dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community' (Nora, 1992, p. xvii). Places such as Tryweryn where Liverpool Corporation constructed a reservoir, or Aberfan where a sliding coal tip engulfed the village school. At the time such events inspired protest movements and changed perceptions of industrialization. They continue to resonate as ever-present sites of claim and counter-claim. As sites of performance, they offer dense accretions of conflicting opinion. Whilst Nora's formulation is open to critique as being overly instrumental, it does help illuminate the role of the memorialization of place in a small, stateless nation: 'the goal was to exhume significant sites, to identify the most obvious and crucial centres of national memory' (ibid.).

And there are, too, particular Welsh expressions *of* placea, that help orientate both its practical engagement and critical apprehension: *y filltir sgwar* (see p. 110), *y fro* (see p. 111) and *cynefin* (see pp. 101–3).

All of which sets particular conditions for the location, presentation, form and content of site-specific performance.

# 1

# Introduction

**In which current understandings of site-specific performance and critical perceptions from within and beyond the field of theatre studies are detailed; and a set of distinctions between auditorium and site are proposed as a provisional point of departure.**

Although the search for a practicable, encompassing definition of site-specific performance has long claimed scholarly attention, it remains slippery. In 1998 Patrice Pavis proposed:

> This term refers to a staging and performance conceived on the basis of a place in the real world (ergo, outside the established theatre). A large part of the work has to do with researching a place, often an unusual one that is imbued with history or permeated with atmosphere: an airplane hangar, unused factory, city neighbourhood, house or apartment. The insertion of a classical or modern text in this 'found space' throws new light on it, gives it an unsuspected power, and places the audience at an entirely different relationship to the text, the place and the purpose for being there. This new context provides a new situation or enunciation … and gives the performance an unusual setting of great charm and power. (Pavis, 1998, pp. 337–8)

Pavis's observations relate specifically to practices originating in theatre: 'the play-as-event belongs to the space, and makes the space perform as much as it makes actors perform' (Wiles, 2003, p. 1). Shortly after, in the keynote volume *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000), Nick Kaye attends to a broader range of forms, stemming from both dramatic and visual art traditions. His characterization of site-specific art as 'articulate exchanges between the work of art and the places in which its meanings are defined' (Kaye, 2000, p. 1) sustains. He resists distinguishing common features within a putative genre, focusing upon process rather than object, and upon the relationship between 'an "object" or "event" and a position it occupies'; '… Indeed, a definition of site-specificity might begin quite simply by describing the basis of such an exchange' (ibid.).

Since the publication of *Site-Specific Art* related scholarship has burgeoned. Amongst many commentators, Miwon Kwon has extended Kaye's concern with visual art practices and Jen Harvie, Dee Heddon, Gay McAuley, Misha Myers, Heike Roms, Cathy Turner and Fiona Wilkie have all written substantively on performance. Most note a change in practice over the past ten years: from

*fixity* to *mobility*; from *architectonic* to *peripatetic* manifestations; from *expositional* to *relational* modes; from 'the spectacular re-enactment to the quiet intervention, from remedial collaboration to dialogic, open-ended process' (Doherty, 2004, p. 11); and from general categorization – 'site-determined', 'site-referenced', 'site-conscious', 'site-responsive', 'context-specific' – to closer scrutiny of the specificity of each instance of performance. Daniel Libeskind's long lists of types of space – food space, interesting space, racist space, forgotten space, etc. – alerts us to both the folly and potential of classification as his students are asked to 'materialize, create, investigate, illuminate, construct, touch, redeem' spaces thus defined (Libeskind, 2001, pp. 65–8).

In her survey of site-specific performance in Britain, what she terms 'interventions into cultural spaces', Fiona Wilkie wrestles with *typology* whilst admitting that few instances are ever distinct and discrete. She identifies *site-sympathetic* (an existing performance text physicalized in a selected site); *site-generic* (performance generated for a series of like sites); and *site-specific* (performance specifically generated from/for one selected site (Wilkie, 2002a, p. 150).

But at base she appreciates the reciprocal *instrumentality* or *affordance* offered by the relationship: 'site-specific performance engages with site as symbol, site as story-teller, site as structure' (ibid., p. 158). 'Layers of the site are revealed through reference to: historical documentation; site usage (past and present); found text, objects, actions, sounds, etc.; anecdotal guidance; personal association; half-truths and lies; site morphology (physical and vocal explorations of site)' (ibid., p. 150). And she challenges notions of easy congruence between performance and site: 'that the "fit" may not be a comfortable merging with the resonances of the site but might be a reaction against them' (ibid., p. 149).

Wilkie canvasses companies and individuals. Brighton-based Red Earth describe their work as 'inspired by and designed to integrate with the physical and non-physical aspects of a specific location' (ibid., p. 149). Dartington artist and academic Sue Palmer comments: 'it's not just about a place, but the people who normally inhabit and use that place. For it wouldn't exist without them' (ibid., p. 145).

In subsequent research, Wilkie identifies two broad developments in practice: 'a shift in form (from *inhabiting* to *journeying*), and a shift in the nature of inquiry (from *this place* to broader questions of *site*)' (Wilkie, 2008, pp. 100–1). That is, from attention to the cultural resonances of one particular site, to an active rethinking of how 'site' is constituted – 'how art, and in our case performance creates a space of encounter'; 'Questions of *what* and *how* site "means" are teased apart' (ibid., p. 101). 'A shift in form can be noted from performance that *inhabits* a place to performance that *moves through* spaces'; 'from a concern with the political and cultural meanings of particular locations to a focus on broader questions of what *site* as a category might mean' (ibid., p. 90).

Rather than simply occupying an 'unusual setting', site-specific performance is adjudged to hold 'possibilities for responding to and interrogating a range of current spatial concerns, and for investigating the spatial dimension of contemporary identities' (ibid., p. 89), representing 'formal and aesthetic but also political choices' (ibid., p. 96). Not only does the use of non-theatre venues contribute to 'an enquiry into what theatre *is and might be*', it also incorporates 'a set of productive spatial metaphors, whereby practitioners use their focus on geographical space to explore a range of theatrical, conceptual, political and virtual spaces. Thus the potentially restrictive *specificity* of the work is expanded to allow for ambiguity and multiplicity' (ibid., p. 100).

Of the initiative in Scotland to create a devolved national institution, she opines that 'site-specificity offers a convenient marker of a set of ideas with which the National Theatre of Scotland wants to be associated: experiment, accessibility, the connection between art and everyday life, and a shift away from the primacy of the metropolitan theatre building' (ibid., pp. 87–8).

Jen Harvie indicates the potential of site-specific performance 'to explore spatial and material histories and to mediate the complex identities these histories remember and produce' (Harvie, 2005, p. 44):

> Site-specific performance can be especially powerful as a vehicle for remembering and forming a community for at least two reasons. First, its location can work as a potent mnemonic trigger, helping to evoke specific past times related to the place and time of performance and facilitating a negotiation between the meanings of those times. (ibid., p. 42)

Second, it is effective for 'remembering and constituting identities that are significantly determined by their materiality and spatiality, identities to do with, for example, class, occupation, and gender' (ibid.).

With regard to the Welsh context, Heike Roms retorts: 'it was frequently not the locations that invested the performances with a sense of identity, as Harvie proposes, but the performances that made these locations and histories associated with them representative of such an identity' (Roms, 2008, p. 115). For Roms, contemporary site-specific performance may involve a 'perceived potential to bring into correspondence the place of representation and the represented place in an attempt to create theatre work that expresses particular localized concerns' (ibid., p. 111), encouraging 'a different kind of audience-performer interaction' (ibid., p. 116).

Within an Australian context, Gay McAuley (2006, 2007) again outlines a schematic typology. Her first category of practice seeks in non-traditional sites 'those physical features and aesthetic qualities needed for a particular production', with the proviso that site 'may begin to tell its own story' (2007, p. 8). The second category entails engagement with a particular community. And the third category emerges from a particular place: 'it engages intensively with the history and politics of that place, and with the resonance of these in the present' (ibid., p. 9).

Whilst her preferred designation 'site-based' refers to performance 'in found spaces rather than in designated theatre buildings' (ibid., p. 7), in which site

becomes the dominant signifier rather than simply being that which contains the performance, she is conscious of its capacity to enhance a 'deeper understanding of the spatialised nature of human culture' (ibid., p. 7), 'changing the way people perceive places' (2006, p. 151) – and to engage with social and political issues of ownership, power, identity, exclusion, memory. 'Work emerges from a particular place, it engages intensively with the history and politics of that place, and with the resonance of these in the present' (2007, p. 9), permitting 'the past to surge into the present' (2006, p. 150).

In regard to a history of colonialism, 'the placial turn' in theory and an appreciation of complexities of dwelling, occupancy and exclusion are significant in demonstrating the ethical responsibilities of site-specific practices, particularly those 'involved in activating and articulating the memories that circulate in relation to places of trauma' (ibid., pp. 171–2). 'Furthermore, locally based spectators experience an enhanced kind of creative agency in that their knowledge of the place and its history may well be deeper than that of the performance makers, and they will continue to frequent the place after the performers have left' (2007, p. 9).

Canadian scholar Kathleen Irwin also emphasizes the human dimension. For her, site-specific performance is 'extrapolated from the specificities of the site itself and, importantly, the communities that claim ownership of it' (Irwin, 2007, pp. 10–11). But it retains the capacity to unsettle and disturb: 'where physical traces of a building's past operate metaphorically to render absent present and function to introduce the spectator into other worlds and dimensions of our world that are *other*. The material traces evoke worlds that are intangible and unlocatable: worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect and insight' (ibid., p. 37).

Drawing upon her practical experiences as a member of Exeter-based company Wrights and Sites, Cathy Turner concurs with the creative potency of an uneasy fit. For her: 'each occupation, or traversal, or transgression of space offers a reinterpretation of it, even a rewriting' (Turner, 2004, p. 373). In addition, 'the "ghost" is transgressive, defamiliarising, and incoherent' (ibid., p. 374), creating a fruitful disjuncture. She characterizes site-specific performance as a 'range of lens'. Its critical appreciation, apprehension and account requires:

- A rhetoric that situates us not as within but as elements of the space of site-specific performance.
- A vocabulary which provides better metaphors for the co-creative aspects of inter-subjectivity.
- A greater emphasis on phenomenological experience.
- A greater emphasis on social interaction, including play. (ibid., p. 379)



In addressing the provisionality and contingency of ephemeral practices based upon other than architectonic principles, she appeals to psychoanalysis:

> By referring to this body of work, one need not return to notions of either site or self as fixed or finite entities. One need not imply an unproblematic notion of a located self, or a resolution of the tension between conceptual and 'real' sites. One need not make an absolute distinction between material and human objects. (ibid.)

She favours the inclusivity of Winnicott's 'potential space' (ibid.) within which all elements, human and material, are envisaged as co-creative.

In both her critical and artistic work Dee Heddon has concentrated upon the local and personal: 'performances that fold or unfold autobiography and place, particularly outside places, I have conceptualised them as being autotopographic' (Heddon, 2008, p. 90). She suggests '"autotopography" renders the self of the place, and the place of the self, transparent' (ibid., p. 15). Her writing juxtaposes 'the factual with the fictional, event with imagination, history with story, narrative with fragment, past with present' (ibid., p. 9), in order to 'write place'. In their latest joint project 'The Art of Walking: An Embodied Practice', Heddon and Turner set out to challenge walking in landscape as 'male, solitary and self reliant', 'rhapsodic and epiphatic' (Wylie, 2005, p. 235).

Architect Jane Rendell characterizes her 'site-writing' as a form of site-specific/critical spatial practice:

> To achieve its objective the research brings spatial understandings from a number of disciplines to spatialize the concepts/processes/subjects of writing through an exploration of the relationship between the material/cultural/political qualities of the site, the associated sites remembered/dreamed/imagined by the writer, and the spaces of writing itself. (Rendell, 2009; see also 2010, forthcoming)

Miwon Kwon's sustained examination of practices with roots in the visual arts are broadly illuminating, particularly as she elaborates ways in which 'our understanding of site has shifted from a fixed, physical location to somewhere or something constituted through social, economic, cultural and political processes' (Kwon, quoted in Doherty, 2004, p. 10) – and from phenomenologically orientated practices to 'an "intertextually" coordinated, multiply-located, discursive field of operation' (Doherty, 2004, p. 30). Site-specific practices:

> initially took site as an actual location, a tangible reality 'its identity composed of a unique combination of physical elements: length, depth, height, texture, and shape of walls and rooms; scale and proportion of plazas, buildings, or parks; existing conditions of lighting, ventilation, traffic patterns; distinctive topographical features, and so forth. (Kwon, 2004, p. 11)

They were:

> initially based in a phenomenological or experiential understanding of site, defined primarily as an agglomeration of the actual attributes of a particular location (the size, scale, texture, and dimension of walls, ceilings, rooms; existing lighting conditions, topographical features, traffic patterns, seasonal characteristics of climate, etc.), with architecture serving as a foil for the artwork in many instances. (ibid., p. 3)

Current perceptions of site have moved 'from a physical location – grounded, fixed, actual – to a discursive vector – ungrounded, fluid, virtual' (ibid., pp. 29–30), effectively relocating meaning from the art object to the contingencies of context. Kwon adds: 'it can be literal, like a street corner, or virtual, like a theoretical concept' (ibid., p. 3).

Kwon identifies three paradigms for practice: phenomenological, social/institutional and discursive. But she stresses that this is not a progressive chronological ordering: 'rather they are competing definitions, overlapping with one another and operating simultaneously in various cultural practices today (or even within a single artist's single project)' (ibid., p. 30). All involve 'an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site' (ibid., p. 12), the work addressing 'the site itself as another *medium*, as an "other language"' (ibid., p. 75). Whilst site-specific art might constitute a form of institutional critique and more intense engagement with the everyday world, it has the capacity to articulate and cultivate local particularities, accentuating difference in the face of globalizing tendencies. However, it may also work in opposition to the constraints of context so that the work cannot be read as an affirmation of 'questionable ideologies and political power' (ibid.).

Contemporary societal deterritorialization and the fluidity of a migratory model of experience introduce 'possibilities for the production of multiple identities, allegiances, and meanings, based not on normative conformities but on the non-rational convergences forged by chance encounters and circumstances' (ibid., p. 165), producing 'symptoms not codes', or 'spaces of affect' understood in contrast to 'effecting space' (Hauptmann, 2006, p. 11). Nevertheless we may maintain 'a secret adherence to the actuality of places': 'Despite the proliferation of discursive sites and fictional selves, however, the phantom of a site as an actual place remains, and our psychic, habitual attachment to places regularly returns as it continues to inform our sense of identity' (Kwon, 2004, p. 165).

It is not a matter of choosing sides, between models of nomadism and sedentariness, 'between space and place, between digital interfaces and the handshake': 'This means addressing the uneven conditions of adjacencies and distances *between* one thing, one person, one place, one thought, one fragment *next* to another, rather than invoking equivalences via one thing *after* another' (ibid., p. 166).

There are here echoes of Nicholas Bourriaud's conception of *relational aesthetics*. Within relational practices the nature of the encounter is fundamental, aiming at the 'formal construction of space–time entities that may be able to elude alienation, the division of labour, the commodification of space and the reification of life' (Bourriaud, 2004, p. 48), encouraging 'moments of sociability' (Bourriaud, 1998, p. 33). 'The political value of the relational aesthetic lies in two very simple observations: social reality is the product of negotiation and democracy is a montage of forms' (ibid.). So site may be produced *through* and *in* interaction, momentarily. Relations make spaces rather than occurring within them: 'place as formed out of the specificity of interacting social relations in a particular location; place as meeting place' (Massey, 1994, p. 168).

Misha Myers's performances (see p. 27) in Plymouth 'activate and invite modes of participation' (Myers, 2009, pp. 107ff.). Her shared and remote walks, within which the knowledgeable participant or *percipient* can alter and determine outcomes, encourage conviviality and companionability, particularly with disadvantaged communities. Those present are asked to recall other times and places that become projected upon and are part of the cityscape traversed in performance.

In appreciating the shift from attitudes regarding site as vacant space awaiting performance, the appearance of new kinds of informational site in changing technological circumstances, and the role of human agency in place-making in a transitory moment of absorption of actors and things and an intensification of affect, the perceptions of cognate disciplines such as geography and anthropology, are instructive for both the critical apprehension of and creative initiatives in performance.

In human geography, the *new mobilities paradigm* aims 'at going beyond the imagery of "terrains" as spatially geographical containers for social processes' (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 209). It is a reflection upon the effects of deterritorialization and nomadism – the increasing flow and travel of people, information and image – whilst acknowledging that in movement not everyone is free in the same way. Connections of social life, it is proposed, are 'organised through certain nodes':

> Mobilities thus entail distinct social spaces that orchestrate new forms of social life around such nodes, for example, stations, hotels, motorways, resorts, airports, leisure complexes, cosmopolitan cities, beaches, galleries, and roadside parks.
>
> Or connections might be enacted through less privileged spaces, on the street corners, subway stations, buses, public plazas and back alleys where the less privileged might use pay-phones, beepers, or more recently short-text messaging to organize illicit exchanges, meetings, political demonstrations or 'underground' social gatherings. (ibid., p. 213)

> Places are thus not so much fixed as implicated within complex networks by which hosts, guests, buildings, objects, and machinery are contingently brought together to produce certain performances in certain places at certain times. Places are about relationships, about the placing of peoples, materials, images and the systems of difference that they perform.

> At the same time as places are dynamic, they are also about proximities, about the bodily copresence of people who happen to be in that place at that time, doing activities together. (ibid., p. 214)

There are then new kinds of site, more or less stable, within and through which performance might be enacted – and new kinds of (performative) relationship within and through which site might (temporally) materialize.

Also in geography, Nigel Thrift's *non-representational theory* is towards '*the geography of what happens*' (Thrift, 2008, p. 2). It concerns movement: 'movement captures a certain attitude to life as potential' (ibid., p. 5). In sum, it attends to the 'onflow' of everyday life. It concentrates on practices 'understood as material bodies of work or styles that have gained enough stability over time, through, for example, the establishment of corporeal routines and specialized devices to reproduce themselves' (ibid., p. 8); as well as upon 'the vast spillage of *things*'; 'Things answer back' (ibid., p. 9). It is experimental. It stresses affect and sensation. And it returns to consideration of space.

In addressing the consequences of technological advance, Thrift sees no reason to reduce everyday experience and understanding of spatial complexity to 'a problematic of "scale"': 'Actors continually change size. A multiplicity of "scales" is always present in interactions' (ibid., p. 17). There is a proliferation of the 'actor's spaces that can be recognised and worked with', redefining 'what counts as an actor' (ibid.).

Although demanding in its range of references, Thrift's work concerns *performance*. It is about dealing with the everyday as it comes at us, as sophisticated social improvisation in a thinned out world, 'whereby a given locale is linked indifferently to every (or any) other place in global space' (Casey, 2001, p. 406) and where we no longer know quite how to go on but are always 'on the go', where regulated or habitual practices may prove ineffective.

Significant concepts related to 'performance' in the work of geographers such as John Wylie and Hayden Lorimer are creative practice, mode of representation, embodied enquiry and analytical trope and *affect* ('an intensity, a field perhaps of awe, irritation or serenity which exceeds, enters into, and ranges over the sensations and emotions of a subject who sees' (Wylie, 2005, p. 236); 'the augmentation or diminution of a body's capacity to act, to engage, and to connect, such that autoaffection is linked to the self-feeling of being alive – that is aliveness or vitality' (Clough, 2007, p. 2)). They undertake performative activities and they write of the sensual and physical experience in situations where materialities, motilities and corporealities are of equal account.

In 2002 Wylie conducted a solo walk along a 200-mile stretch of the South West Coast Path (Wylie, 2005). His account 'aims to describe some of the differential configurations of self and landscape emergent within the performative *milieu* of coastal walking' (p. 236). Hayden Lorimer, in his research on 'sites of special interest', focuses on:

> notable or overlooked landscape features (e.g. paths, gates, stiles, dykes and walls, flagstone steps, sheep pens, cattle grids, shooting butts, bus shelters, bothies, scarecrows, gang-huts). Such folk geographies of things-in-places would focus on narratives, tales, memories and material remains of the not-so-distant past. (Lorimer, 2009)

Both have noted a resurgence in popular topographical writing in Britain pursuant upon the success and pervasive influence of W. G. Sebald, whose *Rings of Saturn* (1999) traces a long-distance walk in Norfolk. In *Waterlog* (1999) Roger Deakin swims across England. In *The Wild Places* (2007) Robert Mcfarlane visits inaccessible locations. In *Connemara: Listening to the Wind* (2007) Tim Robinson continues his detailed mapping of one region in western Ireland. Each has performative aspects: movement, dwelling. Each is a personal account of experience and of place.

Both have acknowledged the work of American anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, particularly her attempts at 'narrativizing a local cultural real' (Stewart, 1996, p. 3) in coal-mining communities in West Virginia. Stewart invites the reader to imagine a deprived community through its own understandings of place and the memories they enshrine:

> It tells its story through interruptions, amassed densities of description, evocation of voices and the conditions of their possibility, and lyrical, ruminative aporias that give pause.
>
> It fashions itself as a tendon between interpretation and evocation, mimicking the tension in culture between the disciplinary and the imaginary. (ibid., p. 7)

Her work is 'a dwelling in and on a cultural poetics contingent on a place and a time and in-filled with palpable desire' (ibid., p. 4).

This resonates with the linked ideas that anthropologist Tim Ingold outlines in *The Perception of the Environment* (2000), which have been widely taken up in associated fields:

> A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there – to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these, in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people's engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance. (ibid., p. 192)

For Ingold, landscape is also *taskscape*: a work-in-progress, perpetually under construction. It is a matrix of movement, with distinct places as nodes bound together by the itineraries of inhabitants (ibid., p. 219). It is differentiated, but it better resembles a network of related places, some revealed through our habitual actions, some through familiarity and affinity and some through particular moments and events stored in communal memory. Moving between places, *wayfinding*, more closely resembles story-telling than map-using, as one situates one's position within the context of journeys previously made: 'every place holds within it memories of previous arrivals and departures, as well as

expectations of how one may reach it, or reach other places from it' (ibid., p. 227). Perceiving landscape is thus 'to carry out an act of remembrance' (ibid., p. 189); 'places do not have locations but histories' (ibid., p. 219).

There is no privilege of origin: a place owes its character not only to the experiences it affords as sights, sounds, etc. but also to what is done there as looking, listening, moving. Both 'being' and environment are mutually emergent, continuously brought into existence together. And here performance might represent a place of work or special moment within landscape (see Pearson, 2006a, pp. 152–62).

Site then is also a function of the social: '*Topophilia* is the affective bond between people and place or setting' (Tuan, 1974, p. 4):

> a notion of place where specificity (local uniqueness, a sense of place) derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from history of relative isolation – not to be disrupted by isolation – but from the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together there. (Massey, 1999, p. 18)

And here site-specific performance may not only highlight such investment, such heterogeneity, it may also become a lasting part of the story of that place: 'potentially constitutive of aspects of the world' (Myers, 2009, p. 34).

## Provisional distinctions

Given an expanded notion of site – 'reimagining place as a situation, a set of circumstances, geographical location, historical narrative, group of people or social agenda' (Doherty, 2004, p. 9) – and an extended range of practices, can anything then be said, in general, to define site-specific performance?

Whilst 'that undertaken in non-theatrical spaces' is now barely adequate, the auditorium might yet provide a *control*, an abstracted set of conditions, against which to extrapolate the particularities of site work, all that might absorb and impact upon practice (whilst acknowledging that the auditorium is itself a site, equally susceptible to conceptual readdress):

| Auditorium | Site |
| --- | --- |
| The auditorium is cloistered. | At site, bounds and perimeters may be extant or installed. |
| In the auditorium environmental conditions are stable. | At site, environmental conditions may change and need to be accepted or actively countered. |
| The auditorium is dark and quiet. | Site is only dark or quiet if chosen for such qualities or rendered so. |



| Auditorium | Site |
| --- | --- |
| In the auditorium performance is scheduled. | At site, there may be a transitory discontinuity in the social fabric. |
| In the auditorium performance is located in one place. | At site, performance may be distributed as moments of rhetoric intensity. |
| In the auditorium the arrangement of the audience is fixed. | At site, there may be multiple dispositions: organized; fluid; negotiated in performance ... |
| In the auditorium, the audience is cast as audience: purposefully assembled, expectant, disposed, potentially appreciative. | At site, the audience may be incidental – those present in the same place at the same time – and obdurate. |
| In the auditorium the audience may have been before. | At site there are no regular theatregoers. If they have been before, it is in another guise. |
| In the auditorium the scene is singular. | At site, the prospect is complex unless otherwise framed. |
| In the auditorium events occur in the middle distance. | At site, events occur at varying and changing distances. |
| In the auditorium effects are confined and controlled. | At site, effects may intrude and compete for attention. |
| In the auditorium the machinery of production pre-exists performance. | At site, it may be installed or modified from that otherwise existing, or rendered surplus to requirements. |
| In the auditorium artifice is disguised. | At site, performance is in plain view unless masked. |
| In the auditorium established techniques are more or less sufficient to the task of production. | At site, techniques may be invented or appropriated. |
| In the auditorium one thing of singular importance is happening. | At site, many things may be happening: performance may need to establish and proclaim its own presence. |
| The auditorium is designed to facilitate repetition. | At site, there may be no recourse, no second chance. |
| In the auditorium previous occupations are erased. | At site, they are evident and operative, though not necessarily alluded to. |
| In the auditorium this sort of thing has happened before. | At site, it is always as if for the first time. |

# 2

## Models and Approaches

**In which conceptual and theoretical approaches are proposed and examined in order to acknowledge and appreciate the particular nature of site-specific performance. An immersive model is introduced. Reference is made to the insights of other disciplines, including human geography and architecture to describe better the experience of place and the nature of performative occupancy.**

### Visitation: going and doing

Imagine Esgair Fraith ('Speckled Ridge'), a farmstead first occupied during the enclosure of common land near Lampeter, west Wales, in the early nineteenth century. Often mistakenly described as a hamlet, its buildings, walls and paths appear too numerous for an upland agricultural concern. From the outset, they were more than this. The first occupier was a weaver, an out-worker in the regional woollen industry. The buildings were always partly industrial, with manufacturing and cloth-storage sheds near the house, dams in the river and the remains of a horse-whim, perhaps to assist fulling. By the late 1880s the family was much reduced: eventually only one daughter lived there, with her own illegitimate daughter, masquerading as her aunt. The next occupants, the Davies, took Esgair Fraith solely as a farming enterprise around 1890. A dated stone of 1904 from the garden marks their energetic tenure. Mrs Davies died in 1926 and the old man lived alone until 1941 when the farm was finally abandoned. The roof was missing by 1949. Local memory has Mr Davies engaged in smithing, tinkering and cobbling, and incredibly in one of the collapsed outbuildings there are traces of his work: fragments of baths and pans, pieces of leather and nails. Esgair Fraith is now in ruins. Its story is that of just two families, of two sets of biographies.

For almost fifty years Esgair Fraith lay deep in the Clwedog Forest, planted by the Forestry Commission between 1956 and 1959 in two adjoining parishes in the long-term post-Second World War strategy to ensure essential resources. It is composed mainly of non-indigenous sitka spruce, with some pine. But the farmstead was never quite hidden. The deciduous trees, beech and sycamore, that matured in the garden and surrounding hedges always marked its location in the coniferous canopy. Gradually a thick blanket of moss and lichen coated its fabric in the resulting microclimate. And it took on symbolic significance: through the state-organized processes of land requisition and afforestation,



it became one of those places in Wales, along with reservoirs and military ranges and open-cast mines, where land disappeared, was 'disappeared', and with it too, by implication, language. In this, land itself is not regarded as separate from the lived experience. Each episode of loss inspired poetic reflection and political response, campaigns of civil disobedience, the formation of organizations of resistance: each a veritable *lieux de memoire* (Nora, 1996, pp. 1–20). This was always a complex matter, involving issues of homeland and native soil, of place, culture, idiom and identity intimately entwined. The late Welsh scholar Bedwyr Lewis Jones suggests that 'land and language are two strands that tie the Welsh-speaker to his *cynefin* or locale'. 'There are other links', he adds, 'such as remembrance of things past' (Lewis Jones, 1985, p. 122).

In what follows it might help to bear Esgair Fraith in mind. But picture too a street corner or a library or a telephone kiosk or a beach or a swimming pool or …

If site-specific performance involves an *activity*, an *audience* and a *place*, then creative opportunities reside in the multiple creative articulations of *us*, *them* and *there*. In the model that follows, each postulate poses particular questions, both offering and demanding different forms and modes of engagement. In acts of visitation and meeting, it begins with me, the same me as 'me-performing' in *Theatre/Archaeology* (Pearson and Shanks, 2001, pp. 15ff.) or the 'I' of *In Comes I* (Pearson, 2006a): a self-reflective practitioner.

#### I go there and you and they do not

To outline stances, attitudes and presuppositions:

- Who am I and what am I doing?
- What are the conditions of my access?
- Am I there by invitation or am I intruding or trespassing?
- Am I there for the first time or is this a place of familiarity?
- Is it in the public or private domain?
- Is what I might see or do either prescribed or proscribed?
- What are the circumstances of my presence?
- Am I a stranger or an inhabitant?
- Do I pass unnoticed or do I stick out?
- Are my actions clandestine or do I draw attention to myself?
- In what guise do I visit?

As *tourist*: wandering with varying degrees of attention and disinterest, or watching the aurora borealis from the specially darkened cabin of an aircraft north of Shetland.

As *walker*: sauntering – *sans terre* – 'equally at home everywhere' (Emerson and Thoreau, no date, pp. 71–2), 'validated by its effects on the body – from

sweat to heart rate to muscle stretching' (Thrift, 2008, p. 68). Looking, and being looked at, following 'the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it' (Certeau, 1988, p. 93). 'The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of "lacking a place" – an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks)' (ibid., p. 103).

As *wayfarer*: moving from one familiar place to another. 'The wayfarer is continually on the move. More strictly, he is his movement' (Ingold, 2007, p. 75).

As *flâneur*: 'at home in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite' (Baudelaire, 1972, p. 399) yet with the freedom to loiter, to witness and interpret passing scenes and incidents, diverse activities, unpredictable juxtapositions, fleeting occurrences, multifarious sights and sounds. Moving through the flux of the city in awe of dazzling consumer spectacles: gazing, grazing, consuming. As scenes of the modern city channel my gaze and limit my objects of pleasure, my circulation becomes disciplined.

As *derivist*: 'in a dérive, one or more persons, during a certain period, drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there' (Debord, quoted in Andreotti and Costa, 1996, p. 22). The *dérive* ('drifting') as 'a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances' (ibid.), distinct from the stroll. Michele Bernstein notes that the taxi journey might constitute our most immediate experience of disorientation and discovery (quoted in ibid., p. 47).

As close relative *psycho-geographer*: 'the element of chance is less determinant than one might think: from the dérive point of view cities have a psycho-geographical relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones' (ibid., p. 22). A complete insubordination to habitual influences without subordination to randomness. It is orientated neither by attraction to a particular era nor to an architectural style nor by the exoticism that arises from exploring a neighbourhood for the first time. But Debord suggests that it is not aimless, for we seem drawn to certain locales, differentiated, complex and unnerving, that offer a density of experience, with significant effect upon the emotions and behaviour of individuals: this he calls *psycho-geography*. His modes of enquiry in search of such places include slipping by night into houses undergoing demolition, hitch-hiking non-stop, wandering in subterranean catacombs.

As *nomad*: shifting across the smooth space of the urban desert using points and locations to define paths rather than places to be. The enemy of the nomad is the authority that wants to take the space and enclose it and to create fixed and well directed paths for movement. And the nomad, cut free of roots, bonds and fixed identities, is the enemy of the authority, resisting its discipline (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 380ff.).

As *rambler*: rethinking the city as a series of flows or movements in pursuit of pleasure, moving between sites of leisure, consumption, exchange and display. Rambling as 'a mode of movement which celebrates the public spaces,



streets and excitement of urban life from a male perspective' (Rendell, 1998, p. 75):

> Urban design organises bodies socially and spatially, in terms of positioning, displaying and obscuring. Architecture controls and limits physical movement and sight-lines; it can stage and frame those who inhabit its spaces, by creating contrasting scales, screening and lighting ... Such devices are culturally determined, they prioritise certain activities and persons, and obscure others according to class, race and gender. Urban space is a medium in which functional visual requirements and imagery are constituted and represented as part of a patriarchal and capitalist ideology. The places of leisure in the nineteenth century city represent and control the status of men and women as spectators and as objects of sight in public arenas. (ibid., p. 84)

As *field-worker*: in pursuit of objects of study:

- What are my objectives? Have I gone prepared? How is my visit planned in advance? Am I on a quest? Do I have an itinerary? Am I purposefully lost in space, trying to get my bearings? Do I have tasks to fulfil?
- How do I orientate myself? Do I need a map to get around or am I drawn to, and moving between, old haunts on familiar routes in an 'archi-textural meshwork' (Ingold, 2007, p. 80)? Am I met and shown around, my attention drawn to this or that which I might otherwise not have noticed?
- Am I directed by the exhortations, admonitions and signposts of others? Am I pursuing quarry, following the tracks of animals or the flight-paths of birds?
- Do I seek out the traces, archaeological traces, of other (former) visitors and occupants? As I move around do I leave marks: 'to walk is to leave footprints' (Roms, quoted in Whitehead, 2006, p. 4)
- Am I simply enthralled by the place? Or is it difficult to know where it ends and I begin?
- Is my journey a private, performative undertaking occasioned by the nature of the place: pilgrimage, 'walkabout'?

Australian Aboriginal landscapes are marked by ancestral acts, sedimented with human significances. To travel across such landscapes is to remember them into being. The pathways are song-lines, long narrative excursions that remember places in song, singing the world into being again.

> For journeys through these places, with the narrative song cycles that articulate their numinosity for the initiated, constitute performative re-makings, re-earthings,

re-memberings of imaginary happenings here now, fusing place, body and spirit at the intersection of secular and sacred time. To walk the story is to revisit and rehearse the itineraries of a tradition that maps the complex interrelatedness of cultural spaces and identities, pasts and possible futures. (Williams, 1998, p. vii)

These are, contra Nora's assertion of disappearance, environments of memory: 'settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience' (Nora, 1992, p. 1): *milieux de memoire*.

- How am I affected? What do I feel? What do I perceive? What do I experience?
- How far is this informed by predispositions and previous experiences?
- To what do I attend? Natural landscape and built environment; sky as well as land; night as well as day? In foul weather as well as fair?
- And upon my return, how do I reconstitute 'there' here?

By configuring the physical materials I bring back. In his project *Rupture and Residue* (2004) Simon Whitehead took six sea-washed ash sticks to Queensland and returned with six sticks to place on his home beach (Whitehead, 2006, pp. 76–7).

By showing the recorded evidence, drawings, diaries, video tapes, audio recordings, of what I did there. As *exhibition* or *installation*, as manipulated and enhanced sounds – as in *Arctic*, Max Eastley's recordings of bearded seal, kittwake, little auk, etc., as well as Aeolian flutes and harps made during northern voyages (Eastley, 2007).

By relating what I did there, at another time, in another place, as *story-telling*, some equivalent of the explorer's account, the traveller's tale. As Walter Benjamin noted, 'when someone goes on a trip he has something to tell about' (Benjamin, 1992, p. 84).

In his reflection on reindeer herding in Scotland, geographer Hayden Lorimer notes: 'landscapes told as a distribution of stories and dramatic episodes, or as repertoires of lived practice, can be creatively recut, embroidered, and still sustain original narratological integrity' (Lorimer, 2006, p. 515). Perhaps this is a work of *autotopography*, a performance that folds or unfolds autobiography and place: 'a creative act of interpretation and invention, all of which depend on where you are standing, when and for what purpose' (Heddon, 2008, p. 91).

By combining documentary footage from there with all that may be created here to stand in for the experience in *multimedia* performances: in Brith Gof's *Patagonia* (1993) (see pp. 164–5), accounts of personal journeys to Welsh emigrant communities in Argentina were fused with the story of the shooting of Llwyd ap Iwan there in 1909 by US outlaws Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (Pearson, 1996).



## We go there and they do not

We may be of the same ilk, fellow artists, our conversation addressing emergent matters from similar standpoints. But our expertise may be in different disciplinary areas. On a fieldtrip – doing *fieldwork* on a geological *excursion* for instance, trekking from one exposure to another – either of us might expound particular knowledge, pointing out this or that. Our discussions might mutually illuminate and extend extant positions: between performance and archaeology, between performance and geography. In 'Performing a Visit' (Pearson and Shanks, 1997) archaeologist Michael Shanks and I reflect upon Esgair Fraith from different perspectives. On the 'Littoral' workshop, during the 'Living in a Material World: Performativities of Emptiness' network project (see pp. 133–4), archaeologists, geographers and artists gathered:

On Sunday January 26th four of us made a transect using a single line of string. We did this at a point approximately two-thirds of the way along the 'littoral' between Severn Beach and New Pill Gout heading towards Avonmouth. The line sat at approximately ninety degrees to the foreshore and ran from the curb of the A403 to well below the high water mark. In the process it crossed under the railway and over the footpath which runs parallel to the A403 at this point. (The littoral is taken here as the long strip of land from Severn Beach to Avonmouth marked by the road inland and the low tide mark out in the estuary). This transect was begun shortly after the turn of high tide (10.14 a.m.) and was completed at about 1.30 p.m. Each participant selected (or asked to have given them) a task. My task, given by Penny at my request following discussion of my sampling habits following our first preliminary exploration of themes during and after the walk on Saturday, was to sample every five strides, using the toe of my left boot as a marker and reporting what was next to the object that first took my attention while trying to pay attention to the full sensory range of my experience, including any memories that appeared. (Biggs, 2008, p. 1)

Every ten paces I paused and attempted to list all the *horizontals* I could see, bottom to top: to demonstrate the manifold instances of human intervention: pipelines, railway tracks, security fences, bridgework. And to appreciate Jean-Luc Nancy's supposition that 'all landscape painting paints a horizon' (Nancy, 2005, p. 60).

## You go there, I and they do not

From a different disciplinary standpoint, you may still employ approaches analogous to those of performance and performance writing. In geographer John Wylie's account of a single day's walking on a coastal path, he describes 'sensations of anxiety and immensity, haptic enfolding and attenuation, encounters with others and with the elements, and moments of visual exhilaration and epiphany' (Wylie, 2005, p. 234). He suggests that walking involves

specific corporealities and sensibilities: moments, movements, events. He is in the landscape but also up against it: 'to be dogged, put-upon, petulant, breathless' (ibid., p. 240).

## They go there, you and I do not

In anticipation of their visit, what is to be done? First, nothing: we leave it as it is, facilitating access, saying little, allowing the remains to 'speak' for themselves, letting visitors address them in their own ways. For at Esgair Fraith the tumbled walls are equivocal, serving as a backdrop or scenography for any narrative or fantasy that might be projected onto them, any knowledges and aspirations that might be brought to them, any interpretation that might be read 'onto' and 'into' them. Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that a visitor's experience of the same place may invoke reactions and associations entirely differently from that of the inhabitants: it is possible to be in a place without realizing its significance for the groups of people who have historically inhabited it, though 'the visitor's judgment is often valid. His main contribution is the fresh perspective' (Tuan, 1974, p. 65). For some, the response will be aesthetic and personal: the romance of the ruin. For others the very ruination is evocative of the cultural trauma that it seems to represent, with the deciduous growth representing a kind of dogged resistance. A pile of old stones to walk your dog over then, or the defeated hopes of a nation? The visitor decides. Whichever, the senses are engulfed by the smells of decay, the textures of moss and dead leaves, the image of collapsed walls, fallen lintels, the gloom of forest shade. Here, the very processes of the 'archaeological' are apparent: mouldering, rotting, disintegrating, decomposing, putrefying, falling to pieces ... Apparent too is that sense of the passage of time, of entropy, and of our own mortality perhaps, that the manicured sites of 'heritage culture' often seem keen to disguise. Here, one realizes, 'it was then, it is now and all points in between'. And the visitor is aware that each surviving doorway was once entered, each window was once looked through. At Esgair Fraith, on this bleak hillside, where it will inevitably rain during a visit, people have struggled, survived and lived a life.

Or they are orientated and directed by our sketch maps and instructions. What they may need is some sense of *scale*, a *key* to the symbols and some idea of which way is up, though what gets onto the map will always be partial. In that these order movement around the site, suggesting routes for walking and pausing, for instance, they could also recommend or demand corporeal involvement *with* the site. They might come to resemble choreographic scores or diagrams with the visitor as participant/performer. Such choreography could be *of* the site, following existing paths, crossing thresholds, entering rooms. Equally, it could delineate unusual trajectories of movement traversing the remains: straight lines, circles, arcs. Revealing unexpected viewpoints, demanding altered physical stances and body attitudes. All of which serve to unsettle the visitor, inviting him or her to look afresh at detail and at vista. And we might suggest not only where to look, but also how to look: in close-up, in long shot, with wide-angle, as people have always done at Esgair Fraith. And they may be encouraged to touch and smell and listen as much as look: 'changing the way people perceive places' (McAuley, 2006, p. 151).



Or they take our guidebooks, texts that supplement the phenomenological experience of being present. These we could term *deep maps*, or *incorporations*: juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual – that include plan, axonometric section, photograph and artist's impression adjacent to, and overlapping, poem, topographic details, local folklore. The conflation of oral testimony, anthology, memoir, biography, natural history and everything they might ever want to ask. Texts adequate to the task of elaborating the complexity of narratives that have accumulated and that are in contest here. These are proactive documents: their parts do not necessarily coalesce. They leave space for the imagination of the reader. The interpretive instinct of the visitor is not denied, and meaning is not monopolized. *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (Pearson, 2006a) is structured as a number of *excursions* in my home region: guiding the reader, be they in an armchair or in the field, through a sequence of locales, pausing at each for personal and critical reflection on themes related to, or evoked by, that place: mixing themes biographical, familial, topographical, archaeological. A *chorographic* approach to the visitation of individuated places.

In specially designed guidebooks integrating text and image, Exeter-based performance company Wrights and Sites offers 'the stimulus for a series of actions, or performances, to be created and carried out by readers who become walkers in the city's spaces' (Turner, 2004, p. 385). Some 'walks' offer specific routes, others imaginative games or provocations: 'loiter without intent'. In *An Exeter Mis-Guide* (Hodge *et al.*, 2003) the city is revealed through oblique engagements, with proposals such as 'Borrow a dog from a friend. Let it take you for a walk'. Their recent project *A Mis-Guide to Anywhere* is transferable to any city. 'Go exploring with children – let them choose a special way of travelling: As if the city were underwater ... or a mountain' (Wrights and Sites, 2006). In what Turner terms *mythogeography*, the personal, fictional and mythical are placed on an equal footing with factual, municipal history: 'the whole city becomes a field of transitional objects, part created, part discovered' (Turner, 2004, p. 386): the city becomes a 'potential' space, a place of enquiry and invention.

Or they encounter what *we* have altered there, the traces we have purposefully made or left behind, both *additive* and *reductive*:

> A line drawn with charcoal on paper, one with chalk on a blackboard, is additive, since the material from the chalk forms an extra layer that is superimposed on the substrate. Lines that are scratched, scored or etched into a surface are reductive, since they are formed by the removal of material from the surface itself. (Ingold, 2007, p. 43)

The practices of land art may be instructive for further performative activities, often themselves inviting participation. At Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, 'you can look at it, look from it, look with it, be in it, be part of it, connect it up with yourself and the surroundings in a number of different ways' (Wylie, 2007, p. 142). Mark Pimlott's *La Scala*, situated on the piazza in front of Aberystwyth Arts Centre, is a large concrete staircase: 'one can climb the stair to be closer to the sky and higher above the world. I want people to feel as though they are suspended in the air, leaving the world, as monumental as the architecture and landscape around them' (Pimlott, 2006, p. 271). The structure prefigures activities of climbing, sitting, sunbathing, talking, looking out to sea. At Drenthe in the Netherlands, PeerGrouP's *Strokasteel* (2005) is a temporary auditorium in a rural setting constructed from 11,000 straw bales (Schuring, 2008, pp. 38–43).

Or they are led towards and move between what we have left there for them, such as the clockwork audio sources of recorded information on local natural history currently attached to trees in certain plantations by the Forestry Commission in Wales. Or the twenty radio transmitters in Graeme Miller's work *Linked* (2003; Miller, 2009) broadcasting recorded testimonies of those who once lived and worked on a three-mile route where a motorway now runs through 400 demolished homes in London, conspiring 'an odd sense that the activity of the walker is somehow triggering these recollections' (Wilkie, 2008, p. 100). Or on the numerous and proliferating platforms of exposition within urban contexts: the multiple hoardings and screens of the contemporary city, in the street, on public transport. Monitors on Cardiff buses now show BBC World News intercut with views of the passing street from multiple cameras.

Or our relationship is mediated in the emergent genre of audio-walks, increasingly familiar in museum trails and artistic practices; or conjoined in Paul Auster's memorial tour of the site of the World Trade Center (Auster, 2005). My own project *Carrlands* (2007b) (see pp. 80–3) is composed of three sixty-minute compositions for locations in an agricultural river valley in north Lincolnshire with recommended walks.

## You and I and they go there together

We accompany them. Of course they may already be there: this is their place and they may know far more of it than we do. Or we may be equally unfamiliar: in 1997 I led a guided tour at a disused steelworks near Bochum in Germany, that neither I nor they had visited before. Going equipped, but only one step ahead of the game.

We may have arranged to transport them there, the journey becoming part of the performance: a brass band on the coach. Or the journey, the performance itself: Forced Entertainment's *Nights in this City* (1995) took the form of a coach trip in Sheffield.

> The text we created – pointing out buildings, street corners, car-parks, patches of wasteground – was always overlaid with other texts – with the whispered or even shouted texts of other passengers ('That's where I used to work …' 'That's the place where …') and the silent text of actions created by those living and working in the city as the bus moved through it. (Etchells, 1999, p. 81)



Once there, performance, both expositionary and dialogic, is conceivable at any number of scales.

In *The Best Place* – 'an encounter with inhabitants, places, stories and images' (Feenstra, 2007, p. 231) – Dutch artist Waapke Feenstra invites suggestions for the 'best' local place. In *Former Farmland* (2008) she walks the land with individual farmers, augering the soil, looking at its composition, reflecting upon land-use as 'site of memory for an agrarian community'. Misha Myers's 'conversive wayfinding' projects (Myers, 2009) are enacted through the contingent effort of conversation, shared walks encouraging companionability. She warns however that 'there are conditions, which the artist may create space for, but cannot predetermine, such as weather, transformations of the landscape, walkers' corporeal rhythms, capacities, desires and mood' (ibid., p. 104). 'The artist asks the instigating question, listens, sets a context for action, creates an aesthetic milieu in which an event is mutually created. The exchanges depend on the talents of the speakers to respond to the insights, fallibilities and allure of each other' (Heim, 2006, p. 203). In Myers's work 'they' are refugees, bringing memories of another place.

It might be a solo narrative akin to a guided tour in which the interpreter is foregrounded and interpretation becomes a performative practice. This can exhibit a high order of intertextuality, of dialogue between texts. It can include truth and fiction, lying and appropriation: the fragmentary, the digressive, the ambiguous – anecdotes, analects, autobiography. The description of people, places and pathologies, poetry, forensic data, quotations, lies, memories, jokes … Here there are no hierarchies of information and no correct procedures. Indeed, it must vacillate between the intimately familiar and the infinitely strange, if the visitor's attention is to be held. The teller is inevitably at the centre of events. Here in the grain of the voice, and in all the rhetorical techniques of the performer's art, is where the story comes to life: in physical re-enactments, impersonation, improvised asides … Thus language is potentially brought back to places that were silenced as a rearticulation. Performance occasions reinterpenetration.

Or it might be a large-scale scenographic work in which what we say here, do there, need not be solely *about* or *of* the place. In 1994 Cliff McLucas hauled three tons of scaffolding up to Esgair Fraith to create *Tri Bywyd* (*Three Lives*) (see Kaye, 2000, pp. 125–37), a site-specific performance about three deaths, about the domestic in the landscape.

## No one goes

There are places that under normal circumstances remain out of bounds: places difficult to access, such as Antarctica, though Chris Cree Brown's composition *Under Erebus* (Brown, 2000) demonstrates the primacy there of sound over sight, the ear ever attuned to the cracking of ice.

Other places are where entry is inadvisable, such as war zones, though Peter Cusack's audio recordings (Cusack, 2009) made in the area of exclusion around the Chernobyl reactor in his *Sounds from Dangerous Places* series teem with the animal and bird life that flourishes there, free from human disturbance.

And there are new kinds of places into which our entry is prohibited, such as the detention centres at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, though this should not prevent us simulating their effects elsewhere.

### There is no here and there

There are places betwixt and between, such as border regions and security areas where actions and motives are under extreme scrutiny, where we submit ourselves to the will of others. Guillermo Gomez-Pena's early work takes place on both sides of the US–Mexican border and the cross-cultural, hybrid work this might generate.

And some places seem neither here nor there, or nowhere in particular, unpatinated, untouched by history: 'today all of our circulation, information and communication spaces could be considered non-places' (Augé, 2000, p. 10). 'A non-space comes into existence, even negatively, when human beings don't recognise themselves in it, or cease to recognise themselves in it, or have not yet recognised themselves in it' (ibid., p. 9).

There are new kinds of place – digital platforms – established through advances in information technology: performance as broadcast, as webcast, as GPS/satnav configuration. We can visit the expeditionary huts in Antarctica without damaging them. We can join a round-the-world yachtswoman every-day as she sails the South Atlantic. We may even be able to visit places once unimagined, in domains such as Second Life.

### There is no us and them

And our mutual and/or respective presence and/or absence is enabled and problematized by social networking websites and mobile telephony. As *avatars* we become multiple, as do they. Who is who may be difficult to discern: 'flash mobs' gather unannounced and the dancers at 'silent discos', each listening to their own soundtrack on an MP3 player, invade a railway station concourse.

### Or we do other

We direct our energies to direct action and *implementation*.

Everything at Esgair Fraith has recently changed. The cash-crop timber has been harvested, and the finds of this felling are spectacular: across this hill-side a dozen similar derelict farms have emerged. We never expected them to return. Their absence allowed us to romanticize their very disappearance, to revel in their loss. Now they challenge us, particularly those of us who have benefited economically and artistically from them, to readdress them.



What might this mean in practice? For the owner, Forest Enterprise, these places are increasingly regarded as a leisure resource: it is eager to provide public access. Since they are to be revisited, we might base the framework of a research project around the notion of the *visit* and its close relative the *guided tour*. Further, Forest Enterprise is legally obligated to plant more deciduous trees. Questions emerge about the policies and politics of such replanting, and of future land use. And here *we* might intervene. Could we design interpretive trails across the landscape, in which the farms and their mature hedges and gardens become significant locales, places to visit, with newly planted avenues linking them? Unfortunately, such is the degree of ruination that the Health and Safety Executive will never allow it. And as one forester retorted, 'it is a perfect place to grow spruce'.

## Phenomenology: experiencing

Imagine a winter landscape.

Your senses working overtime: you shiver and squint, stamp and blow. Only then perhaps do you look, listen, touch. You flog through the snow. Your feet and fingers freeze. To your left, a flock of scavenging rooks takes flight. You are aware of *surface*, *climate* and *ambiance*.

Your sensual engagement is *phenomenological*. The emphasis is on bodily contact, corporeality, embodiment: 'body and environment fold into and co-construct each other through a series of practices and relations' (Wylie, 2007, p. 144). This is as much a *weatherworld* as landscape, and it conspires to bring about *affects*.

Gradually you begin to make *perceptual judgements* about distance and direction, near or far, this way or that way: to make distinctions between left/right, top/bottom, within reach/beyond reach, within sight/beyond sight, here-and-there polarities – difficult enough in this whiteness. And all informed by past experiences of how similar and how dissimilar this is to places you have known.

The environment might oblige you to respond in certain ways, prefiguring performance, spread-eagled on thin ice: performance as a practice of involvement. During a Cape Farewell project expedition to Spitzbergen, dancer Siobhan Davies notes:

> The best movement is to walk or to run. Dance here is then reduced to the familiarity, the straightforwardness, the elegance of the walk and the run. Our walking turned into slipping on ice or pushing our heels down into snow to help us keep upright while going steeply down hill. Every kind of putting one foot in front of the other had its use. (Buckland *et al.*, 2006, p. 86)

You may take up its challenges in practices that intensify sensual experiences: rock climbing, skydiving, snorkelling …

Such experiences you might assist others to encounter. Of his *Locator* workshops (1995–2005) Simon Whitehead writes: 'my role as guide is to

encourage people to get lost' (Whitehead, 2006, p. 38). Or you might tell others about elsewhere. Or help them to imagine. My own *Winter* (2008) was conceived and written for the Groeneveld Forum, a symposium primarily for agriculturalists to consider the potential of the arts to inform environmental policy. The thirty-minute audio work, combining spoken word and musical composition by John Hardy, was made available ready loaded on MP3 players to accompany an optional lunchtime walk in the grounds of Groeneveld Castle near Baarn in the Netherlands, a late eighteenth-century arrangement of lakes, paths and plantings referred to locally as an 'English landscape'. The equipment was provided, with a lunch bag, to delegates who were advised that they could walk alone or in groups. In the event they were also provided with umbrellas, as it poured with rain.

My quandary was how to create a work for a location I had visited only once and with little further opportunity to research its history, either in archives or through interviews. The solution: to invite the audience to imagine this place in a different guise, to picture it in deepest winter. The text makes reference to the familiar paintings of Hendrick Avercamp and Pieter Bruegel. It recalls the bad winters of 1780, 1947 and 1963. And it asks them to remember: their memories became part of a personal *reverie*, a projection onto the autumn landscape. It concludes:

> And if, and when, the snow comes no more …
> What will you remember of childhood delights, of work in the fields?
> The feel of snow: its textures … dusty, watery … caked into woollen gloves …
> The look of ice: glazing windows in leafy patterns, falling as spikes from the roof …
> Frozen toes in rubber boots …
> What we called 'hot aches' as the blood seeped back painfully …
> Your skin … in new tones … red and blue and purple … chapped knees …
>
> And if I asked you to remember the place of your childhood in winter …
> And if I asked you to write a postcard, describing it in five words …
> What would you write?
>
> And if I asked you, to recall adventures, and incidents, and accidents in the snow …
> And if I asked you to write one sentence to describe one such experience …
> What would you write?
> And if, and when, the snow comes no more …
> How will you describe the awesome power of the snowstorm and the sublime and terrible beauty of a world turned black-and-white?
>
> When you begin with the words 'I remember …'
> What will you tell them?
> And when *you* say to them 'Imagine this', what will they imagine?



Several delegates listened twice. Most took the players home and listened again, frequently at night and in bed. Many returned from the walk with stories and anecdotes of their childhoods. Individuals revealed detailed experiences of landscape, affirmed in the immediate response of others present, that might otherwise not have emerged within the conventional protocols of conference proceedings.

## Chorography: differentiating

> To be a place, every somewhere must lie on one or several paths of movement to and from places elsewhere. Life is lived, I reasoned, along paths, not just in places, and paths are lines of a sort. (Ingold, 2007, p. 2)

Picture the place where, if asked, you would say you come from, have attachments with.

The nature of *chorography* is to distinguish and espouse the unique character of individual *places*. At particular scales of apprehension, it identifies and differentiates sites of significance as, potentially at least, places to visit within a given *region*. Chorography attends to the local: it concerns specificities, particularities and peculiarities. In demonstrating preference, it ignores or chooses not to acknowledge other places that fall outside its sphere of interest. It displays partiality. Its outcomes, its representations of a region, are partial.

For Edward Casey a choric region is a 'locatory matrix for things' (Casey, 1998, p. 34). Seventeenth-century English chorographies collected and arranged natural, historical and antiquarian information topographically in a region, place by place, village by village, without necessarily relating it to larger spatial frames or to the broader concerns of disciplinary enquiry, largely because disciplines, anthropology for instance, did not yet exist or were in nascent form. In their inclusion of details of antiquities and flora and fauna, however, they presage the development of both archaeology *and* natural history.

In the form of a gazetteer, they involve the systematic description of a region's natural and man-made attributes, its emplaced *things*. Its scenic features. Its inhabitants, their histories, laws, traditions and customs. Ancient sites and relics. Property rights, and the etymology of names. They incorporate elements of historical narrative and biography, with pictorial maps and architectural sketches. They often seek to legitimize claims to title and land. And whilst they discriminate – 'Regard this rather than that', 'Visit this rather than that' – they draw together diverse phenomena into a heterogeneous collection that not only seeks to evoke the special qualities of a region, but may even come to define, to stand in for, that region as viewed from somewhere else. This is not necessarily however how the inhabitants would choose to represent themselves.

With region as the optic, chorography offers conceptual and analytical approaches to site-specific performance, regarded here as one of Casey's distinct

*things*: a feature of topography, a function of landscape, a component of local history, related as much to immediate conditions of geology or traditions of agricultural land-use as to ostensibly similar practices elsewhere. In that it professes itself attached to a particular locale, such performance is better viewed in relation to other cultural practices and to geophysical conditions there, rather than being considered the local enactment and expression of common traits within a putative genre: 'site-specific performance'. It arises from and is articulated in direct relation to sets of historical, social, cultural and environmental circumstance, and in juxtaposition with all else that constitutes the grain of the region. It need not be considered as the manifestation of transferable techniques and technologies in search of a suitable location. Specific in form, content and function in a specific place, it finds itself adjacent to, drawn into juxtaposition with, owing allegiance to, other *things* – mutually illuminating things, awkwardly dissimilar things – across the terrain and through time within a choric region. It becomes a local feature of, and an active contribution to, the distinctiveness of a region. It may indeed be the most interesting *thing* that has ever happened at this site. And given our particular *sphere of interest*, our disciplinary partiality, we could conceive a chorography that favours moments of performative exposition. Casey's other things may include all manner of celebratory, ludic and performative activities: modes of traditional practice – folk drama and calendar custom – and manifestations of contemporary devised theatre are thus copresent in a regional chorography (see Pearson, 2006a).

But in addressing the very particularities of its engagement with a location, any chorographic account of site-specific performance as a thing will necessitate detailed description, paying equal attention to that which is of the site and that which is brought to the site, the inextricable binding of place and artwork, to demonstrate its uniqueness.

This might resemble what Michael Shanks and I called a *deep map* (Pearson and Shanks, 2001, pp. 64–6): an attempt to record and represent the substance, grain and patina of a particular place, through juxtapositions and interweavings of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the academic and the aesthetic ... depth not as profundity but as topographic and cultural density. In this it is perhaps akin to anthropologist Clifford Geertz's *thick description*: the detailed and contextual description of cultural phenomena, to discern the complexities behind the action, and from which the observer is not removed (Geertz, 1973). It may further reference his *blurred genre*: as Shanks and I appropriated it, 'a mixture of narration and scientific practices, an integrated, interdisciplinary, intertextual and creative approach to recording, writing and illustrating the material past' (Pearson and Shanks, 2001, p. 131).

It also requires explication of the scope of the region and the character of the locatory matrix itself: the sphere of interest. This may be a physical landscape entailing consideration of geomorphology, climate, traditions of land use, dialect, architectural traditions. Or it may be a domain circumscribed by personal predilection or biography or memory. Or a creative construct: a work of invention and imagination.



## Art: modelling

In identifying a series of potential relationships between visual artist and landscape, Kastner and Wallis's typology of land art (1998) might provide a useful analogue for that between performance and site. They suggest the following:

*Integration*: the manipulation of the material landscape in its own right, the artist adding, removing or displacing materials – marking, cutting, rearranging – to create sculpture, drawing out the relationships between existing characteristics of site and evidence of human intervention. This is often monumental in scale, as in Robert Smithson's large-scale construction *Spiral Jetty* (1970).

*Interruption*: the intersection of environment and human activity by employing non-indigenous, man-made materials to draw attention to, frame or harness natural elements, often in a transgressive material as in Christo's major works such as the wrapping in fabric of the Reichstag in Berlin.

*Involvement*: the artist in a one-to-one relationship with the land, using his or her body in forms of ritual practice, of transitory and ephemeral action or subtly rearranging elements, as in Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967).

*Implementation*: the artist demonstrating environmental awareness, with the environment as ecosystem and depository of socio-political realities and not as a blank canvas or an endlessly exploitable resource, involving cleaning, planting, remedial work, as in Joseph Beuys's planting of 7,000 oak trees (1982–87). Or Anthony Gormley cutting blocks of snow to represent one kilogram of carbon dioxide, 'roughly the volume occupied by a coffin' (Buckland *et al.*, 2006, p. 31).

Or *imagining* the land not as physical matter but as metaphor or signifier, as concept or historical narrative: planting, statuary and architectural follies becoming part of an iconography symbolizing culture, civilization and morality.

Such scenarios presuppose *ad*-venture, the realm of the Latin prepositional *accusative – in*, *inter*, *trans* – of motion towards and into: of mobility, of entry and encounter, of the pursuit of choreographic strategies, of interlocutory occupations, of the documentation of traverse and sojourn. But what might be the nature of performance prefixed with *clam*, 'unknown to'; *ob*, 'in front of'; *juxta*, 'close to'; *penes*, 'in the power of'? And what of the ablative, 'the instrument, manner or place of the action described by the verb': *ex*, 'from'; *cum*, 'with'; *coram*, 'in presence of'; *simul*, 'together with'?

Richard Long's work is immediately performative as he moves materials, marks the land and supplies us with maps and diagrams upon which are traced his walk across a landscape or a list of observations he made on a particular

walk. His walking may be measured in time or distance and in the form of line, circle, rectangle. Whilst Long is extremely sensitive to nature, his work is artificial, pursued on trajectories and for durations at odds with the lie of the land and diurnal rhythms. But as we look at the oft-reproduced photograph of *A Line Made by Walking*, where is the performance? Out there or here in the gallery? And where is the audience? Was anyone present at the time, the photograph being but an incidental record of the event? Or were we always the intended audience?

How is landscape addressed performatively by those who dwell there? What of the *insiders*, the figures of Barrell's 'dark side' (Barrell, 1980)? 'To apply the term *landscape* to their surroundings seems inappropriate to those who occupy and work in a place as insiders' (Cosgrove, 1984, p. 19). With enviable etymological facility, Jean-Luc Nancy elides *pays*, *paysan*, *paysage* (Nancy, 2005, pp. 51ff.). Country, peasant, landscape. Location, occupation, representation. *Pays* he characterizes as a corner, delimited by some natural or cultural feature, the corner from which one comes. One can only be from one corner. It is, he suggests, something based on belonging: a matter of *holding* (I hold it, it holds me, it holds together) and *pertinence* (it corresponds, it responds, it makes sense at the very least as a resonance). Taken out of one's *pays* one feels estranged, unsettled, uncanny. One no longer knows one's way around – no more familiar landmarks, and no more familiar customs. A countryman is someone whose occupation is the country, and the land. He occupies it and takes care of it, and he is occupied with it. That is, he takes it in hand and is taken up by it. He works *on, at, in the land*. This embrace is mutual. And pagan: in painting, landsmen can appear as but elements of landscape: it is itself the entire presence, absenting all other presence that would possess any authority or any capacity for sense. No more civic life.

But if there is no need, desire or facility to bring landscape into visual representation are there activities that make manifest, explicitly state, confirm, Nancy's embrace of this holding? There are performance practices and events within the purview of folklore that form special *occasions* and *opportunities* to animate and reflect upon landscape as 'nature, culture and imagination within a spatial manifold', such as the Haxey Hood (see pp. 47–50).

## Architecture I: occupying

Picture an unoccupied building: a disused factory.

In the mid-1990s Cliff McLucas and I made a series of programmatic statements in public presentations and unpublished Brith Gof company documents on mutual understandings of nature of site-specific performance. These informed subsequent workshop practice:

> Site-specific performances are those conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of *found* spaces: existing social situations or locations, both used and disused; places of work, play and worship – cattle-market, chapel, factory, cathedral, railway station, museum. (Pearson, 2007c)

> You can either use the word 'found' or 'chosen'. We choose these places. (McLucas and Pearson, 1996, p. 215)

> They rely, for their conception and their interpretation, upon the complex coexistence, superimposition and interpenetration of a number of architectures and narratives, historical and contemporary, of two basic orders: that which is *of* the site, its fixtures and fittings, and that which is brought *to* the site, the performance and its scenography: of that which *pre-exists* the work and that which is *of* the work; of the *found* – the site – and the *fabricated* – the performance of the past and of the present. They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible.
>
> Performance recontextualises such sites: it is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations – their architectures, material traces and histories – are still apparent and cognitively active. Conversely, site relocates the dramatic material and suggests the environment, equipment and working processes that might mediate and illuminate it. Site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop. (Pearson, 2007c)

> The real power of site-specific work is that it somehow activates, or engages with, the narratives of the site in some kind of way. That might be with its formal architecture, or it might be with the character of the building. It might be to do with the history of that building. (McLucas, quoted in Morgan, 1995, p. 47)

> They acknowledge and utilise the particular nature of these places in their form and content. 'Specificity' to site, here, is to be discovered in an encounter with that which lies beyond the obvious elements of the piece, through intrusion of the 'found', *in looking*, into the incompletions of the 'fabricated'. (Kaye, 1996b, p. 66)

> Site may be directly suggestive of subject matter, theme, dramatic structure; it will always be apparent as context, framing, sub-text. (Pearson, in Pearson and McLucas, no date, p. 7)

> Performance, in turn then, may reveal, make manifest, celebrate, confront or criticise site or location, and the architecture, history, function, location, microclimate may be apparent as subject matter, framing, subtext. (Pearson, 2007c)

Following the creation of the scenography for *PAX* (1991) in which a section of a Gothic cathedral was built from scaffolding and through which the site was always apparent, McLucas began to characterize site-specific performance as the coexistence and overlay of two basic sets of architectures, those of the extant building or what he later called the *host*, that which is *at* site … and those of the constructed scenography or the *ghost*, that which is temporarily

brought *to* site. The site itself became an active component in the creation of performative meaning, rather than a neutral space of exposition – 'it's the "host" which does have personality, history, character, narrative written into it' (McLucas, quoted in Morgan, 1995, p. 47).

> To construct another architecture within the existing architecture, imposing another arrangement, floor-plan, map or orientation which confounds everyday hierarchies of place and patterns of movements.
>
> Significantly these two might have quite different origins and they might ignore other's presence; they are co-existent but not necessarily congruent. The performance remains transparent. (Pearson, 2007c)

'Within those two the performers are then almost guided into what they should do, because there are ways to move in all that stuff' (McLucas, quoted in McLucas and Pearson, 1996, p. 221). There may however be a mismatch between host and ghost, their relationship 'deeply, deeply fractured' (McLucas, quoted in Morgan, 1995, p. 51). Site may facilitate the creation of a kind of purposeful paradox – tension not congruence – through the employment of orders of material seemingly unusual, inappropriate or perverse at this site: an opera in a shipyard, an early Welsh epic poem in a disused car factory.

As a trained architect McLucas proceeded from the premise that 'within the normal everyday world that everybody walks around, these are vital terms – distance, space, volume, direction, orientation' (ibid., p. 47). But he began to apply the term 'architecture' to structural components both physical and dramaturgical:

> *Haearn*'s seven orders or 'architectures' of materials commingle with the host's component orders to create a complex architectural/structural poetics. His poetics is rich in metaphor, opportunity and language, and can generate theatrical detail, action and narrative. (McLucas, quoted in Pearson and McLucas, no date, p. 12)

Drawing upon Bernard Tschumi (see pp. 38–40) he observed:

> Techniques of congruence (hand in glove relationship between event and site), confrontation (transgression of site by event) and ignorance (unreconciled and unactivated or 'blind' non-relationship between event and site) are all available ... It might even be that each of these three occurs at different points in the work. (McLucas, quoted in McLucas and Pearson, 1995, p. 2)

> It is not possible to view one and not the other: the spectator develops an interpretation of what she sees and understands of the *two*. Interpenetrating narratives jostle to create meanings. The multiple meanings and readings of performance and site intermingle, amending and compromising one another. Such sites begin to resemble a kind of *saturated space* or *scene-of-crime*, where, to use forensic jargon, 'everything is potentially important'. (Pearson, 2007c)



> In *Haearn*, the shifts and slippages between forms and media would open the viewer, *in looking*, to a relationship *to be made* with site. (Kaye, 1996b, p. 66)

Despite his architectural inclinations, McLucas quickly shifted to a tripartite model:

> Site-specific work takes things a stage beyond the simple staging of a theatre work in an odd location and seeks a whole new form of work in theatrical terms. That new form of work is composed of three integral and active elements: 1 the performance; 2 the place; 3 the public. And it is the deep engagement of these three elements that constitute site specific works. (McLucas, 1993, p. 5)

Within this matrix, he further describes the three *agents*:

> The performance is an active agent and embodies all of the performers' and musicians' efforts, all scripts, sets, music and action. This is the most controlled by the prior conceptual work of the 'authors' and is the totality of what is normally, in theatre, referred to as the 'piece' or the 'work'. However, in site specific work, this 'performance' must be conceived in order to engage with its other two partners to create a new, developed notion of 'the work'.
>
> The place (emphatically not site, space or building) is an active agent – either formally (in architectural or spatial terms) or socially and culturally (in political, ownership or historical terms).
>
> The public is an active agent and theatre doesn't exist until it/they is/are engaged. As such, they may define, in very large part what is happening – what the piece is; they may leave with different versions of the event, having chosen what is significant and why, from a field of activity and information. (Note: this does not mean that Brith Gof's material is 'open-ended'.) (ibid., p. 6)

> Such works bring together a gathering of interpenetrating, but discrete, discourses jostling to create meaning. They take on the characteristics of a hybrid. As a hybrid the work's parts will never fully coalesce – and it will contain irreconcilable 'differences' within its field of material. (McLucas, quoted in Pearson and McLucas, no date, p. 14)

In *Tri Bywyd* (1995), conceived at the ruined farmhouse of Esgair Fraith, McLucas now identifies the active components as 'the host, the ghost and the witness' (McLucas, quoted in Kaye, 2000, p. 128). He notes the need for 'a number of foreign pollutants' to avoid 'the trap of romanticisation and nostalgia' (McLucas, 1998, pp. 13–14). 'Host might always be haunted by other ghosts – not of the theatrician's making, and Ghost might also come with an inbuilt Host – a ready made event architecture of its own' (McLucas, quoted in Kaye, 2000, p. 129); 'the transparency of architectures means that all the images are compromised' (ibid., p. 135). He concludes: 'they are constellations of effects, attitudes, ownerships, built materials, histories, firmly held beliefs

and so on. They constitute a temporary but unique ecology' (ibid., p. 129). In the era of analogue technology, performance involved the construction of a big, noisy machine.

## Architecture II: programming

Picture a new building: the Welsh Assembly Government building in Cardiff, designed by Richard Rogers.

> There is no architecture without event, without program, without violence. (Tschumi, 1994, p. xx)

Whilst teaching at the Architectural Association in London in the 1970s, Bernard Tschumi began to critique prevailing characterizations of architecture as the history of style, or as the articulation of surfaces. He devised creative models for understanding, animating and taking responsibility for the relationship between action and space: the entangled nature of object, human subject and event. They inform critical approaches to the analysis of site-specific performance. They also provide inspiration and orientation for initiatives in practice.

For Tschumi, architecture is not necessarily prescriptive. It doesn't simply tell us what to do, how to behave. Whilst we may give names to rooms in the profound hope that that is what will happen there, we know that murders are committed in bathrooms. Events can have an independent existence, rarely are they purely the consequence of their surroundings. He suggests that spaces are qualified by actions just as actions are qualified by spaces. Architecture and events constantly transgress each other's rules. Bodies not only move in, but also generate spaces, produced by and through their movements. He describes the intrusion of individuals into a controlled, pure, architectural space as an act of violence. They violate the balance of precisely ordered geometry, their bodies rushing against established rules, carving new and unexpected spaces, through fluid and erratic motions. Movements of dance, sport and war are for him the intrusion of events into architectural spaces, against the assumed order. Acts that reveal potential.

The relationship between action and space is not always symmetrical. Simply, one may dominate the other. And most alternate between independence and interdependence. Tschumi identifies three categories:

- *Reciprocity*, when events and spaces are totally interdependent and fully condition each other's existence.
- *Indifference*, when spaces and events are functionally independent ,of, or neutralize, one another.
- *Conflict*. (ibid., pp. xxi–xxii)



All three can be manifest in sequence or parallel, from time to time, in a given location. And the 'arrow of power' may alter: space can come into conflict with event, event with space. It's not a question of knowing which came first – movement or space – or which moulds the other, for ultimately a deep bond is involved: architecture ceases to be a backdrop for actions.

In sum, in order to examine and represent this complexity, Tschumi devises hypothetical *programmes* (ibid., pp. 7–12): sequences of events ('moments of passion, acts of love and the instant of death'; ibid., p. xxi) and movements ('the inevitable intrusion of bodies into the controlled order of architecture'; ibid., p. xxi). He projects them onto autonomous spatial architectures, frame after frame, room after room, episode after episode, as a form of motivation and suggestive of 'secret maps and impossible fictions'. He then proposes transformational devices that can apply equally and independently to spaces, events and movements: devices that can permit the extreme formal manipulation of the sequence, such as repetition, superposition, distortion, 'dissolve' and insertion. Devices in which the content of contiguous frames can be mixed, superimposed, faded in or cut up, suggesting endless relational possibilities of action, event, people and place: between an architecture and its habitation. His aim is to create disjunction between form and anticipated use. And he has a fascination with the dramatic. His explorations frequently involve violence and crime. For him, events have their own momentum and are rarely the consequence of their surroundings: 'the definition of architecture may lie at the intersection of logic and pain, rationality and anguish, concept and pleasure' (ibid., p. xxviii).

In *The Manhattan Transcripts* (1994) he outlines a series of theoretical projects that simultaneously direct and witness activities and incidents as 'intrusions into the architectural stage set' (ibid., p. 7). He adopts the discrete *frame* as a structuring and representational device, juxtaposing maps, plans, axonometric projections, news photographs, line drawing, choreographic diagrams, and photographs of people and places in sequences of frozen moments in order to examine better, express and document our discontinuous experience of the city. Through sequences of jump cuts, he supposes that the viewer will maintain memory of the previous frame in the creation of imaginary narratives. He claims to introduce the order of experience and the order of time – moments, intervals, sequences – into exploration of the limits of architectural knowledge. 'Programmatic violence ought to be there to question past humanist programmes that cover only the functional requirements necessary for survival and production, and to favour those activities generally considered negative and unproductive' (ibid., p. xxviii).

Tschumi's *programmes* are conceptual and provocative. They envisage and propose action. At the same time, as 'architectural inquest', they document what are also past occurrences. And they are of profound significance in the apprehension of site-specific performance. The layering, juxtaposition and superimposition of images he conceives in his *theoretical projects* resemble the performance scenario. They provide ways of understanding potential relationships

between place and action. But performance itself might best manifest the multiple articulations of event and space that he conceives, the transformational techniques he craves. What performance offers to Tschumi is time. It gives dynamic to the frame and duration to the event. It can conspire to bring about simultaneity – difficult to represent on the page – and it draws attention to all that the frame disattends: sound, odour, climate, social milieu, historical depth and all that is adjacent. The detail behind the architectural facade and all that makes a place distinctive. And this it can achieve as much through artistic indifference and conflict as reciprocity: through the oblique, the disquieting, the truly disturbing. Overheard, caught out of the corner of the eye.

Performance might then be in conflict with or indifferent to site as well as reciprocal – and vice versa – though only through *studied indifference* would it demonstrate its specificity. 'Good architecture must be conceived, erected and burned in vain. The greatest architecture of all is the fireworkers': it perfectly shows the gratuitous consumption of pleasure (Tschumi, 1995, p. 19).

## Mobility: sauntering and loitering

Picture a deserted street.

> Many key urban experiences are the result of juxtapositions which are, in some sense, dysfunctional, which jar and scrape and rend. (Thrift, 2008, p. 209)

If site-specific performance of the 1980s and 1990s was concerned with taking audiences to locations to which access was under usual circumstances restricted, more recent practices have or rendered familiar places unfamiliar, or taken unfamiliar locations to the audience. Since 2001 Mike Brookes and I have created two separate bodies of work that mark a shift from the architectonic approaches of Brith Gof and the occupation of bounded spaces within which scenic devices can be organized and contained: 'banishing nearness as the measure of all things'; 'I want to substitute *distribution* for nearness or ambience' (ibid., p. 17).

First, a series of multisite works: attempts at performance that exists in a number of places simultaneously, at dispersed locations in the urban environment, and for several audiences. These include *Carrying Lyn* (2001; see Pearson and Jeff 2001; Pearson 2006a) and *Polis* (2001; Pearson 2007a) in Cardiff, *Metropolitan Motions* (2002) in Frankfurt, Germany, and *There's Someone in the House* (2004) in Exeter. Such works involve the registration, return, assemblage and subsequent projection of video material recorded in the public domain by both performers and audiences. In *Carrying Lyn*, bicycle couriers transported tapes shot by the performers themselves to an audience waiting in a studio theatre (Jeff, 2009) (see pp. 96–8). In *Metropolitan Motions* couriers returned with footage made by various sections of the audience, itself travelling through the city (see pp. 70–1). In *Polis* the audience was given sole



responsibility for identifying and recording performers. In *There's Someone in the House*, staged in and around the Phoenix Arts Centre in Exeter, a standing audience gathered in a studio theatre around a long, gridded table along which were placed texts and blank videotapes. Over a period of thirty minutes, I moved down the table reading the texts, about dogs mainly, in strictly timed sequences. In cycles of five minutes, Paul Jeff took a tape, placed it in a camera and departed to a locale in the same building where he created a two-minute scene with John Rowley and Steve Robins reminiscent of footage from Abu Ghraib prison. In these sequences the essential relationship was between protagonist and camera as much as oppressor and victim. Two men sit drinking beer whilst a naked third lies in a lift doorway, the door closing and shutting on him. Jeff then returned, placed the tape on the table and took another, departing to meet the performers again at a different location in the building. And so on. Mike Brookes projected the returning tapes on a large screen in a rapid cycling of material. The effect here is of events happening 'just now, just over there'. But were one to want to intervene where would that be?

In a second set of studio performances conceived in collaboration with Welsh playwright Ed Thomas, *Raindogs* (2002) (see pp. 153–4) and *Who Are You Looking at?* (2004) performance was constituted as a purposeful arrangement of mediated fragments – video, photographic, audio – created elsewhere, at some other time. The performers were prerecorded at locations or from new viewpoints inaccessible to a theatre audience.

In both, the city becomes the location of performance. Performance serves to present recognizable places in unfamiliar ways, from unexpected perspectives. And to reveal unfamiliar locales: rarely visited but just adjacent to the flow of everyday life. But the prospect is a partial one. In this, performance resembles Bruno Latour's *oligopticon*, 'seeing a little, very well, but just a little' (Read, 2006, p. 62). 'Oligoptica are just those sites since they do exactly the opposite of panoptica: they see much *too little* to feed the megalomania of the inspector or the paranoia of the inspected, but what they see, they *see it well*'. 'From oligoptica, sturdy but extremely narrow views of the connected whole are made possible – as long as connections hold' (Latour, 2005, p. 181).

Performance is generated and apprehended in several places, from which performers and spectators may be excluded or absent. As an *itinerant* practice, it momentarily occupies nondescript or indistinct sites, or places overlooked through familiarity. It draws attention to all that might not be immediately apparent: details of fabric, moments from history. It does so as much through fiction as fact, and through theoretical asides as much as drama. In *Carrying Lyn* the ten-minute sections of twin projection, juxtaposing the returned video with footage of the same locations at midday, were interspersed with five-minute audio recordings of short theoretical and critical textual reflections on the contemporary city to allow time for rewind, referencing and quoting Marc Augé on spatial forms of anthropological place (Augé, 1995, pp. 56–7) – path, crossroads, monumental centre, and the activities they might engender: itinerary, meeting, gathering. And Michel de Certeau on the rhetorics of walking,

tactical delinquency, and 'the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be, ultimately, the place but is only a name: the City' (Certeau, 1988, p. 103). And Walter Benjamin on *flânerie* – 'The space winks at the *flâneur*: "What do you think may have gone on here?"' (Benjamin, 1999, p. 418). And Deleuze and Guattari on the *nomad*. And Jane Rendell on gender and the urban experience. And Guy Debord on the *dérive*.

The auditorium now rendered *porous*, with information flowing in and out and through it, rather than a place that ensures a singularity of looking and listening: 'through a ceaseless transport of information' (Latour, 2005, p. 182).

The performance exists in a multitude of places, some of which may even be out of sight, in a work potentially as large as the city. It refuses to coalesce, make itself available for total scrutiny. There is no one place from which one can see it all. It is never one thing. It is a *field* rather than an *object*. And it is already archaeological in aspect. To understand its scale, let alone its narrative, the individual spectator pieces together video sequences, photographs, maps, texts, overhead conversations and interrogations in acts of interpretation. A *reconstitution* of the past from its surviving fragments ...

## Archaeology: marking

Picture a boarded up shop.

> Time in its passing casts off particles of itself in the form of images, documents, relics, junk. Nobody can seize time once it is gone, so we must make do with such husks, the ones that have not yet succeeded in disintegrating. (Sante, 1992, p. ix)

In reflecting upon the specific relationship between place and performance, we might usefully borrow other disciplinary optics. We might realign such performance as an active agency within adjacent fields of endeavour: geography, architecture, urban planning. In practical and theoretical convergence between performance and archaeology the closest collaboration may yet result from a shared concern with the notion of the 'contemporary past'.

How is this 'contemporary past' manifest? First, we engage in small acts of *curation*, in creating a present that is itself multitemporal. Juxtaposing today's milk bottle with flowers bought last week with a photograph taken twenty years ago with a family heirloom.

Second, at the most intimate of scales we inscribe the urban fabric, with varying degrees of permanence. Both private and public domain are marked by our presence and by our passing. From 'Kilroy was here' to modern graffiti, we deliberately 'tag' the environment: proclaiming identities and affiliations, demarcating territory. But inadvertently, quietly, continuously in the touch of flesh on metal and stone, we also leave signature *traces*: the prints of our bodies. In certain places, our marks accumulate, the signs of our regular and habitual contact: patterns of grubby handprints around doorhandles, greasy smears on the street outside the fish-and-chip shop. In others, our bodies abrade and erode. We wear things out with our hands, our feet, our backs, our bottoms, our lips: the step is worn shallow, the handrail rubbed naked of paint, the wall is scored by generations of resting bicycle handlebars. In the very passage of pedestrians, in places of multitudinous swarming, the pavement is ground down. Elsewhere, there are the marks. Of singular actions: scuffs, scratches, cuts and stains. Of traumatic events: accidents of fire and explosion, incidents of anarchy and unrest. Of transitory occurrences: dropped groceries, vomited kebab. Sometimes they are no more than the faintest swish and sometimes awful to behold: scenes of crime, 'arcs of blood, quantities of semen'. And on the street corner, dogs sniffed urgently, cocked their legs, left a jumble of spoors in the wet concrete. The unintentional, the random, the intimate unplanned touch of history's passing ... that attest to our presence and also, of course, to our absence ...

Through our passage, movements, moments, actions, encounters, we constantly mark our material surroundings. These are the authentic traces of the performance of everyday life: the result of routine, tradition, habit, accident, event, social ritual, of long-term evolution and unconnected short-term ruptures and singularities, of nearness, of dwelling. Our physical contact constitutes an ongoing archaeological record, and microchronology. Even the most mundane set of circumstances has a depth or density: the character of the place. But recognizing this depends upon looking at them in oblique ways, observing texture and detail. What is banal at one scale of viewing may be minutely detailed in close-up, complex stratigraphies of decoration and structural alteration lurking in the domestic and the ordinary.

These marks we make, these traces we leave, are ineffably archaeological: 'an archaeology of us', of contemporary material culture, of the recent, of the immediate. This is the realm of what has been termed, in an oxymoronic way, 'the archaeology of the contemporary past', an 'archaeology of us' (Buchli and Lucas, 2001, p. 5). That addresses 'those aspects of experience that are non-discursive, inarticulate and otherwise unconstituted practices (either through suppression or otherwise ... tensions, contradictions, exclusions, pains, etc.)' (ibid., p. 14). Restoring an absent present, that we risk ignoring and losing. As a field of enquiry, it involves a renewed sensitivity to the fabric of the present and attention to those details distinct and differentiated that signal our presence, but that we consciously disattend or casually ignore or commit to collective amnesia. Or what French archaeologist Laurent Olivier has termed a 'relationship of proximity maintained regarding places, objects, ways of life or practices that are still ours and still nourish our collective identity' (Olivier, 2001, p. 175).

If the unturned calendars in the sandwich bar were anything to go by, 44 and 46 James Street, Cardiff were abandoned in August 1989. After breaking in, we found traces of those who lived and worked there. Wear patterns around doorways and stains on skirting boards attested to their presence, and

also to their absence. They indicated how the habitual actions and chance moments have shaped the place. But we should beware. The life-story of these shops did not cease simply because they were removed from the histories of the people who once worked there. They began to decompose, to fall apart, significantly and confusingly for us, of their own volition. Visibly changing as we visited them, drawing our attention to the way that nothing in the material world is ever fixed, always tending towards entropy. Slates became dislodged, paint peeled, a veneer of dust settled, pigeon droppings accumulated. Michael Shanks has called this, in that we do not perceive it, the secret life of things. Places and objects are constantly in motion, changing in ways that condition how we observe and make use of them.

Archaeology is, I suggest, a process of cultural production – a form of active apprehension, a particular sensibility to material traces – that takes the remains of the past and makes something out of them in the present. A contemporary creative work.

There is here an implicit repoliticization of a discipline that has its nascence in foundational processes of nation-state building, as a form of active apprehension, as a particular sensibility to traces. As it poses the question, who made these marks?, it addresses social and ethical issues, engaging with questions of identity, community, class and gender. In an examination of the relationship between material culture and human behaviour, it inevitably concerns aspects of activity and experience that are non-discursive, resulting from practices of labour, trade and social life. It might reveal inarticulate, unregarded or disregarded practices. Anonymous, silent, silenced, suppressed, forgotten, ignored, such as patterns of social smoking or profligate street urination or covert sexual activity. It might challenge familiar categorizations, such as assigned usage and the spatially constructed order, through the identification of delinquent events and practices: shortcuts, transgressions and acts of trespass that privilege the route over the inventory. The lateral skids of skate-boarders. Places where the bye-laws of the city are clearly broken: by gum chewers and public drinkers and drug users. It might presence absence, indicating the traces of those departed or who live a life of a different timetable, such as night workers and club-goers. It might indicate small acts of vernacular defiance in the personalization of domicile and business.

Performance is an interpretive and representational practice, a medium that can juxtapose, superimpose and elide different orders of material. Both are social practices: together they might fuse critical and technical experiment, making creative use of the fragments of the past, in an attitude critical and suspicious of orthodoxy, of any final accounts of things. An enacted romanticism.

Performance might demonstrate the partiality of our understanding of the occupancy of the city, revealing that which escapes usual discourses of urban theory and planning. It might be redemptive and therapeutic, but equally troubling and disruptive. With the accent on detail, on that which we barely notice, the archaeologist might enquire of inhabitants and workers what marks their activities and occupations produce and about how such traces reveal difference and distinctiveness – about the genesis and history of existing marks within the locale and how they serve as a mnemonic for the events that caused them, leading to a fuller appreciation, through the stories and experiences of others, of the microchronologies and polyphonic geographies that make up the urban present, to the city as a temporal as well as a spatial phenomenon. In these traces, *can* we discern the movements, moments and encounters involved in their making: maps of practices and behaviours? If our very walking is archaeological then these are surely the true spoors of archetypal figures of the modern city. But to track them we may need a taxonomy, a field guide of marks ordered and identified according to type, location, density and timescale. Can we discern the movements involved in their making?

In the attic in James Street a man's suit quietly rotted beside three Coca-Cola cans and a tray of cutlery spilled across the floor in an unwitnessed moment. But can we ever be sure that human agency was involved in what appears now as an event? Was the chair knocked over and the cutlery scattered in an emotional outburst, or as an accident during evacuation, or later as the result of perching birds? Accidental arrangements of objects, particularly when framed in the viewfinder of the camera, suggested narratives for an eye adjusted by the forensic 'turn': pen, four cups, knife; shoe, bird's nest, wooden cash till, betting slips, jacket; single knife; single toothbrush. Tools and utensils bore chips and abrasions that attest to their usage, to events they had witnessed, things that had happened to them, signs of ageing, time and use: the carving knife ground thin on the doorstep, a favourite mug cracked and handle-less ... We removed them, intending to integrate them into performances elsewhere. But out of context they became so much detritus, already left as surplus to requirements by their former owners. We threw them away. Artist Emma Lawton intended to hack into the shops. To cut, hammer and slice their fabric. And then to order and reorder the fragments of brick and mortar: by size and colour elsewhere. But they were demolished quickly, without our knowing, to make way for a car park for the Cardiff Bay Development Agency. But I can still stand on the street and tell the story of our forced entry.

In works of site performance that evince the transitory and the mundane, we might demonstrate for the popular imagination how we ourselves and our immediate environment are part of the historical process, how constituents of material culture exist within overlapping frames and trajectories of time, drawing attention to how we are continuously generating the archaeological record. Whilst little is at risk here, everything of value might be at stake: communality, generational communication, sense of place. As modes of cultural production, archaeology and performance might take up the fragments of the past and make something out of them in the present, in an attitude critical and suspicious of orthodoxy, of any final accounts of things.

Such works might resemble small acts of resistance to the excesses of mediated, global culture, drawing attention to the local and particular, identifying and energizing regionalized identities, without monopolizing interpretation. In a renewed sensitivity to ephemerality, to an everyday rendered unfamiliar,

an enacted archaeology might provide insights into the personal and the emotive, at scales that as yet escape the scrutiny of CCTV surveillance. Addressing tensions, contradictions and exclusions. Evincing the grain of a place, its history, and its changing nature. It might celebrate the fact that we do and can still mark – insubordinate to the imperatives of public cleansing, architectural sanitization, social decorum – in acts that are colloquial, vernacular, detailed, social. And that in this, we are not alone. Perhaps this concern with the dirty and the discarded is a symptom of late modernism, a nostalgia for a public domain in dynamic dialogue with its inhabitants, counter to the current genrefication and gentrification of the urban landscape, the deterritorialization of social life and retreat into the unmarked domain of cyberspace. A restoration of the absent present …

But if performance is to be an active agency of contemporary archaeology, it might be as much a *reading onto* as a *reading from*. It might *avoid* pointing to this or that, whilst nevertheless making them evident through its very presence.

# 3

## Site: Places

**In which ten locations, their attendant performances and the linkages between them are described in detail, with the additional consideration of associated practices and other manifestations of performance in similar places elsewhere.**

### Field: Haxey, Lincolnshire

**Image 3.1** *The 'Sway'*, Haxey Hood, North Lincolnshire, 1975 (Michelle Bogre)

A field. A group of men, some in costume, some in working clothes, most in boots, pushing …

It's 3.30 p.m. on 6 January in the village of Haxey, in that area of reclaimed fenland known as the Isle of Axholme, in north Lincolnshire, and these men are involved in different ways in the Haxey Hood, a *succession* of *passages* and *nodes* of activity of varying durations, rhythms and intensities, and opportunities for public participation, culminating in the playing of an enduring, wide-ranging game (see Newall, 1980; Cooper, 1993; Parratt, 2000; Pearson, 2006a). It's already been a long day and, although the planned *schedule* may