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Art in the Life of the City: London Stories  
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The city of Muenster in the North-Rhein Westphalia region of Germany may seem an unlikely place from which to embark upon a consideration of London as a locus of progressive public art projects, but mindful of the ways in which the works we are about to discuss tomorrow are dispersed and sustained through the material and discursive technologies of distributed media internationally, I'd like to use the serendipitous twinning of the front covers of the international art magazines *Artforum* and *Frieze* last autumn, as a point of convergence between here and there, between London and Harvard, first and second

audiences, testimony and anecdote, witness and reporter. In particular, I'd like to consider the way in which this work, or perhaps more accurately this image of this work, came to misrepresent art in the life of the city of Muenster last summer as a way to begin talking about some of the contestations and challenges of emergent forms of art in the public sphere for us as artists, commissioners, spectators and critics and in turn, I hope these thoughts will offer a lens through which we might consider our London stories within the context of this time and this place.

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The fervent anticipation, of the 'celestial convergence' of the Venice Biennale, Art Basel, Documenta 12 and Sculpture Projects Muenster in Europe last year converged, it would seem from these covers, in the axis of Bruce Nauman's *Square Depression*. Conceived for the 1977 edition of Sculpture Projects, this 50msq intersection of white concrete sinks into the ground to a depth of about 2.5 metres, its edges extending downwards and crossing at the lowest point in the centre. The image presents itself as an ideal cipher for the culmination of a contemporary Grand Tour — the moment at which the search for the experience of being in the presence of an 'authentic' work of art is performed for the camera. The image epitomises the somewhat reactionary curatorial stance of Robert Storr, who, in his assertion to experience 'Art in the Present Tense', maintained:

"[Biennials] are places in which virtually anyone within reach can restore the aura that some have feared art has lost forever, but which those who are alert can still summon for themselves in the presence of a unique image or form." (Storr 2007)

Some 30 years in waiting, Nauman's work offers a space in which the performance of that authentic moment can be enacted. *I am standing in the Bruce Nauman! I have arrived! I am here!* Not surprisingly, the magazines' editorial teams chose to crop the same press photograph, in which the subjects at the axis of the work (one of whom is the curator Kasper König) are in the process of being photographed themselves. One critic suggested that *Square Depression* is almost, "a template for Rosalind Krauss' diagram of sculpture in the expanded field: '(not-) landscape / sculpture / (not-) architecture.'" (Staple 2007) Krauss of course wrote in 1979 in that definitive text of, "the logic of sculpture... [as] inseparable from the logic of the monument. By virtue of this logic a sculpture is a commemorative representation," she suggested. "It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place." (Krauss 1979, p. 33) *Square Depression*, according to this theorisation of a place-specific sculpture, would indeed seem to operate as a monument - fixed, stable and resolutely commemorative of the genesis of Sculpture Projects Muenster.



The full press photograph taken by Thorsten Arendt some 10 days before the opening weekend, records the final moments of preparation as turf is laid around the work; but neither this distributed shot, nor the cropped magazine cover, reveal the rather non-descript architecture in which *Square Depression* is actually sited. Instead we have a view that is never experienced. 'Being there' is of course entirely different. Standing on or rather *in* the square, you are confronted by the conditions of that place: the University precinct, the late 60s architectural façades of the Centre for Natural Sciences, your fellow art pilgrims and passers-by,

and in my case, the pouring rain. The experience indeed corresponds to Nauman's stated intention to create a kind-of spatial construction of a psychological state of depression by lowering the viewer to a level below vanishing point.

But it is curious how the selected image misrepresents not only this enveloping experience, but also decontextualises and displaces the work from public space, so that the representation pulls the work out of place, out of Muenster, and more broadly out of time. Certainly the cropped cover image could be said to misrepresent the experience of the work in the way in which any still image reduces the multi-layered situation of an artwork to an iconic single viewpoint, but perhaps more importantly for this symposium and our consideration of London, as representations of the state of contemporary art in Europe in 2007, this image misrepresents the truly progressive nature of art commissioned in response to specific places and situations today.

Muenster offered few other moments of resolution such as this precisely because emergent forms of contemporary art practice seem more closely aligned to 'the contemporaneity' described recently by art historian Terry Smith as,

"the jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities, all thrown together in ways that highlight the fast-growing inequalities within and between them."  
(Smith 2006, p. 703)

More often than not the experience of Muenster was one of delightful, frustrated intrigue (the inability to pinpoint a work such as Dora Garcia's *The Beggar's Opera*<sup>1</sup>), dislocation and interruption (Pawel Althamer's *Path* leading nowhere) and displacement (Annette Wehrmann's *Aaspa* or Gustav Metzger's *Aequivalenz- Shattered Stones* or Martha Rosler's *Unsettling the Fragments*). Pawel Althamer's *Path*, for example, offered a riposte to the 1960s conceptualism of Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967, with the artist astutely recognising the conditions under which the viewer would encounter this work, namely on the exhibition itinerary. Althamer leads the visitor off the prescribed route on a pointless pilgrimage, perhaps made all the more ingenious by the adjacent siting of Guillaume Bijl's *Archaeological Site (A Sorry Installation)* which seemed, to my mind, to fold back into itself as a work collapsing into its own touristic referentiality.

These projects contribute to our broadening understanding of the term public art by unsettling prescribed notions of place, site and context. And we can locate the same unsettling of place in London in recent years, from Francis Alys' *Guards*, a remarkable film tracing the march of 64 Coldstream Guards through the financial district of London, to Pawel Althamer's *Real-time Movie*, a scripted and promoted moment of real-time at Borough Market in Southwark, Tania Brugera's *Tatlin's Whisper*, an unannounced performance in which mounted police herded the public around Tate Modern's Turbine Hall to Ruth Ewan's *Did You Kiss the Foot that Kicked You?*, a performance of a strident folk-song by 100 buskers outside iconic buildings across London.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thebeggarsopera.org/>



Often temporary and interventionist, invariably performed by individuals other than the artist, mobilising and demanding different kinds of public engagement, these works are place-based or place-responsive, yet contest the power dynamics of the context in which they operate and refrain from indulging in a literal reading of the specifics of location. All of these works have emerged from the invitation to respond to the particular context of London. Their newness is predicated on the ability of the artist to bring to bear their practice, time

and imagination on a specified and often unfamiliar context. In this sense, these artists and those commissioned in Muenster can be seen to be complicit in place-making and yet their responses are profoundly place-contesting.

The curators of Sculpture Projects Muenster identified this tension between the artists' complicity and resistance to the city's image in their catalogue introduction:

“Even if due to its success, the exhibition has long become a key element in the city's marketing image, it should be able to assert itself in difference to this official identity and the staging strategies employed to promote it.”(Franzen, Koenig et al. 2007)

Muenster is a useful starting point for us because it is the most prominent example yet of the inherent contradictions of contemporary place-based art commissioning. Though a remarkably different context to London, it can help us determine what is now at stake in the commissioning and production of art in the life of the city.

Firstly, we could say that the truly place-specific works in Muenster were those which seemed to offer some resistance to a nostalgic or literal representation of the city and in turn reflected a complicit relationship between the curator and artist, affecting a kind of sense of “being in the wrong place”, a sense of dislocation, or displacement. These works, and those I've described in London, signal the shift in our understanding of place and site to situation, or as art historian Miwon Kwon has suggested, “from a fixed, physical location to somewhere or something constituted through social, economic, cultural and political processes.” (Kwon, 2002) Situation is emergent, we might say, conflictual, an event-in-progress – rather than a mapped location or an axis point. So we can consider how a progressive notion of place as situation might assist us in thinking through what we mean by ‘the life of the city’ and how that situation acts as a trigger and impetus for commissioned work and potentially as the context for the work itself.

Secondly, in relation to time and engagement. Muenster could no longer be experienced as a cohesive exhibition of art in public space, due to the multiple temporal and discursive layers through which artists are producing what invariably have become described as projects, just as four ‘projects’ in London set up remarkably different expectations – with Alÿs's highly choreographed performance staged for a film in the future, Althamer's moment of real-time restaged in the past and Ewan's work seeping unannounced into the ambient soundtrack of the city. This raises important questions about the promotion of ephemeral projects as spectacles and the operation of artworks as destinations within an event culture that is characterised by expendability, by immediate accessibility and seemingly insatiable consumption.

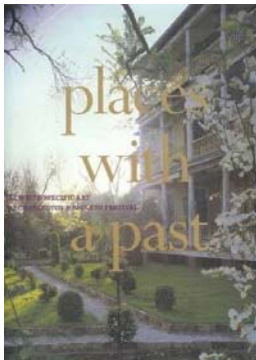
And finally, how do we understand these works to operate beyond the specifics of time and situation? How do we understand them to circulate in the global art economy? What is the value of documentation and anecdote and how might this affect our capacity as commissioners to understand the long-term legacy of such projects?

Historically, considerations of situation or place-specificity in contemporary practice have either attempted to define a movement or set of finite approaches (from Victor Burgin's

consideration of Minimalism in his article 'Situational Aesthetics', the manifestos of the Situationist International or Peter Weibel's identification of *Kontext Kunst* (1994) through the work of Andrea Fraser, Christian Philipp Muller and Mark Dion) or to associate that practice with broader cultural symptoms (such as Lucy Lippard's consideration of the desire for place-bound identities in the mid 1990s. I am more intrigued by what Sally Mackey and Nicolas Whybrow have referred to, in relation to performance studies, as, "the extent to which specificity of content (site or place and its users) is the determining factor in the work that is produced, as against the imposition of extraneous influences?" (Mackey and Whybrow 2007), and furthermore, whether that specificity is scripted and how potentially it is changed through the artist's agency.

Over fifteen years ago, Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne identified the harnessing of place-based commissioning for a region's economic and political gain in their article "Mapping International Exhibitions", proposing,

"The locale of an exhibition is embraced in its title as a rhetorical manoeuvre to appropriate cultural status, the meanings and the myths that attend the collective imagination attached to the city, region or country named..." (Ferguson, Greenberg et al. 1993)



It is indeed possible to trace a lineage of significant curatorial initiatives for which place has the motivating factor including *Sonsbeek 71* (1971), *Unité d'Habitation*, Firminy (1991), TSWA Four Cities Project in the UK, Mary Jane Jacob's *Places with a Past: New Site-specific Art at Charleston's Spoleto Festival* (1992) and the multiple manifestations of *inSITE* across the San Diego/Tijuana borderzone since 1992. These are just a few of the curatorial precedents which saw the convergence of the festival and exhibition models which have led to the groundswell of place-based initiatives in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It might even be argued that the predominance of place-specific works is largely due to such curatorial paradigms, identified by Miwon Kwon in the first of a series of articles on this topic published in 1997. She proposes that,

"The increasing institutional interest in site-oriented practices that mobilise the site as a discursive narrative is demanding an intensive physical mobilisation of the artist to create works in various cities throughout the cosmopolitan art world. Typically, an artist (no longer a studio-bound object maker, primarily working on-call) is invited by an art institution to execute a work specifically configured for the framework provided by the institution (in some cases the artist may solicit the institution with a proposal)... The project will likely be time-consuming and in the end will have engaged the "site" in a multitude of ways, and the documentation of the project will take on another life within the art world's publicity circuit, which will in turn alert another institution for another commission." (Kwon 1997, p. 100)

In 2004, the 'International' component of the 'Liverpool Biennial' professed to "address and empower place as having value" (Biggs, 2004); Charles Esche and Vasil Kortun's opening gambit for the 9<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial in 2005, proposed "an exhibition structure that folds out of and reveals its context – the city of Istanbul", by commissioning artists to respond both to the "urban location and the imaginative charge that this city represents for the world".<sup>2</sup> In 2006, the 'Gwangju Biennale' purported to provide "an impetus to the city of Gwangju to be reborn as a geographical metaphor"; and this year the European nomadic biennial Manifesta will respond to the regions of the Austrian and Italian Tyrol.

The cultural valorisation of place is important for us to consider here because of the way in which the binding of commissioning to cultural tourism has established a set of expectations about how such works might contribute to place making. Realising the geopolitical ambitions of any biennial, the curator of the 10<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial, Hou Hanru, described his exhibition

<sup>2</sup> Istanbul Biennial Press Release. October 2004. <<http://www.iksv.org/bienal/bienal9/>>.

as, “a non-stop machine for production of new urban life... an endless urban maze...”<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting this shift in the conceptualisation of an exhibition of commissioned works as producing place, as opposed to representing or reflecting place. A series of sophisticated curatorial systems have been developed to support the artists’ encounters with place so that the residency or series of research visits are often now the prerequisite for an artist’s participation.

Furthermore, a new generation of curatorial and artistic projects are beginning to emerge which recognise the benefits of commissioning in place over time, so that we see longer-term durational models emerging such as the Whitechapel’s *The Street*, a year-long series of artists’ commissions in and around Wentworth Street, home to Petticoat Lane Market, involving commissioned projects and events by Canal - a collective of artists & curators, Minerva Cuevas, Jens Haaning, Henry VIII’s Wives, Bernd Krauss, Shimabuku and Nedko Solakov. Serpentine Gallery follow later this year with a series of projects on Edgware Road in collaboration with Townhouse, Cairo and Ashkal Alwan in Beirut. These clearly relate to longer-term durational models in Europe and beyond such as SKOR (the Foundation for Art and Place Space) in Leidsche Rijn in the Netherlands, Park Fiction in Hamburg, the land in Chaing Mai.<sup>4</sup>



These are just a few examples of an expanding range of place-based commissioning models which emerge from a history of engagements between the international and local. The UK has witnessed exceptional growth in the number of ‘off-site’ gallery programmes dedicated to commissioning work outside the gallery (e.g. Ikon, Birmingham; Milton Keynes Gallery; John Hansard Gallery, Southampton; Aspex, Portsmouth). Long-standing commissioning organisations (such as Artangel, Locus+, Artsadmin and the Ruskin Laboratory) have also been joined by a new set of city-wide initiatives in regional cities such as CAN (Contemporary Art Norwich), Art Sheffield and the Folkestone Triennial, all of which set the

commissioning of place-specific work at the heart of the curatorial initiative.

Furthermore, in the UK we have seen the emergence of highly sophisticated public art strategies from Greenwich to Bristol, which recognise the contribution of artists to urban regeneration not simply through the commissioning of permanently publicly-sited works but through their inclusion as lead artists on design teams, temporary interventions and ongoing durational projects. The national public art thinktank IXIA and the South West based Public Art online are just two examples of the ways in which knowledge is being captured across a huge diversity of commercial and publicly funded projects in public space.

A marker of the unprecedented interest in public art in the UK is the forthcoming Channel 4’s *Big Art* project – a series of seven ambitious commissions across the UK involving artists such as Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Antony Gormley, Jeppe Hein and Greyworld, through which artists have been selected by local communities to produce a work in response to their particular context. Though the cultural valorisation of place can be seen in some respects to have particular resonance in regional cities in comparison to the capital, London-based commissioning institutions are responding to the possibilities of place-based commissioning, in some cases assuming the itinerant qualities of a commissioning agency to transform the institution from a container of activity into a locus of activity, bringing the skills and experience gained through collaborative outreach and education programmes to bear on an increasingly sophisticated series of temporary off-site programmes, so building-based or non-building based become less and less useful as terms to describe the nature of a gallery’s activities.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.iksv.org/bienal10/english/detail.asp?cid=3&ac=conceptual>

<sup>4</sup> My colleague at Situations at the University of the West of England, Dr. Paul O’Neill is currently leading a three-year research project, entitled *Locating the Producers*, which is investigating new durational models of commissioning in place over time including a number of these projects. See [www.situations.org.uk](http://www.situations.org.uk) for further details.

In her book *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, Jane Rendell uses Edward Soja's trialectic of space, time and social being to think through the 'in-betweenness' of art and architectural practices. Rendell considers the current interest in locating work outside the physical confines of the gallery in relation to Robert Smithson's dialectic of 'site' (non-gallery) and 'non-site' (gallery) pointing to the categorisation of 'off-site' as a "strange reversal of Smithson's concept" in which "the gallery is the 'site'". (Rendell 2006) She points to Smithson's 1967 essay on *Spiral Jetty*, in which he proposes site as having 'open limits' and 'outer co-ordinates' whilst non-sites (such as galleries) have closed limits, inner coordinates and contained information. (Smithson 1972 (1996)) Rendell argues that "precisely because, within the gallery system, curatorial practices associated with sites outside the gallery continue to be valued as cultural rather than aesthetic production, the differences that exist between sites, non-sites and off-sites demand ongoing critical investigation." (Rendell 2006)



I would argue, however, that what is of interest is not how such a work as Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project* or the Sultan's Elephant, or Thomas Schütte's *Model for a Hotel* differ in terms of their site, for in some senses they all operate as remarkable points of convergence for a public, but rather how such projects differ in terms of their response to, creation of and intervention in place.

And so to help us think through how this occurs we might turn to a more progressive notion of place as advanced in geography, anthropology, archaeology and urban studies. Through interdisciplinary conceptions of place we can begin to think through the locations of Tate, Trafalgar Square and the city of London as intersections of mapped location, urban mythology, power dynamics and social interaction. "What gives a place its specificity", geographer Doreen Massey has argued, "is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations" (Massey 1994); Author of one of the most useful introductions to notions of place in human geography, Tim Cresswell has suggested: "Place is not location. Places are never complete, finished or bounded but are always becoming – in process." (Cresswell 2004) Whilst Cultural anthropologist James Clifford has suggested, "Location isn't a prison. It's comprised of material, but unfinished, maps and histories" (Clifford, 2000, p. 62).

Massey suggests that public space may have a character of its own, but it is not "a seamless, coherent identity, a single sense of place which everyone shares equally as Habermas would have us believe. But people's routes through the place, their favourite haunts within it, the connections they make (physically, or by phone or post, or in memory and imagination) between here and the rest of the world vary enormously. If it is now recognised that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places." She argues "Moreover, such multiple identities can either be a source of richness or a source of conflict, or both." (Massey 1994)



So our conception of Trafalgar Square for example, might occur imaginatively as this or this, but then on one day reveals itself as this or this. (*Slides of views of Trafalgar Square are shown*)

This is the place of Trafalgar Square rather than the location of Trafalgar Square. This public space is a route through, a point of exchange, the connecting tissue between divergent cultures and colonial histories and a space of potential collisions and meetings. To consider the inside or outside spaces of

London as fixed and static sites for art would be to deny the ways in which the place of

London is remade on a daily basis through a layering or intersections of social, economic and political relations. London, we might say, is an event in progress, as a practised place.



So even though the Fourth Plinth acts as fixed and stable platform on which sculptures are sited, out of the six recent proposals, artists Jeremy Deller, Bob and Roberta Smith and Antony Gormley can be seen to understand Trafalgar Square as this constellation of social, economic and political relations, a space in which constructed through practice. Deller's proposal to install the remains of a vehicle that has been destroyed in an attack on civilians in Iraq self-consciously provokes the commissioning brief, whilst Gormley's *One and Other* (left), would involve members of the public

who have volunteered to stand on it for an hour at a time. Gormley suggests over a period of 12 months, that 8,760 people would take part. Bob and Roberta Smith's *Faites L'Art, pas La Guerre* (*Make Art, Not War*) would take the form of an illuminated peace sign, powered by the sun and the wind.

Their work directs you to the site of the plinth, but then outwards to the associations and contestations of Trafalgar Square itself. This clearly corresponds to a progressive notion of the public sphere as developed by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, which proposes the public sphere as a site of varying types of competition and contestation, itself fraught with social fragmentation, of *unequal* and exclusive access, of what they describe as "competing communicative practices."

What marks out emergent public art works is not the physical limitations inside or outside or the differences between those sites but rather the addressing of a broader context – the ways in which work recognises that location is emergent through the work, rather than being a precondition. So the fact that Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth* and Pawel Althamer's *Real Time Movie* are located in and outside Tate, is perhaps of less interest, than what distinguishes these works from each other. They both self-consciously refer to the signifying contexts through which they come into being, and demand attendance at a particular destination and physical mobilisation, but then to some extent have these outer limits that Smithson referred to. Whilst Salcedo's intervention destabilises physically, Althamer engenders an entirely different set of expectations and reorientations. I want to go into a little more detail about Pawel Althamer's work here.



In November last year, a 2.5 minute film trailer featuring the British film actor Jude Law was screened across cinemas in London and on YouTube worldwide. I'm going to show it to you now....

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oul1SbVCu8>)

Directed by Jason Martin, this was a trailer for an enactment of the same sequence of events by the same actors in real time, at Borough Market, a fashionable food market in Southwark close to Tate Modern. It was a component of a work by Pawel Althamer entitled *Real Time Movie* and commissioned by Tate Modern as part of the exhibition *The World as a Stage*. The trailer uses the conventions of cinema to validate the event, directing you to experience, to become part of the performance itself. Not surprisingly, Law's presence on the day attracted

huge crowds, so that the subtleties of the Borough Market of the trailer were replaced by a frenzy of cameras, bodyguards, and jostling celebrity watchers.

But what does this work have to tell us about the nature of our public spheres, about the fervent expectations of a public in event culture; about the institution and commissioner's role? Firstly, it's crucial to consider this work as part of an ongoing restaging of Pawel Althamer's film project. The project began in 2000 as *Motion Picture* in Ljubljana for the nomadic European Biennial Manifesta 3. Organized as an event "staged" for a public location, the work deployed eleven stage and screen actors who spent 30 minutes seamlessly playing the roles of various urban dwellers (a tourist, a pair of lovers, a skateboarder). Because of its quasi-clandestine nature (the actors were unannounced and left without even acknowledging that there had been a performance), the work provoked onlookers to approach non-participants and ask if they were part of the spectacle. And the performance was filmed and shown as a trailer for Manifesta. In 2004, Althamer restaged the performance and a 90 second film trailer for the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, where it was compared to a kind of photo-realistic painting.

On hearing about the inclusion of Jude Law, on seeing the sleek trailer emphasising a single event, I wondered whether the integrity, the unannounced quality of the work had been lost. Considered alongside the genealogy of happenings or interventions in public space, the earlier versions of *Real Time Movie* in Slovenia and North America, seemed closer to the playfulness of Allan Kaprow's happenings or the Situationist International constructed situations of the late 1950s. These were conceived in the context of postwar consumerist culture, these acts were conceived for their own sake – in Kaprow's words as "*activities engaged in by participants for the sake of playing*" and by Guy Debord as "an integrated ensemble of behavior in time."



A closer contemporary correspondent to these assertions would be Roman Ondak's *Good Feelings in Good Times*, a queue of people which forms for seven minutes or so in a series of public locations. It was originally staged outside the Kunstverein in Cologne, then at the Frieze Art Fair and subsequently bought by the Tate and most recently in New Zealand (left). Like Pawel Althamer's restagings of *Real Time Movie*, the script to which the actors perform in *Good Feelings in Good Times* is the readymade. There are a set of rules which the performers attempt to follow in context. Yet, what distinguishes Althamer's London *Real-Time Movie* from Ondak's work is the fact that location is announced. Althamer doesn't wish for his work to occur anonymously, to blend seamlessly into the everyday.

We can see this particular scripting of the scene in *Real Time Movie* as self-consciously deploying the systems of viral distribution and promotion through which the Tate brand is sustained, so that complicity in the making of the work is shared by all of us, so that

engagement becomes about expectation, about the questioning of where the authentic experience of the work really lies, about who is authoring the work through its multiple stagings and 'playings out'.

In his 2002 essay, *Dispersion*, Seth Price suggests, "We should recognize that collective experience is now based on simultaneous private experiences, distributed across the field of media culture, knit[ted] together by ongoing debate, publicity, promotion and discussion... Publicness today has as much to do with sites of production and reproduction as it does with any supposed physical commons, so a popular album could be regarded as a more successful instance of public art than a monument tucked away in an urban plaza." (Price 2008) So we might think of the recent Flash Mob event organised by Mobile Clubbing at Tate

Modern at the site of Doris Salcedo's work as an example of this. Clubbers turned up at the appointed time unannounced to the Tate with the following instructions:



1. Arrive at location at given time.
2. Start dancing to your personal stereo to the music of your choice.
3. Use the whole space. Spread out. This will prevent us from being moved on.
4. Don't worry clubbers you will be one of many.

Or the Freeze London event organised by Improv Everywhere via Facebook which initiated five minutes of frozen movement in Trafalgar Square.  
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MS65a-RKTQk>)

This also relates to Simon Sheikh's consideration of the public sphere as "opposed to high modernism's ideals of a singular, autonomous and formally complete artwork, we would now consider artworks as placed in a heterogeneous field, where the significations and communications of the work shift in relation to space, context and politics. Just as there is no complete, ideal work there is no ideal, generalized spectator". (Sheikh, 2004)

But if Althamer uses the same systems to engage his spectators and participants, does this work runs the risk of becoming another stunt, another expendable spectacle? To understand how we might consider the different kinds of engagement that are occurring, and where the artist's agency comes in, we need to go back to the context in which commissioning is now occurring in the UK, specifically to the expectations and contestations about the nature of participation.

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In the UK, cultural projects have played an increasingly important role in British urban regeneration since the mid-1980s, but recent developments have focused less on capital projects, and more on the capacity of arts activity to support community-led renewal. The contribution of contemporary art to place identity is thus calibrated through its potential impact on economic, environmental and social regeneration, as outlined in a Government Urban White Paper, published in 2000 which identifies the importance of culture as a regenerative tool for cities. In the broadest sense culture and cultural activities are defined as and I quote:

- a source of civic pride and a positive way of celebrating diversity.
- an important factor in some areas of economic development.
- a means to promote and develop lifelong learning.
- able to contribute to a sense of community cohesion and social inclusion.<sup>5</sup>

The Arts Council England's 2006 strategic document *The Power of Art, Visual Arts: Evidence of Impact, Regeneration, Health, Education and Learning* asserts, "The arts have helped reclaim derelict buildings and land, generate pride in areas, increase the sense of local ownership of urban and rural centres and develop distinct cultural identities." (Arts Council England 2006)

Not surprisingly research in this field has concentrated around arts impact assessment (e.g. Belfiore 2002, Massey et al. 2006), with a progressive and multi-faceted notion of best practice emerging through such recent documents as *A Manifesto of Possibilities* (Birkbeck,

<sup>5</sup> Urban White Paper "Our Towns and Cities: the Future. Delivering an urban renaissance" published by the DETR, November 2000.

University of London and the London Centre for Arts and Cultural Enterprise).<sup>6</sup> And there is a corresponding body of literature which considers the move towards the collaborative, interdisciplinary and in some cases collectively authored projects which set out to inspire sustainable futures through direct action. Probably most prevalent are those practices which have been documented by Claire Cumberlidge and Lucy Musgrave in their volume - *Design and Landscape for People: New approaches to renewal* and by Max Andrews in the volume, *Land, Art*, produced as part of the RSA's Arts and Ecology programme. But there is also a strand of work which, whilst just as interested in process, concerns itself with the possibilities for criticality (rather than the valorisation of place identity). Such as The Free Art Collective's ongoing series of billboards and signs.



An interesting corrective to this body of literature is the artist Bob and Roberta Smith's (aka Patrick Brill) *Art U Need: My Part in the Public Art Revolution* (left). But whilst I find Brill's humour a welcome riposte to some of the earnestness surrounding participatory projects, he seems to set up binaries between the monumental (bad) and ephemeral (good), between the spectacular (bad) and the dispersed (good), which can lead to a kind of investment in amateurism as the only way of dealing with the instrumentalisation of culture.

This consideration of counter spectacle arose in a recent symposium at the Tate, entitled *Rethinking Spectacle*, which reconsidered Guy Debord's definition of spectacle in his 1968 book *The Society of the Spectacle* as a mode of social relations, through which shared experience is atomised, consumption is passive and without agency,

which forecloses critical distance and creates a false togetherness.

(<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/symposia/7682.htm>)

The critic Claire Bishop considered the denigration of the term spectacle, particularly in the writings of Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh, in relation to the depoliticisation of contemporary art and its complicity with dominant ideologies. She proposed that process-based works have operated and have been considered critically on the basis of counter-spectacle, as a solution to the atomisation of communities. This corresponds to her critique of the littoral or participatory work celebrated by Grant Kester in her 2004 article "The Social Turn: Collaborations and its Discontents" and her consideration of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*.

Citing Jeremy Deller and Phil Collins as exemplars, Bishop suggests,

"the best collaborative practices of the past ten years address the contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention, and reflect on this antinomy both in the structure of the work and in the conditions of its reception". (Bishop 2006)

Bishop developed her argument at the symposium in relation to the writings of Jacques Ranciere, who suggests that, "genuine participation is the invention of an unpredictable subject who momentarily occupies the street, the factory or in our case public space, rather than a fixed space of allocated participation." Participation doesn't guarantee critical legitimacy, he argues. "spectatorship is not a passivity that must be turned into activity. It is our normal situation.... We don't need to turn spectators into actors. We do need to acknowledge that every spectator is already an actor in his own story and that every actor is in turn the spectator of the same kind of story." (Ranciere 2007, p. 61) So this would clearly relate to our understanding of *Real Time Movie* and how the artist not simply initiates a convivial place in which participation can be enacted, but actually sets off a series of dizzying reflections back and forth between actor and participant, participant and actor.

<sup>6</sup> See [http://wiki.bbk.ac.uk/Buildingcultures/index.php/Manifesto\\_of\\_Possibilities](http://wiki.bbk.ac.uk/Buildingcultures/index.php/Manifesto_of_Possibilities).

But in his book *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Kester suggests that perhaps artists can also work from a position of solidarity rather than simply as provocateurs, and that the effectiveness of this solidarity depends on their sensitivity to the “local political dynamics, histories and cultures” and the possibility of an ongoing relationship. (Kester 2004)

It seems that these two positions are not so far from each other as one might expect: Bishop through Ranciere arguing for the recognition of an individual’s capacity as a complicit actor in society able to make their own interpretations of cultural formations and Kester arguing for the possibility of a kind of collaboration which allows the viewer to ‘speak back’ to the artist in certain ways, and in which this reply becomes in effect a part of the work itself”.<sup>7</sup> But where the two diverge is in the consideration of autonomy and heterotony, between art as art, and art as life. And it is here, that I find it particularly useful to come back to our discussion of place and situation, as a way of considering how art engages with life in the city but may retain autonomy. So not as Patrick Brill suggests as either or, but as the integration of complicity and resistance.

In her 1998 article, “Public Art and Urban Identities”, Miwon Kwon argues that, “community-based art can be approached as a projective enterprise, rather than a descriptive enterprise”, that projects should “unsettle”, “activate” and “raise questions”. (Kwon 1998) Kwon’s argument, as I am sure you are familiar, emerges from a critique of what is known here as ‘New Genre Public Art’ or ‘Art in the Public Interest’. She sees this as the third paradigm of public art – after ‘Art in Public Places’ and ‘Art as Public Spaces’. Kwon raises important questions about the motivations of funders and commissioners, about the balance of power and negotiation of difference and queries the possibility for artworks to operate beyond the confines of a set agenda. Hence, the intention to uncover lost histories, to reveal what is unknown to a city’s inhabitants, is essentially negated. Being situated, being embedded, to feel that you belong or at least ‘know’ a place, she suggests, is “not necessarily of artistic merit”.

Essentially, even if the curatorial enterprise is to legitimate place identity, if we understand place to be an unstable, shifting set of political, social, economic and material relations – surely the works which connect and engage with a real sense of place will be those that engender a sense of dislocation – but not simply through provocation but rather that enable the passer-by, the art pilgrim, the participant to see the city, place anew?



There is not enough time here to begin to unpick the disparate approaches to the destabilisation of place, but we might begin with analysis of how the human figure is employed in Antony Gormley’s *Event Horizon* over London’s skyline, compared to Javier Tellez’s *One Flew Over the Void*, 2005, San Diego/Tijuana or Francis Alÿs’ *Guards*. Or how land is exchanged and contested between Rachel Whiteread’s *House*, here seen demolished by order of the Council in 1993, Aleksandra Mir’s *First Woman on the Moon*, 1999, and Amy Balkin’s ongoing *This is the Public Domain*, Tehachapi, California.

An example of a work I was directly involved with might give you a sense of what I mean, and as I am based in Bristol, I hope you’ll forgive a slight divergence from the London stories. In 2006, the artists Ivan and Heather Morison staged a remarkable project for one day. We commissioned the Morisons to make a work for the British Art Show, a survey of British Art every five years, which toured to four regional cities in the UK in 2006. Installed in the early hours in darkness, a jack-knifed lorry crash was simulated in the centre of the urban landscape – a pedestrianised area of wooden boards, block paving, lights, fountains and cascading water.

<sup>7</sup> Grant H. Kester. “Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework for Littoral Art”, [http://www.variant.randomstate.org/events\\_archive.html](http://www.variant.randomstate.org/events_archive.html). 12 April 2006.



It appeared that the material consequences of the crash were still present - the long refrigerated trunk of the articulated lorry discharging its load of 25,000 flowers. On closer inspection though, the situation appeared far too contrived, clean if you like, to constitute a real crash. The cornucopia of flowers was clearly stylised, the lorry – devoid of advertising – appeared all the more a sculptural object in space – as if a monument against which a commemoration was being laid. The artists effected it seemed a new, unexpected, open-ended chains of events,

whereby the transit of flowers appeared to have been halted. There were no visible signs of interpretation, no information sheets, no stewards, just the materiality of the work. The work tracked the duration of a day in Bristol attracting the attention first of shift workers, breakfast Radio, then commuters, then tourists. By mid afternoon, a rumour had begun to circulate that the flowers would be given away and by 6pm, a queue had formed. At 6pm, a frenzy ensued – and within 40 minutes, every last flower and stalk had gone – dispersed across the city – not simply in small bunches, but in huge swathes of flowers stuffed into bicycles and prams, carried home on the tops of buses. The work now continues to circulate as a tape-slide piece with audio derived from the flower auction in Amsterdam where the flowers were sourced.

As the commissioner of this work, what has continued to interest me is the way in which this work assumed different guises throughout a 12-hour period and how it continues to circulate in the global art economy subsequently. At first a static, place-based sculpture, the work eluded to the monument – but through a violent intrusion into public space – perhaps evoking a similar intervention to Elmgreen and Dragset's *Shortcut* – installed here outside the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (below).



But then the Morisons' work was transformed into a dispersed work through the city, virtually through digital imaging on mobile phones and materially through the dispersal of flowers. In this sense, the work emerges as truly contemporaneous – a situation rather than a sited work.

If we take Kwon's notion of the wrong place, the avant-garde struggle, as she suggests, as a kind of spatial politics, "to pressure the definition and legitimation of art by locating it elsewhere, in places other than where it belongs". (Kwon 2000, p. 43); it seems to me that we can discern a capacity to unsettle existing perceptions of place through strategies of which create new situations in place. Artists such as Ivan and Heather Morison, Roman Ondák, Francis Alÿs, Jeremy Deller, Ruth Ewan, Pawel Althamer and have all adapted established artistic strategies, to challenge our perceptions of place, effect interruptions, geological and physical displacements, staging mythic acts that enter the social imagination, and spectacular intrusions in the urban fabric or quiet infections which fundamentally remake place and space; they unsettle place memory.

Important considerations are of course what kinds of resources these emergent forms of contemporary art will require in the future. Will galleries become increasingly like production companies? How will existing staff levels cope with the ambitious requirements of programmes no longer limited by time or space? How will the effects of climate change impact on the itinerant schedules of nomadic artists moving from place to place? But perhaps by way of a conclusion, I want to just think back to those Artforum covers and think for a moment about how these works can signify beyond that first audience and the specifics of time and situation? How we understand them to circulate in the global art economy through films, images, rumours, youtube downloads, and SMS text messages. As an example, I want

to relate two stories of two works each of which can be said to have mapped routes through London.

(This shaded section was not presented)

Over five years, Francis Alÿs developed *Seven Walks*, an ambitious project for Artangel which delved into the everyday rituals and habits of London. The walks were enacted in different parts of the city – Hyde Park, the City of London, the National Portrait Gallery and in the streets close to Regents Park, and resulted in a series of films, videos, paintings and drawings which were presented together in a neo-classical building on Portman Square and the National Portrait Gallery in autumn 2005. *Guards*, a 28-minute film by Francis Alÿs and Rafael Ortega, follows sixty-four individual Coldstream Guards. Each soldier begins alone and then groups when meeting his peers creating a square formation, whereupon they march towards the nearest bridge and then dissolve.



We commissioned writer Iain Sinclair to respond to the piece in 2006. Among British writers, no-one has made London the central subject of their work to quite such an extent as Sinclair. *“The Alÿs film”, he suggests “begins with the ultimate tourist vision and takes it to another place. Guards is not only an acoustic piece, it’s also a mythological piece... it’s made by someone who doesn’t belong in London, a passer-through. And these people, the cultural exiles, as far as I’m concerned, are always the ones with the sharpest visionary take on London. They’re estranged from the nonsense of simply getting yourself about, sealed in discrete pods... Someone coming from outside sees two things; they see the iconic postcard realities and they see how impossible it is to negotiate space – and they recognise certain obvious facts. The instinct, all the time, is to come*

*from being scattered, lost individuals, into forming a block or group; to undergo this kind of square dance, a dance in the city of noise, of hobnail boots, to make a shape and to get to the river... The weight of capital, money, investments, surveillance that’s pushing at you, constantly, and you have to get away... So this film is a dream of London rather than a London that could ever exist. It’s surreal, it’s quite funny, there are people in the wrong place. It’s a vision of the city by someone who comes from somewhere else, someone who has understood our strangeness and the strangeness of the geography.”<sup>8</sup>*

Ruth Ewan's *Did You Kiss The Foot That Kicked You* was also commissioned by Artangel (<http://balladofaccounting.org/>) some two years later. Ewan's project is the first in a series of commissions in response to an open call for ideas. The project marks a clear continuation of the two major themes of Ewan's work to date - the struggle for social justice and the transformative power of sound and music. Previous works of hers include setting up jukeboxes full of protest songs in a gallery and training a small team of parrots to repeat revolutionary slogans. On this occasion, 100 buskers were deployed by the artist around the City of London and were to play the Ballad of Accounting by Ewan MacColl every 10 minutes. The artist developed this work in response to Government records released in 2006 through The National Archive which show that from 1932, security service MI5 held a file on MacColl. One report claims that he was 'a communist with very extreme views' who needed 'special attention'. The file also states, as a cause for concern, that MacColl had 'exceptional ability as a singer and musical organiser'. Pamphlets would be available giving further information about the project, but there was to be no direct publicity beforehand. The idea was to inject the song - a litany of calls for social justice - into people's journeys. Commuters journeying to work encountered the bold brass sound of the Oompah band on Waterloo Bridge, a delta blues adaptation at Marble Arch tube station and the unusual distorted sounds of a vocal looping pedal at Canary Wharf. *“The song”, Ruth Ewan suggests, “communicates the agitated excitement of closing the gap between culture and everyday life, of talking directly to the audience, of making an unmediated impact. At the same time, the song’s urgent tones communicate an anxiety that no one is actually listening. Recalling his street performing days, MacColl above all remembered the ‘blank apathy... harder to take than abuse.’ (Play audio)*

<sup>8</sup> Situations paper 1, published at [www.situations.org.uk](http://www.situations.org.uk)

If the majority of commissioning is fundamentally tied to the legitimating of place identity whether that is Southwark, Trafalgar Square or Edgware Road, and we understand place as an unstable, shifting set of political, social, economic and material relations – surely the resulting works which connect and engage with a real sense of place will be those that engender a sense of dislocation – that encourage us not to look with the eyes of a tourist but to implicate us in the act of place-making.

These projects require a sensitivity to the ways in which the work will engage with its public – whether quietly, unannounced seeping into the social imagination, or spectacularly demanding the mobilisation of the public, whether leading an audience to a fixed point in time or space, only to deflect attention and to critique the very context for which the work has been commissioned, or whether reaching its audience through an iconic and intriguing image that is just the beginning for a set of stories.

For me art which truly becomes immersed in the life of the city, and which enriches public spaces, emerges through artistic engagements (be they fleeting, or long-term) which recognise what it truly means to be contemporary. The experience of art is not one in my opinion that necessarily restores a sense of belonging or offers up a moment of resolution, but if truly situation-specific that work of art will shatter the fictions of a stable sense of place, will intervene in the status quo and literally shift the ground beneath your feet.

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