

ONE DAY SCULPTURE

A NEW ZEALAND-WIDE SERIES OF TEMPORARY PUBLIC ARTWORKS

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PLACE: THE FUTURE WAS HERE!

This paper explores the question of how artwork, particularly the temporary or ephemeral, creates and contests the identity of location within the context of place and temporality especially in relation to the everyday. The spatiotemporal theories, particularly of French theorists such as Marc Augé, Henri Lefebvre and Henri Bergson are used to gain an understanding of the issues involved.

The political implications of how the siting of an artwork changes the identity of the location and the perception of that change are pertinent to artist, curator and viewer. However, it is relevant to identify the ‘viewer’ at this point. In relation to the locating of artwork in the everyday, the viewer, more often than not, is a viewer by accident, a passer-by in the course of his/her daily activity rather than a dedicated fine-art viewer. The inference of this is that the artist and curator should hold no preconception of knowledge in relation to that viewer.

Brian O’Doherty in *Inside the White Cube* discusses the idea that ‘things’ are what makes space happen rather than space just being where ‘things’ happen¹. To take the ‘things’ as artwork in this instance indicates that space is more than just a container

¹ iO’Doherty, B. *Inside the White Cube*. The Ideology of the Gallery Space. The ideology of space within the gallery is expounded within O’Doherty’s book that, although originally published in 1976, is relevant to the way art is shown today. p.39

for the art and that the art gives a presence to the space. Descartes, for whom space had no independent existence, also discusses this opening up of space by 'things'.

O'Doherty describes location as a keyword, where concerns about space and perception are condensed.² Although he is talking specifically about gallery space, there is a relevance to the contextual siting of artwork outside the formal art space. The siting contests the identity of that location through the perception of the space, that is, through the viewer.

Temporary or ephemeral works provide a durational aspect. The experience of looking and seeing in the present is strongly linked with the experience of looking and seeing in the past, which, in turn, will inform the future. This also has links with ideas of performativity, which Mary Kelly describes as 'signaling an awareness of the way the present gesture is always an interaction or repetition of preceding acts'³. The condensing of space and perception therefore is linked with notions of experience and duration.

It is the location and the act of viewing that provides the experiential foundation. Cicero writes 'For walk where we will, we tread upon some story'⁴. In the setting of the everyday, the 'stories' belong to the individual as well as to the location. The co-existence of the physicality of the work and the experience of the viewer create a place in history. It becomes part of folklore and myth, each recalling of the event layered with a patina of new experience. Its future could then be said to be larger than its past or present.

It is also significant that access to a temporary work is limited by duration that further enhances the re-telling of the 'story'. The transitory nature of an artwork is important for the work to maintain its position within personal memory. The short duration of seeing amplifies the experience in the memory of the viewer. A permanent sculpture however, quickly becomes part of the everyday. Its long duration of seeing allows it to become commonplace. To use a phrase by Joe Moran, author of *Reading the Everyday*⁵, the temporary or ephemeral work 're-enchants the everyday' and thus, through the experience of the viewer, the inherent identity of the location and the transitory nature of the artwork, a new identity of location is formed. These ideas will be further explored later through visual examples.

I have chosen works that explore the possibilities of art experience within the sphere of the everyday and the non-place. The practice of Scandinavian artists, Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, explores different types of space and their analogies to different behaviours in relation to the identity of the viewer. This work, Prada Marfa,

² *ibid.* P.78

³ Kelly, M. in *Art: Contemporary Key Thinkers*, ed. Costello D. and Vickery J. Berg 2007 p.51

⁴ Cicero in *Handbook of Greek Mythology* quoted in *Universal Experience: Art, Life and the Tourists' Eye* Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago 2005 p.254

⁵ Moran, J. (2005) *Reading the Everyday* Routledge and Moran, J. (2008) *Queuing for Beginners* Profile Books. This quotation was part of a personal conversation.

2005, uses an anonymous setting, formerly the site of a petrol station, by the roadside in Marfa, Texas to place a shop, Prada. The presence of a shop instantly confers the label of the everyday, a place that contains the functional. But the shop is Prada, a high-class luxury goods vendor, which displays the condition of excess necessary to superabundance and non-place. However, the town of Marfa was also the home of Donald Judd. His acquisition and subsequent conversion of many buildings to art spaces, museums, galleries, studios etc. perhaps comments on different ideas such as value, process and sustainability of art and contributes, by default, to the range of viewer positions. Prada Marfa would be viewed differently according to the experience of the viewer, be it fine art professional or casual passer-by.



Prada Marfa 2005

This work also introduces dichotomies into functionality and the inherent identity of the location. The location and the identity of location is one that has been chosen for its very genericness. The location encompasses the criteria of Marc Augé's non-place (transit, transport, commerce and leisure) and this artwork brings to the fore these ideas of non-place, introducing further layers of meaning into this site.

To take the particular context of the everyday, the visibility, or invisibility, of space in the shopping mall which relates to Prada Marfa. The mall is designed to create an experience rather than just be visited. It is created as a setting for the specific purpose of shopping, designed to be anonymous and generic, homogenous with other malls. It could also be said to be placeless.

Accordingly, it is a non-place. Augé states that the non-place has two complimentary realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends and the relationships that individuals have with these spaces"⁶. Whilst space is a physical entity that can be 'described' by its features, non-place is defined by its functions and its concept, and, as such, is both physical and mental. The symbolism of the Elmgreen and Dragset work uses these numerous dichotomies of space, place and non-place that make Prada Marfa accessible to all viewers.

What is important here is the location as palimpsest of place. Whilst the surface layers of place can be physically erased, the mental notions of identity of that place cannot be. This is at odds with Augé who states that the non-place 'does not integrate the earlier places'.⁷ This means that any previous traces are erased, that nothing is carried

⁶Augé, M. *Non-Places, An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* Verso 1995 p.94

⁷ *ibid* p.78

forward from the past. This is in direct opposition to Lefebvre who believes that what came previously in a space underpins what comes after⁸ and is in accordance with ideas of performativity. My belief that place is palimpsest is a crucial point as to how artwork creates and contests identity of location.

Siting an artwork in any locality embodies its inherent identity and eventually becomes part of the layers of history intrinsic to that location. Previous identities of place are always present whether in physical, mental, social or historical form and the artwork makes visible that space and incorporates these identities within it. An artwork placed in a non-place, which, like the everyday, is defined by its functions and concept, is no different. However, here the perception of the viewer plays a greater part. Temporary or ephemeral art 're-enchants' and makes visible. After the removal of the work, the site physically becomes part of the everyday again. The art, however, continues to exist in the memory of the viewer. Conversely, whilst temporary artwork changes the relationship of the viewer to that place, permanent art, constantly seen, soon becomes 'invisible' and become part of the everyday, the familiar backdrop to daily activity.

To return to Prada Marfa, the location of the artwork creates a leisure site and functions as a political statement whilst the casual viewer is the link between the location and the art and becomes the embodiment of the palimpsest of the site. The experience of fine art professionals however will be totally different.

Elmgreen and Dragset have taken an individual element of the shopping mall and re-located it into another, similarly generic, location. The contextual ingredients of the first place have been appropriated and placed into the second whose inherent identity is entirely different. This would imply an enormous shift in thinking for the viewer. There is also an obligation of contextuality for the viewer. Could it be that the experience of the viewer confers that 'contextual ingredient' rather than the location itself? The inherent identity of the site is contested by the artwork with its paradigm shift. An artwork claims a site for its own, for its duration.

Time and duration are particularly important to French philosopher Henri Bergson. He believes that time co-exists in a state of multiplicity, the layers of past, present and future overlapping. To relate this to Elmgreen and Dragset's work, placing Prada Marfa in the Texan landscape, its past, its present and its future co-exist in overlapping temporality. Experiences also shift in viewing perspective.

This work by Heather and Ivan Morison, *Journée des Barricades*, also politicizes the everyday and employs the strategy of boundaries. The space /time shift also exists in this work representing the future implications of climatic and social change. *Journée des Barricades*, existed in Wellington on December 2008 and highlights the relationship between the everyday and cultural locational identity.

⁸ Henri Lefebvre *The Production of Space* Blackwell Publishing 1991. Translated Donald Nicholson-Smith p.229



The Zabbaleen, Cairo, Egypt, 2008. Photo: Ivan Morison



Artists: Heather and Ivan Morison 2008

The original idea was conceived in Egypt and also relates to science fiction. One aspect of this work is that the materials used in the Zabbaleen barricade were common to that location and the re-making of the work in Wellington also used materials common to the new location. The link is that they are all waste materials, the throwaways of each culture. The notion of the cultural identity of one location is being imposed on another.

However, the duration of the piece is perhaps important here. The inconvenience caused by the blockade necessary to focus on the impact of the message. A permanent installation of this type would maybe not be tolerated as, for example, Richard Serre's *Tilted Arc*.

I feel that the viewing experience and the locational identity of the artwork are linked to Bergson's concept of time and Lefebvre's concept of space. Bergson's notion of time and its flow being relative to Lefebvre's proposition of a 'trialectics' of spatiality. This is discussed in Hubbard, Kitchin and Valentine's *Key thinkers on Space and Place*, where the 'trialectics' of spatiality explores the 'differential entwining of cultural practices, representation and imagination i.e. perceived, conceived and lived space'⁹. The multiplicities of the three time states, past, present and future overlapping with states of spatiality, perceived, conceived and lived space. These ideas of time and spatiality are present in the Morisons' work and important to identity of location. The temporary artwork questions the role of time and duration within the context of location.

By way of contrast, this work conjures up the everyday in a gallery setting. This work by Pakistani artist, Ceal Floyer, *Door* 2007, allows the viewer to conjecture. This

⁹ Hubbard, P. Kitchin, R. & Valentine G. (2004) *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* Sage p.

image was taken in the former Ingelby Gallery, Edinburgh, which was not a white cube and retained some of the trappings of its former domestic usage.



Ceal Floyer Door 2007

The temporary nature of this and the Morisons' work is of prime concern, although in Floyer's work, the temporariness is a figment of the viewers' imagination. The work is a strip of light that appears to be showing under a door. This is a projected image from within the gallery space and although the projector is visible, there appears an element of deception. However, it is the perception and its opposing reality that is important. The viewer perceives that there is a social and lived function to the room beyond the door. The point is that the work is perceived as temporary. It is expected that the light will go out. The temporary nature of the perception is as valid as the actuality. It embodies perceived, conceived and lived space. However, the artwork contests the identity of the location creating a fictional narrative that overrides the actuality. It could be said that, in this case, the viewer transcends the artwork.

So far, I have discussed how the viewer perceives space in an urban setting. I wish now to look at a rural setting and, in particular, how artwork creates place from the perspective of the artist. The everyday is often thought of as a purely urban/suburban notion but, of course, is just the place where daily activity happens.



958797

This is a piece of my own work and is known only by its grid reference 958797. It was part of a series of temporary interventions in Northern England that celebrated new legislation allowing the right to roam. This reed boat represents both the artist's past, a fascination with water voyages, particularly Thor Heyerdahl's Pacific journeys, the present in new found freedoms and the future, the hopes and dreams that a journey represents, both the journey perceived by the boat and the 'new' land that can be accessed.

However, the memory of the reading of these voyages is hazy. All that remains is the sensation of adventure, the feeling of tiny boats crossing a huge sea. The process of

making my reed boat was one of weaving strands together to create a narrative that referenced my individual feelings rather than any allusion to fact.

The siting of this work upon an undistinguished moorland both brings into existence an identity for that location but also contests that identity by conferring another, a second, that relates to the artist's past and present. However, when an artwork is positioned, the appearance of the original identity of the place is superseded by the artwork for the duration of the work's existence. A new identity is gained for the duration of the work. The inherent identity of the location is experienced within the viewing encounter.

Sculpture, particularly, invites a plurality of viewpoints but it also invites a plurality of points of view. Locating within the public sphere, especially the everyday, there is a continual perception that the space belongs to its users. To each user, it is place; it is their place, which has the continual updating of identity experiences, from historical, social, mental and physical. It allows ownership, which then confers the concession of censorship. The identity of the space is through their usage of the space. It invites viewers to have views.

Floyer says about her work, 'It's like mentioning the obvious but in a different tone of voice'.¹⁰ Each viewer also has their 'own tone of voice' that succinctly processes the visual and empirical information to create, in the future, their own version of the artwork albeit in their own memory, a mythological work that may or may not have resemblance to the original. The future appears greater than the past, the interlayering of time states and locational shifts to present a future that exceeds both past and present.

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The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the Publisher.

¹⁰ Floyer, C. Art Now Taschen 2002 p.158