.

³⁶ Walter de Maria quoted in Archer, de Oliveira, Oxley and Petri, *Installation Art*, p. 34.

³⁷ Robert Morris, 'Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture', Harriet F. Senie and Sally Wedster, eds, *Critical Issues in Public Art, Content, Context and Controversy*, (Washington, 1992), pp. 250-60, p. 251.

York Earth Room' (1977). Originally commissioned by the DIA Foundation, they continue to be supported by Dia. At 393 West Broadway, on a polished wood floor, between the grids of the iron columns, De Maria placed 500 brass rods in five parallel rows of 100 rods each. Each rod is positioned such that the distance between the rods increases by five millimetres consecutively from front to back. This is the companion piece to De Maria's 'Vertical Earth Kilometer' (1977) where a brass rod of the same diameter, total weight and total length, is inserted 1,000 metres into the ground. Around the corner, at 141 Wooster Street, De Maria's 'The New York Earth Room' is an interior earth sculpture, 335 metres square and 56 centimetres deep that, unlike his two other earth room sculptures in Munich (1968) and in the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, (1974), still exists.

Along the street in Chelsea where Dia was located is a row of grey rocks each one partnered by a young tree. The rocks are waist high and the trees though taller than the rocks are still slender. In time they will grow to overshadow their markers, and in a time even further distant, the trees will die and only the row of rocks will remain, looking just as they do today. The rocks and trees are part of Joseph Beuys' project '7000 Oaks' began in 1982 at Documenta 7, in Kassel, Germany and completed by the artist's son at the opening of Documenta 8 in 1987. Beuys' plan was for the planting of 7000 trees each paired with a basalt column, throughout the city and then the world. Beuys intended the work to be a social sculpture, a work of art made by many, transformed each time a tree was planted and a marker sited. In 1988 Dia installed five basalt stone columns, each paired with a tree, at 548 West 22nd Street and in 1996 another eight tree/basalt pairs were planted down 22nd Street from 10th to 11th Avenues. In 2007, the trees mark the site once occupied by the Dia Center for the Arts.³⁸

This work, like those of de Maria, sets up an interesting set of relationships between sites, yet says less about the particularities of the sites in which they are located. In Beuys' work

³⁸ The project, supported substantially by Dia, was managed through the Free International University (FIU). See *7000 Eichen: Joseph Beuys*, (Cologne, 1987).

growing tree and static stone are positioned in relation to one another and it is here that the dialectical tension of the work resides. De Maria's choice of materials, implacable brass and earth treated with chemicals to keep it inert, are those that refuse change, but the contexts into which these materials have been inserted are in constant flux, culturally and economically as well as physically. In Soho rents have risen dramatically since the original commissions twenty years ago. In 'If You Lived Here. . .', a project also commissioned by Dia between 1987-9, ten years after de Maria's work, Martha Rosler emphasised gentrified places as sites of contestation and connected the arrival of art galleries in Soho with the rising property prices.³⁹ Is this social context, the location where the work is 'sited', also the work?

Between city and sky in a small urban park set among the roof-tops of New York is a glass rectangle circling a cylindrical form also constructed from glass.⁴⁰ The cylinder is almost the same size and shape as the water-towers perched on the surrounding roofs. At times it is possible to see through the pavilion to the distant skyscrapers of down-town, to look through to the gap on the skyline where the twin towers used to be. At other times you are confronted by your own reflection. Whether the surface you face is glass or mirror depends on the weather and where you stand. In this work, like many others by Dan Graham, the cube references the grid of the city and modernist architecture while the cylinder relates the surface of the body to the horizon line. Yet the positioning of this particular piece allows it to articulate questions concerning the limits of sites, of the gallery and of the artwork, its particular position making it perhaps more pertinent than some of Graham's other works. On the roof you are inside the artwork, outside the building, yet still occupying territory owned by the gallery. Does the physical edge of a gallery mark the boundary of its site? Or, in Smithson's terms, does the rooftop become a site to the non-site of the gallery?

³⁹ Rosalyn Deutsche, 'Alternative Space', Brian Wallis, ed., *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism – A Project by Martha Rosler*, (Seattle, 1991), pp. XX-XX, p. 55.

⁴⁰ The park includes a pavilion designed by the artist Dan Graham in collaboration with architects Moji Baratloo and Clifton Balch and a Video Salon with a coffee bar showing work selected by the artist. See also Dan Graham, *Pavilions*, (Munich: Kunstverein München, 1988).

Looking up at the Camden Arts Centre, London, from the street below, the scaffolding wrapped around the first floor of the building suggests that construction works are underway. Inside the gallery is empty except for a platform of scaffolding poles and planks positioned along the edge of the two walls making the corner. By stepping up onto the platform you can walk outside through a window. This installation by Mexican artist, Jose Davila, marked the start of a major refurbishment of the gallery in the summer of 2002, continuing 'North London Link' a two-year programme of off-site projects that had started in June 1999 and prompted a new series of works.⁴¹ Unlike Graham's rooftop park where one occupies the same physical boundary – its condition as a site changes conceptually, Davila's work negotiates the changing material conditions at the boundary of the site of gallery, allowing the viewer to occupy a series of positions which change ones relationship to the physical edge of the art institution.

'North London Link' aimed to work with groups and communities within Camden. When Adam Chodzko was invited to make a piece of work as part of this off-site programme, he questioned the notion of an identifiable 'public' and accessibility. His intervention, 'Better Scenery' (2000) was 'an escapist proposition', consisting of two signs, one in the Arizona Desert and the other in the car park of a new shopping centre, the O2 Centre, in Camden.⁴² The O2 Centre is a highly simulated environment consisting of fake rock walls, a sub-tropical forest, water features and palm trees. A slice of Las Vegas on the Finchley Road, it is the kind of place that could easily be described as an empty signifier.

Both signs are black, in plain yellow lettering each one gives clear directions of how to get to the other. Both sets of directions end with the phrase:

⁴¹ This programme included Anna Best, 'MECCA', State Mecca Bingo Hall; Felix Gonzalez-Torres 'Untitled' (America), (1994-5); Maurice O'Connell, 'On Finchley Road' and Orla Barry, 'Across an Open Space'. Others artists worked with participants at Swiss Cottage library and the Royal Free NHS Trust.

⁴² See Adam Chodzko, *Plans and Spells*, (London, 2002), pp. 40-1. See also Adam Chodzko, 'Out of Place', John Carson and Susannah Silver, eds, *Out of the Bubble, Approaches to Contextual Practice within Fine Art Education*, (London, 2000), pp. 31-6.

Situated here, in this place, is a sign which describes the location of this sign you have just finished reading.⁴³

The signs relate the two sites dialectically, giving neither one preference. But in pointing only to each other, their relationship is entirely self-referential, they make no attempt to relate to their immediate context. Neither sign can be described as site or non-site, the two are entirely equivalent, each one bound up in the other. In speaking only about where they are not Chodzko's signs question the ethos of site-specificity and accessibility behind many off-site programmes.

When the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham moved site, artist Tania Kovats worked with architects Levitt Bernstein, supported by a Royal Society of Arts grant, to generate ideas for the new building. Kovat's initiative was to clad the 'plinth' on which the building sits in slate to increase its visual clarity. As you exit the Ikon you do so down steps profiled against a slate grey plinth.⁴⁴ But where exactly is this artwork located, in a site, non-site or off-site? Walking away from the gallery through the city, you circle the edge of the infamous Bull Ring, one of the structures that inspired Pierre Huyghe's 'Concrete Requiem' (2000) an orchestral composition created with composer James Bentley, played by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group for the opening of 'as it is', a series of art works commissioned by the Ikon but located outside the gallery.⁴⁵

It is hard to locate Birmingham 'as it is', since the transformation of a city connected with industry, canals, spaghetti junction, is already accompanied by a nostalgia towards the

⁴³ Chodzko, *Plans and Spells*, pp. 40-1.

⁴⁴ See Tania Kovats in collaboration with Levitt Bernstein Associates, New Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, *Frontiers; Artists and Architects, Architectural Design*, n. 128, (London, 1997), pp. 94-5.

⁴⁵ See *As It Is*; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, (Birmingham, 2000), p. 66 and also Claire Doherty, ed., *Out of Here: Creative Collaborations beyond the Gallery*; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, (Birmingham, 1998).

concrete architecture of the recent past, as well as a cynicism towards the supposedly affluent global future. As you approach the canal, new designer shops and bars line the water's edge. Japanese artist, Tadashi Kawamata made a meditation space here, a boat made out of discarded material, looking a little like the structure a homeless person might sleep in. ⁴⁶

In a nearby street, on the first floor of a warehouse in a neighbourhood undergoing regeneration, is a room with an invigilator seated behind a table laid out with art brochures and a sign-in book. The space beyond is occupied by ten boxes stacked up, two high, made of metal frames covered in plywood panels with circular holes cut out. The whole structure is no more than two metres tall. You can crawl onto the pink carpet floor through an entrance hole. In one place you can stand full height and look into all the rooms, two have sleeping sections with clean white duvets, another has a television, in a fourth is a computer. Artist Andrea Zittel lived here, in her artwork 'A-Z Cellular Compartment Units', for a short period.

Zittel's work speaks of our aspirations for dwelling, from the hermit existing in splendid isolation to the fun we have playing 'house'. Set inside a warehouse building due to be converted into luxury new apartments, the work raises important issues concerning housing: the amount of space each person needs, the difficulties of sharing living accommodation and the desire to compartmentalise activities. On first glance 'A-Z Cellular Compartment Units' looks a little like a show house at an Ideal Home Exhibition, but on closer inspection the construction does not reveal the qualities of a prototype or a functional structure. The lack of weatherproof finishes, the omission of any plumbing and the difficulty the construction creates for its occupants in terms of size and scale, make it clear that this machine is not easy to live in. This work might look like architecture but Zittel does not intend us to take up residence here, rather to think about what that might mean.

⁴⁶ *As It Is*, pp. 70-3. See also Tadashi Kawamata, *Field Work*; Sprengel Museum, Hannover, (Hannover, 1998).

Despite being located outside the physical confines of the gallery, the visible invigilation operates to maintain the institutional boundary of the gallery and position the work as art. Such works are commissioned as part of off-site programmes, usually the domain of a different team of curators from those that curate the internal spaces of the gallery. These artworks are usually expected to be accessible to a general public and aligned with the needs of the educational programme, their functionality, or directed social use, often resulting in a lower status for the work. 'Off-site' programmes may be carried out for pragmatic rather than for ideological reasons, for example, when the gallery premises are compromised by relocation or repairs. For this reason, I would argue against curators such as Elizabeth McGregor, one-time director at the Ikon, who in 1999 stated that the distinction between art commissioned inside and outside the gallery was becoming 'less and less relevant'.⁴⁷ On the contrary, precisely because certain kinds of curatorial practice, those that work with sites outside the gallery, continue to be down-graded within the gallery system, the differences that exist between sites, non-sites and off-sites, demand critical investigation.

The Expanded Field

Bourneville was built in the late nineteenth century as a village and factory complex in the British midlands. A paternalist development, it was conceived of by an enlightened capitalist, a chocolate manufacturer, George Cadbury, who wanted to create a pleasant environment for his workers. Despite the fact that it is built around a factory, an industrial development, Bourneville is modelled on the English village, with a green and bandstand, country styled 'cottages' and a row of shops. For 'In the Midst of Things', curators Nigel Prince and Gavin Wade invited 27 artists to make works at Bourneville, both outside and in the buildings themselves.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Public Art Journal*, (March 1999), v. 1, n. 1, p. 14.

⁴⁸ See Nigel Prince and Gavin Wade, eds., *In the Midst of Things*, (London, 2000). See also Gavin Wade, ed., *Curating in the 21st Century*, (New Art Gallery Walsall/University of Wolverhampton, 2000).

We were interested in developing an exhibition that would provide a critique of existing social models and begin to move toward offering new propositions.⁴⁹

In her 1979 essay, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', Krauss adopted the term 'expanded field' from Robert Morris, as an extended physical and mental terrain for understanding 'sculpture'.⁵⁰ Krauss argued that in post-renaissance art sculpture was defined as not-architecture and not-landscape, but that modernist sculpture had lost any relation to site, even a negative one, and become an abstraction or pure negativity. Adopting a technique called the 'Klein' group, Krauss repositioned contemporary sculpture in relation to the positive as well as the negative aspects of landscape and architecture.⁵¹ Within this field, as well as 'sculpture' (not-architecture and not-landscape), Krauss identified three new sculptural conventions, 'site construction' (landscape and architecture), 'marked site' (landscape and non-landscape) and 'axiomatic structure' (architecture and non-architecture).⁵²

The central feature of the method used by Krauss is the semiotic square.⁵³ Fredric Jameson has described this square as 'the supreme achievement of Greimassian semiotics'.⁵⁴ Based on

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁰ Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', Hal Foster, ed., *Postmodern Culture*, (UK, 1985), pp. 31-42. This essay was originally published in *October* 8 (Spring 1979).

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 36-8.

⁵² Ibid., p. 33.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 43. See footnote 1. Here Krauss references Marc Barbut for a discussion of the Klein group and A. J. Greimas and F. Rastier for the Piaget group, two different versions of the square. See Marc Barbut, 'On the Meaning of the Word "Structure" in Mathematics', Michael Lane, ed., *Introduction to Structuralism*, (New York, 1970) and A. J. Greimas and F. Rastier, 'The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints', *French Yale Studies*, n. 41, (1968), pp. 86-105. Barbut notes that the rediscovery of the Klein group in terms of its axiomatic basis and 'operations of rudimentary logic' is called the Piaget group by psychologists. Barbut, 'On the Meaning of the Word "Structure" in Mathematics', p. 379. In later writings. Krauss suggests that Greimas' work is a 'transformation of the Klein group' and a re-formulation of the semiotic square. See Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, (Cambridge Mass., 1994), p. 28, Bibliographical Note.

binary opposition, or in philosophical logic a contrary or strong opposition, for example black versus white, the semiotic square is capable of generating at least ten positions. First there are the contradictory or simple negatives of the two dominant terms, non white and non black, then the compound, white and black, known as the complex or utopian term and finally the neutral term, non black and non white. Jameson suggests that the square offers a 'discovery principle', one that can be used to 'map out and articulate a set of relationships'. But he emphasizes the importance of the 'inaugural decision', the choice and arrangement of the terms of the original opposition, as well as the 'peculiar nature' of the fourth term or 'the negation of the negation'.

This must be (when the operation is successful) the place of novelty and of paradoxical emergence: It is always the most critical position and the one which remains open or empty for the longest time . . . The semiotic square is thus not static but dynamic.⁵⁵

Krauss' inaugural decision, the placing of non-architecture and non-landscape in opposition to one another as a response to the term sculpture, limits the potential of possibilities for the square especially for the fourth term or the negation of the negation. Her expanded field produces a set of categories, which in their different combinations extend the possibilities for sculpture, but avoid the temporal aspect of the square and so the importance of discovering the potential of the fourth term. In a response to Krauss' essay, Craig Owens critiqued her method, arguing that post-structuralist discourse should involve a questioning of categories based on logic, rather than their re-assertion.⁵⁶ A later publication, *The Optical Unconscious*, was a move in this direction, here Krauss again uses the semiotic square, this time to rethink

⁵⁴ Fredric Jameson, 'Foreword', Algirdas Julien Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings on Semiotic Theory*, (trans. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins), (London, 1987), p. xiv-vi.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Kastner, ed., and Brian Wallis, *Land and Environmental Art*, (London: 1998), p. 37 discusses Craig Owens 'Earthworks' (1979).

the relation of figure and ground in modernism. Reflecting a little more on her own method and aim to understand modernism as a 'graph or table rather than a history', Krauss highlights her preference for exploring logic 'as a topography rather than following the threads of it as a narrative'. Again, she generates a square out of an opposition, this time figure ground, but in order to develop a more process based operation, Krauss juxtaposes her square with Jacques Lacan's 'Schema L' bringing vision and consciousness into her argument.⁵⁷

In 1979, Krauss' term, 'the expanded field', indicated the need to extend the critical discourse of art in order to accommodate new kinds of artworks produced in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, Hal Foster has suggested that the expanded field described by Krauss has imploded and that the categories are no longer held in productive contradiction.⁵⁸ In my opinion this does not mean we should abandon all attempts to think through categories, but rather we might question the sufficiency of the kinds of categories we use, that those we employ to explore art still tend to prioritise questions of form. Instead we need to generate new categories, ones that allow us to understand artworks as products of specific processes, of production and reception, operating within an expanded and interdisciplinary field. Artists choose to operate at sites within, at the edge of, between and across different disciplinary territories, for example, art, design, architecture and landscape, and they do so by adopting methods that call into question disciplinary procedures.

Concern for the single women working in the factory at Bourneville resulted in the 'Women's Recreation Area', a space just for women with a pond and a fountain. This area had not been maintained and Cornford & Cross decided to restore it for their project 'Utopia (Wishful Thinking)'. The artists refilled the pond with water coloured purple with dye and two splashing fountains; they had new paving stones replace the old broken ones around the edges. Purple is the trademark colour of Cadbury's, and with white and green, is also one of the three colours of the suffragette movement. Dye prevents photosynthesis from taking

⁵⁷ Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, (Cambridge Mass., 1994).

⁵⁸ Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (and other diatribes)*, (London, 2002), p. 126.

place, so slowly the plant life in the pond died away. Since the artists spent their budget on repairing and restoring part of the property, in a sense their art is an offering, a gift to Bourneville, but like all gifts, there is something expected in return. In referencing the sickly and suffocating effect of paternalism, the work questions the idealism of utopian schemes, hinting perhaps at a patronising and controlling edge to the apparently benign aspirations at Bourneville. This work given as gift challenges the ideology and values of Bourneville and demands critical thinking as its counter-gift.⁵⁹

On first glance, 'Utopia (Wishful Thinking)', could easily be confused for a piece of design rather than fine art. It is only the lifelessness of the pond, perceptible only after several minutes, and still possible to ignore, that gives the game away. The work raises a thematic that appears in the projects of many of the artists invited to participate in 'In the Midst of Things' – the cross over between art as a critical venture and design as a problem solving exercise. The new canopies on the canteen provide an example of another artwork that also 'looks like' design. Kathrin Böhm started her research by finding out from members of staff at Cadbury's if there was a need, anywhere on the site that required an artist who worked with public space and colour.⁶⁰ Böhm produced fabric 'Canopies' for the canteen in bright stripes of blue and yellow, stating 'I wanted to respond to a need rather than just go looking for a possibility offered up by the site'.

How is this work different from what a textile designer might produce? Why is one thing designated art and another design we might ask? These are questions increasingly emerging as a growing number of artists engage in territories usually associated with urban design and architecture. As well as 'looking like' design – a piece of paving or a canopy – these artists adopt design-like working methods, for example, responding to a need or fixing things that are broken, activities that would usually fit within the architect's brief or the repair and

⁵⁹ Prince and Wade, eds., *In the Midst of Things*, pp. 116-9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5, p. 65.

maintenance schedule. The artists in 'In the Midst of Things' appear to be 'designing' objects, but not in the way a designer might. Is it the reflexive nature of the practice that makes this work art and not design?

Utopian design visions have often addressed social problems by attempting to solve them. Modernism had it that new designs and spaces would determine new forms of social relation. Architecture, as Le Corbusier was keen to point out, was the alternative to social revolution.⁶¹ But the curators and artists involved in 'In the Midst of Things' are not interested in a modernist utopia that attempts to solve all the problems of the world through design. The projects that tend toward the utopic in their vision have questions rather than answers as their intentions. It is in this sense that art can offer architecture and design a chance to think critically about their recent history and present aspirations.

Many of the invited artists made pieces of architecture that required occupation to allow them to function. Liam Gillick's 'Big Conference Platform Platform', (1998), a 'canopy' grid of anodised aluminium and perspex jutting out into an interior space above head height, was a continuation of his exploration of the tensions between planning and speculation through the language of architecture.⁶² Placed on the green and open at both ends, 'Holy Ghost', Jacqueline Donachie's Quaker inspired shed-hut, became inhabited by group singing 'Amazing Grace' and surrounded by a crowd drinking beer.⁶³ A group of ten kiosks for dialogue, Lucy Orta's 'Life nexus Fete', created another social space.⁶⁴ In line with their

⁶¹ See for example, Neil Leach, 'Architecture or Revolution?', Neil Leach, ed., *Architecture and Revolution*, (London, 1999), pp. 112-23, p. 112.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 72-3.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 50-3.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 60-3.

attempt to realise a utopian village and free state of their own called AVL-Ville, Atelier van Liesholt made 'AVL-Canteen' the transformation of a 40 foot sea container into a kitchen.⁶⁵

In February 1966, in 'Notes on Sculpture, Parts 1 and 2' (1966), Robert Morris argued that unlike pictorial work, sculpture was not illusionist, that it had an 'literal nature' and that clearer distinctions needed to be made between sculpture's 'tactile nature' and the 'optical sensibilities involved in painting'.⁶⁶ In June of the same year, David Antin wrote that sculpture was 'a specific space in which the observer is thrust, i.e., it is a place'.⁶⁷ And again in the same year, this time in October, David Bourdon quoted Carl André's account of the development of modern sculpture from form, through structure, to place and his statement on 'Cuts', André's show in March 1967 at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, 'I now use the material as the cut in space'.⁶⁸ In the same issue of *Artforum*, in Part 2 of his 'Notes on Sculpture', Morris, following Tony Smith, took up the question of scale and located minimalist work at a human scale between the private object and public monument, as one term in an expanded situation.⁶⁹ Smithson describes the shift in his own thinking at this time, from an interest in specific objects to a more relational way of 'seeing' the world where the works

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 84-7.

⁶⁶ Robert Morris 'Notes on Sculpture 1-3', Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Oxford, 1992), pp. 813-22, p. 814. Part 1 was first published in *Artforum*, (February, 1966), pp. 42-4.

⁶⁷ See David Antin, 'What is an Environment?', *Art News*, (April 1966) referenced in Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Los Angeles, 2002), p. 211.

⁶⁸ David Bourdon, 'The Razed Sites of Carl Andre', Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimalism: A Critical Anthology*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1995), pp. 103-8. Reprinted from *Artforum*, (October, 1966), pp. 103-4.

⁶⁹ Robert Morris 'Notes on Sculpture 1-3', Harrison and Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, pp. 813-22, p. 816. Part 2 was first published in *Artforum*, (October, 1966), pp. 20-3.

'became a preoccupation with place'.⁷⁰ For Dennis Oppenheim, 1967 was the year when the 'notion of sculpture as place was manifest'.⁷¹

The discovery of sculpture as a place articulated above by a number of prominent artists was startlingly new in 1966 and 1967. An interest in the relationship between art and space continues to underscore much contemporary practice, but what distinguishes much of today's artwork from the work of the 1960s and 1970s is the process based nature of the spatial interest and the kind of occupation that many artworks require in order to function. Krauss' expanded field might be a physical extension of the terrain of the gallery and an expansion of the category of sculpture in terms of its relation to landscape and architecture, yet it does not question the ideological territory of the gallery nor discuss how we might extend the possibilities of making and viewing objects and places in ways that go beyond traditional art discourse to consider function and use, words usually associated with design-based disciplines. The other structures that populate sites outside the gallery, the diverse practices and meanings that inhabit these places are not brought into play, neither by the artists nor by the critic herself. So how can we expand the field further, to think of art not in a site or as a place but in terms of spatial practice, and consider the relationship between art practice and those practices that occur beyond the gallery, those not normally associated with art?

At Bourneville Darren Lago demanded participation through gardening to produce his artwork. He worked with the Gardener's Association to create a series of cabbage beds scaled off the size of a chocolate bar. Chocolate was included in the soil and the cabbages were grown in purple dye so that they looked faintly purplish in colour. 'Chocolate Garden' was planted like a series of ornamental rose beds in the green lawns of Bourneville. In

⁷⁰ 'Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution (1972), Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson*, pp. 270-96, p. 296.

⁷¹ *Dennis Oppenheim*, by Germano Celant; Charta, Milan, (Milan, 1997), p. 29.

England, where the vegetable patch is usually associated with the back garden rather than the flowerbeds of the front garden or park, they felt strangely out of place.⁷²

In Foster's reading of minimalism, in relationship with the viewer, the sculpture is off the pedestal, 're-positioned among objects and re-defined in terms of place'.⁷³ Foster argues that the need to create a direct physical relationship with the viewer was part of an attempt to avoid positioning the work as idealist, that for certain artists, minimalism replaced the idealist cartesian 'I think' and the abstract expressionist 'I express' with 'I perceive'. Today's artworks located outside the gallery cannot be fully grasped through perceiving, many require both perception *and* conception as responses from the subject, they position themselves as places for both physical and intellectual engagement, and in some cases, imagined occupation as well as actual inhabitation.

Gary Perkins makes models of interiors, sometimes of domestic settings or the inside of lorries and vans. He places cameras in some of the models and relays the image to a nearby monitor. As we gaze from a safe distance into spaces that have been miniaturized and which prioritise our view in, Perkin's work locates us viewers as omnipotent subjects and draws on certain voyeuristic aspects of looking. The piece of work Perkins made for Bourneville was prompted by a visit to London's Millennium Dome. 'Soon all this will be yours' consisted of a half circle of rooms complete with the detritus of simple everyday activities like mending the car.⁷⁴ Despite being perfectly made and representing ordinary domestic settings, the scenarios Perkins replicates are strangely disturbing. We are torn between wanting to decipher the 'real' spaces they refer to, and avoiding the issue by thinking instead of these places as fictions.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 58-9.

⁷³ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge Mass., 2001), p. 38.

⁷⁴ Prince and Wade, eds., *In the Midst of Things*, pp. 88-91.

Placed within architectural discourse, Perkin's scenes would be understood as scale models of existing spaces or proposals for new designs, but positioned as artworks we are able to consider them more critically. Conventional architectural design prefers to locate the model either as a representation of real space or as a fiction, not as both. Models might be used as conceptual diagrams or research tools for clarifying an idea or as scaled down replicas of the 'real thing' that demonstrate to the client, developer or end-user the way the building will look and be constructed. Taken out of such a context and presented with no such proposal of intention, no site plan or map, the architecture model can operate both as determination and speculation.

Nathan Coley's 'A Manifesto for Bourneville' also uses architectural models but in a different way. His project reworks the famous 'New York Skyline' of 1931, a photograph taken at the Beaux Arts Ball in Manhattan, where the architects of famous buildings, such as the Chrysler Building, came dressed as their own work. Coley created a series of architectural models that could be worn as hats, including a model of the rest house in Bourneville, as well as a Frank Gehry and a Mies van der Rohe building. Coley then asked a photographer to take an image of five people with these cardboard models on their heads. A text placed below suggested that the models were responses to an invitation to redesign the rest house. The photograph, measuring six feet by three feet, was placed at the end of a tunnel that ran from the Women's Recreation Ground to the factory. This involved developing a site not previously open to the public. Since the Men's Recreation Grounds were located at the far end of the tunnel, Coley speculated that the tunnel might have been used as a place for secret assignments.⁷⁵

By choosing a place with a contentious social and architectural history, for 'In the Midst of Things', the artists were able to expand the field of art practice towards complex territories of interdisciplinary working and the socio-spatial as well as the aesthetic qualities of sites. In a radical development of the choice Foster describes between the perceptual experience offered

⁷⁵ Prince and Wade, eds., *In the Midst of Things*, pp. 112-5.

by minimalism and the intellectual challenge posed by conceptualism, many works produced for 'In the Midst of Things' demanded both intellectual engagement and active occupation. The scale of Bourneville made it possible to walk through the entire site and to see works sequentially and in juxtaposition. A work might occupy the foreground and then recede to become a backdrop, offering the viewer multiple, changing and sometimes conflicting, ways of experiencing art.

Space as a Practiced Place

For 'Breakdown', Michael Landy decided to destroy everything that he owned, 7010 objects in fifteen days.⁷⁶ From a pair of slippers to a drawing given as a gift by artist friend Tracey Emin, each object was placed in a plastic bag, labelled with an inventory number and circulated on a large conveyor belt running around the centre of a vacant C&A store at the western end of Oxford Street near Marble Arch in London. Men and women dressed in blue overalls took the objects apart and in some cases broke down their material components as well, removing plugs and passing pieces of wood into shredders. Pinned onto the walls at the back of the one time department store were lists of objects, under categorical headings such as Electrical Equipment, Furniture and Clothing.

In the context of Oxford Street, any attempt to refuse to buy, let alone to destroy commodities is a strong one. But however clear the gesture, Landy's artwork raises a number of problems. Landy choose not to distinguish between different kinds of object – gifts, souvenirs, commodity consumables, originals, replicas – all were broken down.⁷⁷ Academic research into collecting, material culture and gift economies, suggests complex discriminations exist between different kinds of object. This is an essential aspect to any critique of commodity

⁷⁶ Michael Landy, 'Breakdown', (2001), C&A Store at Marble Arch, 499-523 Oxford Street, London, W1. See Gerrie van Noord, ed., *Off Limits, 40 Art Angel Projects*, (London, 2002), pp. 162-7 and Michael Landy, *Breakdown*; Artangel, London, (London: 2001).

⁷⁷ See for example Dave Beech, review of Michael Landy, 'Breakdown', *Art Monthly*, (March 2001), pp. 30-1.

capitalism, given an added twist if we consider that the economic value of the art objects Landy himself makes will increase in relation to his status as an artist, possibly as a direct result of the destruction of these objects. But perhaps this is doing Landy a mis-service, the bluntness of the breakdown may well be intended to bring us to our senses and make us think about the sheer number of objects that exist in the world, partly as an effect of the increasingly particular demands we in the west exert as consumers.

Performance plays a major role in 'Breakdown', activities that take place on the production line, in the recycling plant and at the landfill site, are referenced by performing them, and in so doing connections are made to a number of different sites linked to the lives of commodities. But what kind of relationship is Landy trying to establish between these sites and how does he use performance to make his points? Irony, parody, mimicry, all these are modes of performance whose relationships with the 'original' action differ – some copies aim to be exact others exaggerate difference for comic effect. The problem with 'Breakdown' was the lack of precision with which the objects were broken down. Some were taken apart physically, but not all and not to the same extent, some component materials were destroyed, but the logic of this was not based on the need to recycle, but on a bizarre sort of pragmatics. As far as I could see, the only material that was fully broken down was wood, since wood was the only material the shredder on site could shred!

De Certeau's understanding of the difference between space and place is closely related to his notions of practice, tactic and strategy. In de Certeau's terms, practices move across divisions between place, time and types of action, allowing connections to be made between places and their counterpoints or activities and their variants located elsewhere. As types of practice, strategies seek to create places that conform to abstract models; tactics do not obey the laws of places.⁷⁸ In the case of 'Breakdown', Landy's reference to sites located elsewhere, those involved in the breakdown of commodities, demanded that shoppers reflect upon the

⁷⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley, 1988), p. 29.

predominant activity of Oxford Street – shopping or the accumulation of commodities – in an extended manner, in relation to variants of that activity. Yet the decisions made by Landy concerning the performance itself seemed to be based less on aesthetic criteria and critical tactics and more on what it was possible to achieve in the given context. Landy created a space that practised a critique of the place of commodity consumption, but exactly what he had to say about the lives of different kinds of object and the ethical issues around consumption is less clear.

Jeremy Deller's 'The Battle of Orgreave' (17 June 2001) was a re-staging of one of most violent confrontations of the miners' strike, an act of resistance that took place on 18 June 1984 in the town of Orgreave outside Sheffield in the UK.⁷⁹ Although the site was the same, the cold and windy weather of 2001 compared to the boiling heat of 1984, made the crowd at the start of the day mutter that things weren't quite the same as they remembered them. But at the sound of the cry 'Maggie, Maggie, Maggie. Out, Out, Out', the atmosphere changed. My own fury at the aggression of Margaret Thatcher's policies, the unrealistic characterisation of the mine-workers, the dismissal of the unions, and worst, in the dreadful wake of Thatcherism the apparent lack of dissent all came flooding back. I felt vaguely uncomfortable with such a powerful emotional response. Although I had an affinity with Sheffield, I had chosen to live there because of what the place represented to me: 'the socialist republic of South Yorkshire', I was not a miner and I had not been in Orgreave on that June day.

As a historian, I am slightly sceptical of empathy and the ease in which authenticity is ascribed to experiential accounts. There were plenty such testimonials to be told at Orgreave that day. Miners and their families were keen to discuss the battle and its ensuing ramifications. Local opinion favoured Deller's work, focusing on how important it was to remember an event, rather than worry about whether it was an accurate reconstruction of the past. Although Deller

⁷⁹ See van Noord, ed., pp. 190-5 and *Jeremy Deller, The Battle of Orgreave*; Artangel, London, (London, 2002). See also Dave Beech, review of Jeremy Deller, 'The Battle of Orgreave', *Art Monthly* (July/August 2001), pp. 38-9.

involved a battle re-enactment society to re-stage the event, some of the miners' chose to play themselves and some sons played their fathers. (It is worth noting that only one policeman played himself.) The presence of cameras filming the battle for broadcast as a documentary film directed for television by Mike Figgis enhanced the role-playing aspect of the event, prioritising for viewer, especially those located behind the cameraman, a consideration of the 'facts' not as they had occurred in the past but as they were being constructed in the present. (illus. 2)

In his desire to examine a moment of resistance, Deller's work is clearly a piece of political art in a socialist tradition, but it is not a piece of social realism. Despite what we now know of the media's distortion of events, their misrepresentation of the actions of the police in this battle that served to undermine the power of the trade union, Deller portrayed the day in a fairly even-handed manner, as a battle of two sides, miners and policemen. Somehow I would rather he had been a bit more Benjaminian, that he had 'rubbed up' history against the grain. After all, Orgreave marked a turning point in the strike and the first use of military strategies by the police for settling resistance. But perhaps by appearing to fall in line with the re-enactment society's dogged desire for so-called historical accuracy in replaying the battle scenes, Deller's approach revealed a certain irony and a mode of telling that was more self-conscious and critical in its attitude to historical representation than he let on.

In recreating a political struggle that took place at a specific moment, 'The Battle of Orgreave' points to the importance of time in the practice of place, something that remains underdeveloped in de Certeau's theoretical propositions on space and place. By drawing on the importance of temporality of the practising of place, Deller's work shows how an act of remembering the past can reconfigure a particular place in the present. 'The Battle of Orgreave' points to the potential offered by a specific moment and the importance of repetition as remembrance in recognising this.

Both Deller's and Landy's projects were commissioned by Artangel, an agency who select, fund and help artists produce mainly temporary work for unusual sites in the UK.⁸⁰ From magazine inserts to short films for television, from an empty club house in London's west end to a suburban storage centre, the constellation of sites mapped by Artangel projects follows the choices of the artists they have chosen to work with. It is interesting to compare this approach to that of the Public Art Development Trust, PADT, a public art consultancy set up by Sandra Percival, for whom the starting point is the site,⁸¹ or to New York's Public Art Fund, who curate work for pre-selected locations in the city, including Madison Square Park, City Hall Park, the south east corner of Central Park, Metro Tech Center in Brooklyn as well sites chosen by artists.⁸² And of course, there are similar organisations all around the world each with their own particular approach to the commissioning of artworks in the city in which they operate.⁸³

The works described above elaborate de Certeau's understanding of space as a practised place through social explorations of the particular sites in which they are located, but also by intentionally positioning one site next to another. Through actions and occupations, these artworks practice places and explore the spaces between these places. They demonstrate that site-specific work is not necessarily a condition of 'undifferentiated serialisation' of 'one place after another', but that by considering the particularity of one place in relation to another,

⁸⁰ Artangel have been commissioning art works since the early 1990's, when the company was set up by James Lingwood and Michael Morris, both of whom had previously worked at the ICA (The Institute of Contemporary Arts) in London. See van Noord, ed., *Off Limits* and www.artangel.org.uk.

⁸¹ For work commissioned by Public Art Development Trust in London, see www.padt.org.uk and the series of publications, *PADT Documentary Notes*.

⁸² In New York the Public Art Fund has been operating for twenty-five years to support emerging and established artists' projects, installations and exhibitions in alternative venues throughout New York City. PAF is a non-profit arts organization; financial support comes a combination of donations from individuals, foundations and corporations, and as public funds from The New York State Council on the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. See the Public Art Fund Journal, *InProcess*, *Public Art Fund Publications* and www.publicartfund.org.

⁸³ See for example Bulkhead (1999-2001) in Glasgow, Locus+ in Newcastle and Sunderland, and Arte Cuidad in Sao Paulo, Brazil. See Duncan McCorquodale and Julian Stallabrass, Pauline van Mourik Broekman and Niru Ratman, *Locus Solus: Site, Identity and Technology in Contemporary Art*, (London, 2000) and www.bulkhead.org.uk.

certain artworks can be understood to, as Massey might put it, 'unfix' place. Does the act of performing an activity in a displaced location or repeating an event have the potential to be transformative? By performing spatial practices art can focus attention on the critical potential of a place, and turn reactionary actions into De Certeau's 'tactics' or what I might call critical spatial practices.

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List of Illustrations

1 Robert Smithson, 'Spiral Jetty', (1970), Salt Lake, Utah. Photo: Cornford & Cross, (2002).

2 Jeremy Deller, 'The Battle of Orgreave', (2001), Sheffield. Photo: Cornford & Cross, (2001).

Biography

Jane Rendell BA (Hons), Dip Arch, MSc, PhD, is Professor of Architecture and Art and Director of Architectural Research at the Bartlett, UCL. An architectural designer and historian, art critic and writer, she is author of *Art and Architecture*, (2006), *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, (2002) and co-editor of *Critical Architecture* (2007), *Spatial Imagination*, (2005), *The Unknown City*, (2001), *Intersections*, (2000), *Gender Space Architecture*, (1999), *Strangely Familiar*, (1995). She is on the Editorial Board for *ARQ (Architectural Research Quarterly)* and the *Journal of Visual Culture in Britain*, a member of the AHRC Peer Review College and chair of the RIBA President's Awards for Research. In 2006 she was a research fellow at CRASSH (Centre for Research in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities) at the University of Cambridge and received an honorary degree from the University College of the Creative Arts.