Introduction

A crisis of site?

FOR THE PAST 30 YEARS it has become increasingly evident that the idea of site is in crisis. Even the most recent accounts of site specificity have stumbled upon difficulties in naming the practice itself, re-packaging it variously as 'community-specific', 'context-specific', 'issue-specific', 'audience-specific' and 'new genre public art' and while it can be and often is these things, somewhere the very notion of site loses its way. Site – what artists of the 1970s remained so faithful to – today seems to be uneasily brushed under the carpet. And yet it is integral to issues of identity, memory and politics. Although I may use these re-packaged terms to describe certain moments of site specificity's evolution, I will be writing towards hopefully a greater understanding of site as the space of the encounter.

The term 'site specificity' has been appropriated in a multitude of cultural contexts to describe projects or encounters that have their roots in the historic specificity or psychic encounter with specific sites.[1] It is imperative to distinguish between 'site' and 'place' conceptually. 'Site' signifies an abstract location whereas 'place' is an intimate and particularised culture, bound to a geographical location.[2] Site-specific art may be considered to generate a uniqueness of place or it may be a site's particularities, whether historical or phenomenological, that give rise to a project.

This interest in site, its transformations and more recently, its propensity to travel, stems from my own encounters and re-encounters with 'old favourites' at biennials, museums, galleries and project spaces worldwide. The subsequent recontextualisation of these works and accumulated semantic baggage that I carry to them, time and again in various locations, seemed to me to forge a different encounter with the same works each time. It occurred to me that, despite a change in location, the site of encounter was itself a dynamic space.

A site can exist in various locations, stretched out across time. The spatially and temporally extended site of Documenta11 serves as some example of this. Located across

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[1] p. 53, Kwon,M. One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity, (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
[2] p. 3, ibid.

four continents in Berlin, New Delhi, St Lucia and Lagos[3], Documenta11 collapsed the distinctions of 'over here' and 'over there' and opened one year ahead of schedule at platform1 in Vienna. In a similar spirit to Documenta11, I hope to explore the notion of site through a multidisciplinary approach; through genealogies and ethnographic praxis examined through spatialised practices.

Ethnography, the process of 'being there' in the field, used to be distinct from travel, as though one teleported from some neutral ground to arrive at the heart of an investigation within some inert field. Indeed, the means of transport and all the associated, situated baggage that was brought by the ethnographer, or audience was largely erased in this process. It is my aim to incorporate these elements of travel and the aforementioned (semiotic) baggage into my exploration of site as an epistemological investigation with an emphasis on difference over truth claims. Indeed, I would like to propose this project as an attempt to articulate the dynamics of difference. Equally, this emphasis on travel draws a parallel with the focus of my work, namely the attempt to arrive at a positionality.

In chapter one then, I explore the relations between artworks and their sites from the late 1960s and how these earlier, sedentary models of site specificity have generated identities, 'enhanced' public spaces and have, in general, occupied a moral high ground through their positioned conception. Later I mark the paradigm shift in the reconfiguration of site as a phenomenon that is constituted through social and political processes, often setting out to interrogate art's ideological system. The nature of this chapter is to explore a brief genealogy of site specificity. As I have already mentioned, the term itself has been renamed frequently during the course of its history and I would like to point out that my continued use of the term 'site specificity' throughout this project is intentional. I do not want to repackage 'site' and its implications as anything other than it is nor do I wish to relegate to the margins the term site as so frequently has been done in writings on the subject in the past.

Chapter two examines the 'traffic in culture'[4] and points towards the ethnographic tendencies in recent modes of site specificity. I use the term 'ethnography' in an obviously expanded sense to circumscribe a set of practices and values, some of which may be employed in the realm of the visual. Contemporary ethnographic fieldwork has undertaken to re-examine itself as no longer a static, exotic site that belongs to the realm of the 'other' but that the site of investigation may be a 'contact zone', that is, a place that

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[3] p. 104, Meta Bauer, U. "The Space of Documenta11: Documenta11 as a Zone of Activity," in Documenta11_Platform5: Exhibition Catalogue, Kassel, June 8 – September 15, 2002, Hatje Cantze Publishers
[4] George Marcus' phrase, used in his book (1995).

is located between fixed points, one that is constantly mobile and demands negotiation between its inhabitants. Irit Rogoff in her work *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* proposes that contemporary meanings circulate visually as well as orally and textually.[5] It is for this reason that I am focusing on site specificity and its more recent nomadic tendencies to better understand where meanings situate themselves within the visual field. Through this investigation I attempt to interrogate the notion of site as a 'field' of encounter and importantly, that an encounter may constitute itself as a series of travel relations.

Chapter three is an inquiry into the dynamics of engagement in the 'contact zone' and an attempt to ascertain where meaning locates itself in cross-cultural translation. I focus primarily on Derrida's concept of *différance* and Lyotard's *blocking together* to try and establish what those elements might be within the space of the encounter that may become lost in translation, to try to distil their singularities through discursive signification. My investigation of meaning then, is traced through the dynamics of site specificity.

This project is not an attempt to configure a correct definition of site specificity but is the product of my increasing sense of urgency that the relationship between an artwork, its site and audience needs to be reassessed in light of recent theories of space and ethnography. It leads me to question what constitutes a site, whether a site exists prior to an artist's intervention, where the meaning lies within the site of encounter with an artwork and the dynamics of this when travel is introduced into the equation. This project is one that concerns the realm of meaning and interpretation through spatialised practices. In particular I am attempting to understand the development of meaning and interpretation through the social, psychic and physical architecture of site. It is my attempt to forge a relationality between historic specificities, psychic subjectivities, places and subjects through an investigation of site specificity. What appears to be initially a crisis of site may essentially equate with a crisis of meaning, interpretation and the transmission of knowledge.

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[5] p. 29, Rogoff, I. Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture, (2000) Routledge, London

Chapter 1

Rooted Site, Stable site

IN 1981, NEW YORK'S FEDERAL PLAZA was the site of a new 120-foot-long, 12-foot-high steel sculpture *Titled Arc (fig. 1.1)* by the artist Richard Serra. Commissioned by the U.S. General Services Administration during a period when site-specific approaches to public art were being promoted, the massive wall of steel insisted on permanence, on fixity and was conceived as intrinsically linked to the physical site of its production. Such was the integral relationship between the site and the work that Serra himself argued that "to remove the work is to destroy the work."[6] Indeed, the work has come to signify the epitome of site-specific art.

The emergence of site-specific art in the late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with a growing concern towards art's commodification and tendency to modernist ideals of autonomy and universality. Where the transparent, seamlessness of modern space allowed for portable, autonomous works, site-specific work based itself on an experiential understanding of the actual space of its production, insisted upon the physical dimensions of its site and troubled the representational or structural environment. Obstinately immobile, early site-specific art submitted to its physical environment and indeed was determined by its phenomenological context. In the same way that Minimalism challenged the hermetically idealist notion of the art object by deflecting its meaning to the ambient space of its presentation, site-specific work sought to produce an indivisible relationship between the work and its site. To remove any element of this relationship would be to destroy the work itself.

Such claims to the intrinsic relationship between a site and its object depend to a large extent on the stability of the site itself for if fixity and permanence are the strength and the nature of such works, the space of presentation must itself be a constant. Space here belongs to the realm of the mathematician.[7] The physical, geometric attributes of a space can be measured and classified, as far as possible, through mathematics. Not in any way infused by anything taking place within its arena, the space as a kind of ready canvas appears as luminous, free of obstacles and indifferent to social presence. The site of presentation exists prior to the work through its phenomenological specificity or

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[6] Quoted in p. 12, Kwon, M. <u>One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity</u>, (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts

[7] p. 2, Lefebvre, H. <u>The Production of Space</u>, (1991) English translation, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, London. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith.

historical uniqueness and the work, in terms of the space it occupies, is secondary to the site of its production though once created, intrinsically linked to it.

In an article published in *Arts of the Environment* in 1972, Robert Smithson described his search for the site of his *Spiral Jetty* (1970) work, *(fig. 1.2)* a great earthen coil jutting out from the desert into a lake. Aside from trying to locate a salt lake consisting of wine-red waters, Smithson contemplated the form his work would take in relation to the site

> At that point I was still not sure what shape my work of art would take. I thought of making an island with the help of boats and barges, but in the end I would let the site determine what I would build.[8]

Smithson chose his site at the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Certainly not produced in the most accessible of all locations, *Spiral Jetty* is utterly immobile, unsaleable, site-specific. It has even endured its own disappearance; unknown to Smithson, the lake levels were unnaturally low when he created the serpentine earthwork and it was inundated until only recently.[9] With its fresh re-emergence the work has commanded more attention and has become a kind of honey-pot area drawing visitors to its remote site at Rozel Point, prompting the Dia Center for the Arts – that has recently taken responsibility for the work – to develop the site to make it more comfortable for tourists. The work's strength lies in its fixity; its refusal to be moved and its subsequent gravitational pull on those interested in it. This early example of site-specific work that is so adamantly conceived and produced with its site in mind is now considered by thinkers such as Hal Foster and Miwon Kwon to fall neatly into the 'sedentary' model of site specificity through its grounded site-bound knowledge, defined as a pre-condition of the work. Its permanence, it may be argued, even determines to some extent the identity of the area, just as Anthony Gormley's *Angel of the North* reactivates and articulates histories in Gateshead, marking the industrial past to somehow move away from it within an era of regional regeneration. Just as Gerry and Sewell, the two struggling teenagers in Mark Herman's 2000 film *Purely Belter* testified when they found themselves congregating at the foot of the *Angel of the North*, becoming angry with the work for not delivering the promise of change and a brave new future. Despite their anger though, the two boys were still drawn to the site of Gormley's work during times of difficulty and the film returns to this site over and again, firmly situating the boys' story within the long line of history that the work represents. Permanence, not transience, aids identity formation.

Certainly there was much funding ploughed into site-specific work in the 1980s to *enhance* public and private space and to put places on the map. Initially, in the mid-

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[8] p. 111, Holt, N. (ed.) The Writings of Robert Smithson, (1979) New York University Press, New York
[9] p. 25, Observer Magazine, 25 April 2004

1960s, this manifested itself as enlarged signature pieces by internationally acclaimed, generally male artists such as Isamu Noguchi, Alexander Calder and Henry Moore. Site was viewed as a stable, architectural entity and artists' primary concerns were the placements of these works, such that their aesthetic qualities would be enhanced by the chosen site. From the mid-1970s, guidelines for public art programmes, most notably in the United States, shifted their priorities from supporting internationally renowned artists to stipulating that the specificities of the site should influence, if not determine, the final artistic output.[10] The upshot of this was the emergence of a functionalist ethos that prioritised the works' use value within the public realm, resulting in shading or street furniture for the audience's benefit. Intrinsic to this enforcement of the extension of art from its site was the assumption that the supposed enhanced aesthetic quality of the physical, architectural site would advance ameliorated social conditions within the specific environment. Rosalyn Deutsche has noted the reductive approach this equation presents

> social activity [was] constricted to narrow problem solving so that the provision of useful objects automatically collapsed into a social good.[11]

Indeed, throughout its history, site-specific art appears to have been adopted as the vehicle for the enhancement of space through harmonious design, for improved social conditions, for unearthing repressed histories and speaking on behalf of silent peoples. Later site-specific projects turned their attentions to challenging the cultural framework in which they were produced, once again occupying the moral high ground through institutional critique. Artists such as Daniel Buren and Mierle Laderman Ukeles interrogated the idealist values of the space of representation itself, not only by challenging the pristine physical conditions of the white cube as a representational space but contesting the very framework within which art is produced. Buren's *Within and Beyond the Frame* (1973) (*fig. 1.3)* in its literal extension from the exhibition space and its subsequent marking of the gallery walls as framing devices punctured the very notion of the ideological framework by pointing towards a network of framing economies that simultaneously occupy the space of the institution and exceed it. To think specifically, then, in terms of the site of the institution, was to incorporate what Buren has described as the "unveiling"[12] of the illusion of this site's autonomy and revealed the interconnected economies that constitute how one produces a work or interprets a work within this site. Interpretation could no longer be confined to the white walls of the gallery. In a recent

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[10] p. 57, Kwon, M. One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity, (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
[11] p. 65, Deutsche, R. Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics (1996) The MIT Press, Cambridge
[12] Quoted in p. 14, Kwon, M. One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity, (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts

conference, Stefano Boeri[13] described the production of knowledge that may be sampled from local space[14] that can translate to larger environments, as flows across borders. For artists such as Buren the external forces exerted on the viewer and on the local space of presentation left the very concept of site, the production of meaning and knowledge in a state of instability.

Taking Buren's work as a point of departure, I would like to develop the idea of site as an entity on to which great social, political and economic pressures are exerted. The frame, which had previously been determined mathematically as the space of the institution or the site of production, must be thought of in light of Henri Lefebvre's work *The Production of Space*. There are several points that Lefebvre makes which I would like to raise that will enable a critical concept of spatialisation within this project. The first is that space is socially produced. This is in opposition to the notion of mathematically determined space in which sites may be considered as stable, unchanging and devoid of external forces. Lefebvre also presents space as a contingent, constantly negotiated entity. The social forces that are at work within the spatial field change momentarily and so it follows that the resulting space, as constituted from these forces and projections, is in a process of negotiation and renegotiation. The last point I wish to pick up on is Lefebvre's dismissal of the 'transparency' of space and it is this point that is crucial to this project. Lefebvre articulates what may equate to a crisis of meaning through a reconfiguration of space as a treacherous container of unrecoverable, hidden signs

> The illusion of transparency goes hand in hand with a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places. Anything hidden or dissimulated – and hence dangerous – is antagonistic to transparency, under whose reign everything can be taken in by a single glance from that mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates.[15]

It is this project's aim to understand the consequences of Lefebvre's conceptualisation of space on meaning and interpretation through site-specific practices whose very nature and existence have been predicated on models of space as stable. And so I revisit Serra's *Tilted Arc* which is most notably a work that was rooted to the site of its production. Serra insisted that

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[13] *Mapping Intensities* conference. Stefano Boeri is an architect and urban planner and co-founder of "Multiplicity," an ongoing research project that explores the relationship between territorial mutations and self-organisation in urban locations.

[14] The term 'local space' has specific connotations which I will define in Chapter two.

[15] p. 28, Lefebvre, H. The Production of Space (1991) English translation, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, London. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith.

> *Tilted Arc* was conceived from the start as a site-specific sculpture and was not meant to be 'site-adjusted' or 'relocated'. Site-specific works deal with the environmental components of given places. The scale, size, and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it be urban or landscape or architectural enclosure. The works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organisation of the site. [16]

In a paradigm shift, site-specific works started to address the site itself as another medium and, in keeping within the institutional critique of the time, it followed that to work against the site would be to challenge the modernist illusion of artistic autonomy. *Tilted Arc* was met with fierce opposition upon its installation in Federal Plaza. Opponents argued that the work, instead of enhancing the local architecture, violated the plaza - a public amenity - which should be used as an area of relaxation and not, as many argued, the site in which to enforce government values. Some found the work psychologically oppressive as the sculpture cut across the length of the space. At the court hearing in 1985 in which the local 'community'[17] called for the sculpture's removal, a security expert testified to the ways in which the work could compromise public safety as it encouraged loitering, graffiti and terrorist bomb attacks.[18] Somehow ejected from the site of its presentation, somehow disrupting the space it had occupied for five years, *Tilted Arc* was uprooted from its site and removed from Federal Plaza.

The case of *Tilted Arc* really exemplifies the importance that earlier site-specific artists placed on the physical site and the fidelity they manifested in the conceptual relationship between the work and its siting. Serra sooner saw the work banished altogether than relocated. The reasons for this disruption are something that later chapters will try to interrogate but for now the emphasis remains on the staticity of such works – permanence or nothing at all – and their subsequent demands on the audience to travel to the site. This valve-like movement whereby the audience 'goes-forth' may be seen to be mirrored by artists in later site-specific practices where the artist 'goes out' to the community. In an extremely timely and important intervention that took place in August 2004, the artist Paula Roush (msdm)[19] set forth a proposition into the 'real space' of the community of

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[16] pp. 193 – 213, Serra, R. 'Tilted Arc Destroyed,' (1989) reprinted in Richard Serra <u>Writings Interviews,</u> (1994) University of Chicago Press, Chicago

[17] Here I want to suggest that the term 'community' refers to the work's immediate audience; those it was commissioned to benefit, those that had contact with it and its site on a daily basis and other interested parties that followed the case.

[18] p. 78, Kwon, M. <u>One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity</u>, (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts

[19] A Portuguese artist, living and working in London, who founded the organisation Mobile Strategies of Display and Mediation (msdm).

Bow in East London through her project *Bowville. (fig. 1.4)* [20] The Bowville Investigation Bureau, set up in a disused shop on Roman Road market, served as the surveillance centre from which the Bureau could track and monitor the movements of the protagonist Marion Manesta Forresta. Pointing back to the suffragette movement, Marion's name is a bastardisation of three members of the suffragette movement, some of whom were the first people to undergo surveillance. Considered by the local authorities for her affiliation with left wing organisations, most notably *Eastopia*,[21] Marion was given the chance to earn her right to stay in Bowville without surveillance through winning the public vote. Using global satellite positioning technology, the Bureau was able to track her movements through the streets of Bowville and enforce border restrictions on her whilst she developed an increasing presence and identity with the local community in which she tried to earn her citizenship. A wireless camera fed live footage of her actions back to the Bureau where continuous research into current global acts of terror took place.

Such densely rich layers of history can be unravelled within the site of *Bowville* such that the project is intrinsically linked through its material conditions and psychic subjectivities to the site of its performance. Twenty years on this type of site-specific project seems just as sedentary, just as rooted as *Tilted Arc* was to Federal Plaza. Yet elements of *Bowville* have moved on…to San Francisco and Slovenia. Site is not only unstable, site is on the move.

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[20] Please also visit www.bowville.net

[21] *Eastopia* was a project that took place in Summer 2003 in which the 'archive' of blue plaques in Bow that mark sites of historical interest were invigilated by a group of women. Much of the suffragette movement was initiated in Bow. For more on this project visit www.msdm.org.uk

Chapter 2

On Squanto and itinerant fieldwork

THERE SEEMS CERTAINLY TO BE some value-added significance in having experienced works or sites first hand. In the same vein as the critics, artists and theorists who emerged in the 1960s, physical presence permits an experience of actualness[22] and authenticity. Presence requires travel. These rigorous demands permeate the art world today. The art world has seen an enormous increase in international art fairs, biennials and festivals and one could almost map out an itinerary of must-see events ranging from New York to Venice, São Paulo to Kassel to Basel to the Nevada desert. In addition to this, networks exist between multinational museums; museums share the cost of increasingly expensive artworks, shows tour, works are exchanged. Travel is the ticket to credibility, authenticity, to experiential knowledge. The field of inquiry is shifting, expanding, pulling us from the culturally established global cities to further flung sites. The signs point to an increasingly mobilised audience and so it is no surprise that the terms of artistic production themselves have been influenced by this itinerancy.

This globalisation of culture may be accounted for through the spread of communication technologies, the formation of the European Commonwealth, the expansion of multinational companies.[23] It is not an analysis of this movement nor its realisation that I intend to scrutinise, however. The mobility of contemporary life is somewhat of a given and I want to avoid an overly global vision of capitalism and flow of commodities. The questions that interest me more relate to where site can be located within an economy of movement, how an architecture of meaning may be constructed around this economy and where all of this leaves the concept of fieldwork in a world of motion, when 'there' is no longer a place?

As chapter one suggested, early models of site specificity insisted on their immobile attachment to a particular site as exemplified by Richard Serra's assertion that "to remove the work is to destroy the work."[24] Essentially, those interested in these works would have to travel to them to experience them first hand; the act of physically 'going out' into the field, into a cleared place of work. This vector of movement presupposes some form of home base and an exterior site of discovery, something that is identical to older models

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[22] p. 23, Meyer, J. "The Functional Site," Documents 7, Fall 1996, Documents Magazine Inc. NYC
[23] p. 10, Coles, A. (ed.) Site Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn Vol. 4., 2000 Black Dog Publishing, London
[24] Quoted in p. 12, Kwon, M. One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity, (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts

of fieldwork that are more associated with the ethnographic practices of the 1930s and theorists such as Margaret Mead and Borislaw Makinowski. This model of cleared space of work assumes that one can keep out distracting influences. As Donna Haraway has succinctly stated

> A commitment to mobile positioning and to passionate detachment is dependent on the impossibility of innocent 'identity' politics and epistemologies as strategies for seeing from the standpoints of the subjugated in order to see well. One cannot 'be' either a cell or a molecule – or a woman, colonised person, labourer, and so on – if one intends to see and see from these positions critically…[25]

It is interesting to note that the siting of contemporary art has shifted from the surface of the medium to the space of the work's representation and then from institutional frames to discursive networks. With this new siting comes the analogy of mapping which is certainly a tendency towards the anthropological. What is emerging is a kind of visual anthropology – an ethnography. Art has moved into the realm of what anthropology is thought to examine.

It is extremely useful to conceptualise the space of encounter within visual culture as the field, our engagement within this space as fieldwork. Within the confines of the field one can define the relationalities at hand. Artists advance the idea of site as "predominantly an intertextually coordinated, multiply located, discursive field of operation"[26] and so it seems crucial at this stage to pick up upon the notion of a 'field'. For some time now there has been, to quite a large extent, some overlap between the disciplines of anthropology and the emergent field of visual culture. Indeed, Hal Foster has noted that anthropologists used to have 'artist envy' and this trend has more recently been reciprocated in the art world. Further, Foster has described in some depth the overlapping models that have dominated both anthropology and art theory, namely textual ideology that reconfigured the social as a cultural system and the model of context and identity that opposes this symbolic logic in its search for the referent.[27] (These models will be explored in more depth in chapter three.) Foster points out also the tendency in both practices to privilege alterity, interdisciplinarity and contextuality[28] which positions ethnography as such a good candidate through which to self-reflexively understand art and interpretation.

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[25] p. 192, Haraway, D. "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective" in Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (1991) Routledge, New York
[26] p. 159, Kwon, M. One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity, (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
[27] p. 182, Foster, H. "The Artist as Ethnographer," in The Return of the Real, (1996) MIT Press, London
[28] ibid.

Lucy Lippard in *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* posits a notion of place as one seen from the inside in her advocacy of place-bound identity. This seems again to be a return to the idea of authenticity and knowledge from "being there" [29] which is the essence of fieldwork itself. It is perhaps for this reason that art and theory and the shifting modes of site-specific practices are becoming increasingly driven by fieldwork. And yet the situation that we enter as theorists is possibly far more complex than we think. The field, as the anthropologist James Clifford presents it in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, is no longer a bounded entity but a series of travel encounters. When some of the first pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts in 1620 they were met with a native American named Squanto, who helped them through their first winter.[30] The pilgrims went out from their home base to an America which to them must have been considered as a cleared space, internally coherent, static and previously untrampled. Squanto, however, spoke good English as he had recently returned from Europe himself. This account has been adopted by anthropologists as the 'Squanto Effect'[31] and is used to illustrate culture's circulation and the instability and mobility of what was previously considered to be the static field. This, in turn, affects fieldwork which is largely considered now to be less a matter of localised dwelling and more a series of travel encounters. I use the term Squanto within the confines of this project to identify the cultural circulation of audiences, of artworks and importantly, the itinerancy of site itself.

It is naïve, however, to insist on a wholly literal notion of travel in ethnographic terms. It is perhaps more useful to think of inside–outside connections within the field of inquiry, recognising the powerful forces that may pass through this space of encounter, such as the media, armies and so on.[32] With this caution in mind though, I would like to define the travel at issue within this project in order to move on. The type of travel of interest to this project concerns the processes inherent in contemporary site-specific projects and interconnected sites and subjectivities that together establish a new site or work. To a lesser extent it also refers to the movement of meaning from the work's medium to its ambient space, from the material conditions of a space to institutional critique and then to discursive networks during the course of its evolution. Of course, this project is also concerned with 'literal' travel as artworks move and are re-encountered and contemporary spaces of representation are drawn out spatially and temporally, such as Documenta11.

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[29] p. 72, Amit, V. Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World, (2000) Routledge, London
[30] p. 18, Clifford, J. Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997) Harvard University Press
[31] ibid.
[32] p. 28, ibid.

What emerges is a multi-sited, itinerant field in which our engagements with sites and with works are nomadic. Quite aside from the more obvious traversal of borders in work such as Christian Philipp Müller's *Illegal Border Crossing between Austria and Czechoslovakia* (1993) *(fig. 2.2)* in which site is advanced as a multiply-located entity, what is more interesting is the discursive vector which site has taken; the agglomeration of photographs and postcards that Müller mailed from these liminal sites. The persuasiveness of this rhizomatic model of fieldwork is its propensity to make connections through translations across disparate discourses from site to site in an inter-connected, multidisciplinary framework. Renée Green's work *World Tour* (1993) exemplifies this mode of production. Installed at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and Dallas Museum of Art, the installation presented four projects produced for other institutions that had previously taken place over a three-year period. These included *Bequest* commissioned by the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts, *Import/Export Funk Office* exhibited at the Christian Nagel Gallery in Cologne and at the 1993 Whitney Biennial, *Mise en Scene* which was first shown in Clisson, France and *Idyll Pursuits*, produced in Caracas, Venezuela. The site becomes structured no longer spatially but intertextually, as a kind of itinerant narrative path that is forged by the artist. These articulations occur as actions across spaces as a kind of relay of meanings that are linked by the artist. This sequential tendency has its implications in identity formations, memory and politics but it is with meaning and interpretation that my interest resides.

Green's reinstallation in *World Tour* configures, through its agglomeration of previously disparate temporal and spatial elements, what Stefano Boeri has defined as 'local space'

> that spatial matrix system (that is, physical, mineral) that collects certain structural tendencies developed locally and that is activated every time transformative energy is directed on the territory [33]

I would like to suggest that this local dynamic may operate over an expanded site; a site within a relay of other sites that operate within the same logic. James Meyer has attempted to articulate the discursive vector that recent site-specific projects have followed as the "functional site," which he defines as not necessarily occupying a physical place (in stark contrast to Serra's monumental work,) but as

> a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and discursive filiations and the bodies that move between them (the artist's above all). It is an informational site, a locus of overlap of text, photographs

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[33] p. 52, Boeri, S. "Border Syndrome: Notes for a Research Program," in <u>Territories: Islands, Camps & Other States of Utopia</u>, (2003) KW – Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin

and video recordings, physical places and things…It is temporary; a movement; a chain of meanings devoid of a particular focus.[34]

One only needs to glance at the space of the artworld to see the relationalities and relays at play; the Whitechapel Gallery's *Early One Morning* (2002) exhibition that coincided with *Tra-la-la* at Tate Britain, both of which reactivated an Anthony Caro work entitled *Early One Morning* (1963)[35], and elements of Mike Nelson's latest work *Triple Bluff Canyon* (2004) nodding towards Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) from which Renee Green's *Partially Buried* (1996) also devolved its name. The relay of meanings and historical networks Meyer defines in opposition to the "literal site" which he presents as an actual location, a singular site, in which the artist's work is determined by the physical, actual constraints of its site of production. It is this literal site that artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s privileged and allowed to determine their work. In a slight sideways shift I would like to join Meyer's notion of the functional site with the recent ethnographic influence on site specificity's terms of production to think of site as a heterotopic[36] 'contact zone'.

The term 'contact' was borrowed from linguistics by anthropologists, where the term 'contact language' refers to improvised languages that develop among speakers of different native tongues.[37] I would like to loosen up the term a little further and put it to use in a cultural-critical sense to define the space of the encounter between an artistic production, artist and its audience in order to emphasis how subjects are constituted in relation to each other. As Julian Stallabrass has commented, familiar works and venues are made to rub up against each other and, in the resulting friction, alter one another.[38] The question remains though, with what violence does this 'contact' take place? (Something that subsequent chapters will be dealing with more explicitly.) The anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt defines the contact zone as

> social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each
> other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination

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[34] p. 21, Meyer, J. "The Functional Site," Documents 7, Fall 1996, Documents Magazine Inc. NYC

[35] Please refer also to the Mapping Project *Engagement of 'Early One Morning' exhibition* which may be found at www.hatcafe.co.uk under 'mapping project' link for a more in depth analysis of this particular functional site.

[36] Foucault (1998) presents the term 'heterotopic' to describe those spaces in which real sites engage together in contested or inverted form.

[37] p. 6, Meyer, J. "The Functional Site," Documents 7, Fall 1996, Documents Magazine Inc. NYC

[38] p. 15, Stallabrass, J. "Memories of Art Unseen," in Stallabrass, J., Van Mourik Broekman, P. & N. Ratnam, Locus Solus: Site, Identity, Technology in Contemporary Art (2000) Black Dog Publishing Ltd, London

– like colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.[39]

This 'clashing' of cultures as she describes foregrounds the interactive nature of the contact zone and this interaction inherently poses moral difficulties for those that enter this space. In his essay "The Artist as Ethnographer," Hal Foster scrutinises the tendency of contemporary site-specific art to manifest itself as collaborative, community interventions within public space. These assimilative, integrationist models of site-specific art run the risk of occupying a moral high ground as the artist, typically an 'outsider' (to the contact zone), engages the local community in the production of their (self) representation.[40] Most often funding from local authorities enables such collaborative activity to take place and tied-in with this is institutional authority which consciously or otherwise may permeate the work, sidestepping institutional critique despite efforts to the contrary. More importantly, however, is the unacknowledged authority of the artist who acts as the sited insider within the contact zone.

> As the artist stands *in* the identity of a sited community, he or she may be asked to stand *for* this identity, to represent it institutionally. In this case the artist is primitivized, indeed anthropologized, in turn: here is your community, the institution says in effect, embodied in your artist, now on display. [41]

Again, one can mark a shift in meaning within recent models of site specificity. The medium of translation becomes the artist who speaks on behalf of silent peoples and so it is that the *site* of the author, their positionality, becomes the primary vehicle of meaning and the site of conflict. In a roundtable discussion on Site Specificity[42] Helen Molesworth and Miwon Kwon discussed the implications of the deployment (whether consciously or not) of situated knowledges to community projects. The notion of subordination once again revealed itself. Kwon remarked on the appeal of the "marginal" community to artistic interventions to lend identity to places through their engagement with projects. And yet, in addition to this, the project's credibility is at stake when one considers the possibility of what Arjun Appadurai has termed "metonymic freezing"[43] whereby one facet of the informants' lives reductively comes to represent them in totality. In the same roundtable discussion, Molesworth countered that the possibility of a positioned outsider to the contact zone coming in and saying something useful or interesting is absolutely

[39] p. 4, Pratt, M.L. Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, (1992) Routledge, London
[40] p. 138, Foster, H. "The Artist as Ethnographer," in The Return of the Real, (1996) MIT Press, London
[41] p. 198, ibid.
[42] "On Site Specificity," in Documents 4-5 Spring 1994, pp. 11 – 22.
[43] p. 25, Clifford, J. Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997) Harvard University Press

valid. One begins to recognise that Lefebvre's 'illusion of transparency' carries enormous weight. Space is not transparent, is not innocent but populated with loaded obstacles. It is the recognition and translation of these obstacles as a situated viewer across the tumultuous fields or contact zones that this project is working towards.

And here is where I want to pick up from where Miwon Kwon left off in her work *One Place After Another: Site Specificity and Locational Identity*. Where does this mobile, itinerant fieldwork leave meaning and epistemologies? If Squanto is the emergent norm and site specificity is tending more and more towards this model then an investigation leaving site as the space between producers, communities and audiences requires a keen understanding of the dynamics of this network, this 'contact zone,' in order to illuminate the obstacles in this space and to identify a potential singularity of site and meaning within the space of the encounter.

Chapter 3

Rapport: The Dynamics of the Contact Zone

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER I DISCUSSED how site may be constituted as an intertextual, spatially and temporally fragmented, contingent relay of encounters, located in distinct places, though not privileging place. I understood the project of engaging with sites as a kind of cultural-critical fieldwork in which subjects are in motion and audiences are on the move and, turning to contemporary ethnography - which has enjoyed a critical affiliation with contemporary art theory for some time now -reconfigured the notion of site as 'contact zone'. This is not to undermine in any way the concept of site, as I lamented in the introduction, but to understand the internal logic of site within contemporary visual culture. What emerges from this employment of a multi-sited ethnography within a discourse of interpretation is not the layering of loaded perspectives on to the site or community, which equates to speaking on behalf of a community, rather this model enables a new object of study to surface as it is encountered in the contact zone.

What remains to be questioned is what the conditions for serious translations in contemporary visual culture may be, taking in to account Lefebvre's production of space? Where can one situate oneself in this translation? And with what force and loss of specificity might an encounter translate across borders? Indeed here, the very concept of a border needs to be visited. Borders mark out areas of seemingly internal coherence. The 'local space' as described by Boeri as a matrixial model, much akin to Meyer's 'functional site' that locates itself between cultures and across times, is itself contained as 'translocal'[44] space whose borders are not re-written but momentarily re-established through social activity. Whether it is the pristine space of the museum or gallery, the more far-flung biennial or an intervention outside, this network of sites, what ethnography identifies as the contact zone, must surely operate under its own logic, providing a critical frame. One might ask then where the need for translation arises within this seemingly coherent entity? The space of the nomadic site, the contact zone, is socially produced through its relationalities. It is therefore, in no way an innocent, transparent space that is free from the processes of translation. The contact zone is a malleable, contingent, unstable site because, in terms of fieldwork, it is a place of dwelling *and* travel. James Clifford has noted the problems of theorising the field;

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[44] The notion of 'translocal' space is one that has been imagined by Clifford (1997:6) and is concerned with tactics of translation and experiences of attachment.

ethnography (being there) has largely been separated from travel (getting there)[45] resulting in the critical erasure of the external forces that act upon the contact zone. Part of this project's concern is to re-establish the 'baggage' that is brought into the contact zone, marking the porosity of local space and the negotiation of translation where site is itself unstable.

Lefebvre's theorisation of space is similar to the thinking surrounding text. Lyotard's intervention in this area is crucial to an understanding of the dynamics in operation in the contact zone. The functional site that has emerged advances as a relay of encounters in which meanings may be defined in terms of their position within the discursive network by virtue of their opposition to other elements within this system. I would like here to complicate this comfortable relationality, such as that posited by Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, by introducing some resistance into the realm of interpretation through the notion of the figural; that is, the inability to uncover every element of meaning within an encountered object resulting in a kind of semantic crisis. How can one possibly begin to comprehend the situated, subjective energies that have been ploughed into the object and their relations to the unstable site?

Laura Marks describes the 'transnational, transitional object' that passes between cultures variously as 'fossil' or 'fetish.'[46] In both cases the object remains stubborn as the viewer works to strip through the various latent layers of potential meaning

> It is the self, not the object, that is in transition. The object remains the same although it takes on layers of meaning that later, as the subject acquires some new sort of subjecthood, dissolve away.[47]

This accumulated, psychic subjectivity is something that has been explored by Gabriel Orozco, most notably in his work *Yielding Stone* (1992) *(fig. 3.1)*, a plasticine ball weighing the same amount as the artist, that was rolled through the streets of New York City collecting impressions on its surface throughout its journey.[48] Upon its reception in a gallery the work accumulated further impressions from its audience - at the most tangible level - their fingerprints. Through this palimpsest of marks and indents emerges once again a multitude of subjectivities in which the audience may have recognised their own

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[45] p. 23, Clifford, J. Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997) Harvard University Press

[46] Marks suggests that 'fossils' retain the shape of their cultural upheaval and therefore invite the viewer to decode their previous histories whereas 'fetishes' tend to vanish after the need for them has gone although they contain no less meaning.

[47] p. 123, Marks, L.U. "The Memory of Things," in The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and Senses (2000) Duke University Press

[48] p. 78, Morgan, J. "Circles in the Sand," in Art Review December/January 2004, ArtReview Ltd, London

prints or have access to the historical specificities, the geographical, physical and planned journey of *Yielding Stone* to be able to read overwritten pits and dents. Because we are dealing with the semantic dynamics of space, it seems fitting to adhere to Lefebvre's critical concept of spatialisation. In keeping with his work, I wish to posit two distinctions concerning meaning and interpretation within the frame of the site-specific. The first concerns the *psychic subjectivities*, the second the *material conditions* of the work. It is these entities that clash and momentarily redefine the space of the encounter.

How many could understand the subjective conceptualisation of Robert Smithson's site for the *Spiral Jetty*?

> My dialectics of site and nonsite whirled into an indeterminate state, where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other. It was as if the mainland oscillated with waves and pulsations, and the lake became the edge of the sun, a boiling curve, an explosion rising into a fiery prominence. Matter collapsing into the lake mirrored into the shape of a spiral. No sense wondering about classifications and categories, there were none.[49]

Smithson's experience of selecting his site seems more to be one of synaesthesia than of great historical import. The work was born out of a subjective engagement with the site, a geological understanding of the site and a moment of overwhelming personal affinity with the site. At this point, where truth claims relating to intended meaning appear to be largely unrecoverable, I would like to revisit the enduring, persistent re-articulation of what was originally Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) *(cover illustration)*. Smithson's work, in which earth was piled on to an abandoned woodshed until its main roof beam caved in, was located at Kent State University, Ohio. Just months after the work's installation, Kent State became recognised for the National Guard shooting of four student protesters and the work took on the status of a kind of inadvertent memorial. Years on Renée Green has reactivated the history of the site through her work *Partially Buried* (1996), an archive-like installation incorporating period furniture, historical objects, books and photographs, plotting a relationality between the Kent State shootings, Smithson's work and the author James Michener who wrote a book called *Kent State*. The subjective relationalities set up within this 'functional' installation resurrect histories in the present, yet remaining rooted in the site of Smithson's work. More recently, Mike Nelson has made reference to Smithson's 1970 work in his installation *Triple Bluff Canyon* (2004). Not intended as a homage to the artist, Nelson decided to rebuild *Partially Buried Woodshed* having seen an image of the work on a magazine cover which appeared to Nelson, to be somewhat distanced from

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[49] p. 532, Smithson, R. "The Spiral Jetty," (1972) in Stiles, K. & P. Selz, (eds.) <u>Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings</u> (1996) University of California Press, Berkeley

reality. Nelson's work consists of a plethora of subjective references, including JG Ballard's *The Crystal World* that he revisits in the knowledge that this was a seminal text for Smithson.[50] Like Orozco's *Yielding Stone*, Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* has accumulated many layers of histories and references, as have the works that point back to it. How retrievable are these subjective relationalities when the constituent pressures and histories of the contact zone are temporally and spatially fragmented?

In chapter two I described the notion of contact as the encounter with the other that, in linguistic terms, partially undoes the linguistic structure that is encountered by all parties concerned though to varying extents. We must understand then, that through a process of 'transculturation'[51] something becomes 'undone' or conceptually internally fragmented when an encounter is made in the contact zone. This transculturation is a manifestation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialisation and so one must question with what loss of specificity this translation takes place? A recent television commercial for a 'local' bank has highlighted some of the more seemingly concrete specificities that may be attached to a site. Taking one gesture as its constant it travels the globe using the "a-ok" gesture 'out in the field,' noting the extreme differences in meaning as the gesture is encountered locally. Such variations in interpretation, from meaning 'all is OK' to something more profane, point towards some relationality between the gesture, which itself remains constant, and other subjective entities. Within the varying space of the encounter, some projections have been made on to the gesture. Even HSBC does not underestimate the importance of local knowledge.[52] On the other side, however, there is that which maintains a familiarity even as it does traverse borders. In a brief but insightful article, Marc Augé labours as an ethnographer, in the field of Disneyland

> This is undoubtedly one's first enjoyment of Disneyland: the spectacle on offer exactly matched our expectations of it. No surprise whatsoever: just like MoMA in New York, where one cannot get over just how much original artworks look like their reproductions…
> …why were so many American families strolling up and down the park when they had, quite obviously, already visited its American counterpart? Well, precisely because these families could recognise here that which they already knew. They could abandon themselves to the pleasures of verification, the joy of recognition, not unlike those overly bold tourists who, lost at the other end of an exotic world, soon tire of the local colour and only seek to relocate and

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[50] p. 4, Bickers, P. "Triple Bluff," in <u>Art Monthly</u> No. 278, July - August 2004, Britannia Art Publications Ltd, London

[51] This ethnographic term is used to describe how subordinated groups select the materials that are transmitted to them by the dominant culture (within the contact zone). For whilst the emanation of this material cannot be controlled in can be absorbed by varying extents. (Pratt 1992: 6)

[52] Slogan taken from HSBC Bank commercial, running in Summer 2004.

> familiarise themselves in the sparkling anonymity of the closest supermarket:
> all supermarkets are alike.[53]

This familiarity gestures towards some radical specificity or singularity in which the global experience of the theme park translates across borders. Of course, the saccharine space and aesthetic is not an ideal example but once again questions what this singularity might be that resists a loss of specificity through travel.

In the case of site-specific art does the artist decide that the work makes optimum sense in one specific psychic or geographic location or does the object become so dense with accumulated meaning, so fossilised that it comes to rest in one place for a longer period of time? Site-specific art should ordinarily champion the immobile object that does not contain autonomous meaning and that becomes redundant with a change of location. This is certainly true of early site-specific works. Contemporary site specificity seems to espouse mobility. At the end of chapter one I noted that elements of *Bowville* had travelled to San Francisco and Slovenia. The connections and relationalities within a project define the argument the project presents. *Bowville* consists of some singularity that has the ability to cross borders and reactivate local histories.

Bowville's extraordinary ability to elicit complex histories and experiences from the local community through dialogue with the artist and the performers was in part due to its enduring topicality, partly its extended presence on the site of Bow, to some extent its reactivation of local histories and a continuation of past projects in the same contact zone but primarily due to an increasing sense of community through 'labour in the field'. One could easily displace the notion of 'site' within the confines of this project for an intervention that tended towards 'community-specific,' 'issue-specific,' 'audience-specific' and was indeed all of these things and countless others but such easy dismissals would undermine the enormously complex issue at hand which is that the site is the interrelation of all of these. *Bowville*'s reactivation of local histories associated with the suffragette movement, its relation to current topics surrounding diaspora, surveillance and territories and the subsequent real-time involvement of the community that added a further layer of interpretation, all produced a functional site that elicited individual histories. The respondent's reactions varied over the duration of the project from "it's not Bow*ville*, it's Bow; you're going to have to understand that if you want to stay here" to the uncovering of one Muslim man's story of his migration from New York to the East End of London and his accounts of the local community's projection of the notion of 'Muslim' onto him during the current climate of terror and fear. The project's strength

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[53] p. 184, Augé, M. "An Ethnologist in Disneyland," in Coles, A. (ed.) <u>Site Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn</u> Vol. 4., (2000) Black Dog Publishing, London

was located in its articulation of the clashing of psychic subjectivities and material conditions without occupying a moral high ground.

It starts to unfold that this investigation into meaning and interpretation privileges Derrida's concept of *différance*. The clashing of these entities; the psychic subjectivities and material conditions, is the product of a set of relations that themselves vary momentarily within the contact zone. Evading the binary oppositions of truth and falsity, the concept of *différance* permits a relational understanding of interpretation and meaning. Derrida argues that meaning is endlessly deferred, that the sign itself marks the position of difference

> The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign…The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence.[54]

There exists only a relation of difference between the sign and the signified and only in this way can signification exist. In the space in-between are located psychic subjectivities and material conditions. I would like to think of the coexistence of these elements within space in terms of Lyotard's *blocking together*.[55] Whilst remaining distinct, these two entities occupy the same space, are superimposed, yet without privilege. I would argue however, that there is enormous friction, that they do both clash but that this is somehow a process of negotiation on the part of the of the 'author' and the spectator; we are not witnessing the death of the author nor her reincarnation but a negotiation between the two incorporating a space in between that is populated with loaded obstacles. And so it is that I arrive at my final proposition. In a move on from Roland Barthes extremely influential essay "The Death of the Author"[56] in which he proposes that the audience completes the artwork, bringing with them subjective histories and knowledges to the encounter, I would propose that the dynamic at hand within the contact zone is one termed by ethnographers as 'rapport.' Clifford in his work *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century* defines rapport as

> extended co-residence, systematic observation and recording of data, effective interlocution in at least one local language, a specific mix of alliance, complicity, friendship, respect, coercion, and ironic toleration.[57]

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[54] Derrida, J. Of Grammatology (1974) The John Hopkins University Press, Maryland
[55] p. 25, Readings, B. Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics (1991) Routledge, London
[56] pp. 142 –154, Barthes, R. Image Music Text, (1977) Fontana Press, London
[57] p. 71, Clifford, J. Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997) Harvard University Press

This move, I hope, permits a more contextual model of site specificity with an emphasis on the *negotiation* of meanings and identities and interventions where site is the relational negotiation of 'subjects in difference.'[58] Theorising site specificity as a rapport model allows the reintroduction of the means of transport; allows the situatedness of the encounter to emerge within the contact zone. Meaning itself accrues with new contexts, it gathers layers, it is contingent. If this were the only variable within the site of encounter it would still require negotiation but, like Squanto, all elements of this relationship; between site, material conditions, psychic subjectivities, audiences and artists are contingent and despite their occupation within the local space of what may be termed as the art world, absolutely require translation through negotiation. Indeed, as the theorist Suzanne Lacy has noted

> what exists is the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may *itself* be the artwork. [59]

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[58] ibid.

[59] Suzanne Lacy, quoted in p. 105, Kwon, M. <u>One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity</u> (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Conclusion

THROUGHOUT THIS PROJECT I HAVE linked contemporary ethnographic praxis to the set of critical attitudes associated with today's site specificity in order to discern the architecture of interpretation within and across sites of flux. The space of the encounter is itself volatile and no part of the dynamic is stable; mobilised audiences visit expanded, functional sites in which objects, dense with fossilised meaning travel, alter the ambient space in which they come to rest, if only briefly, before moving on. One can only glimpse the signs that present themselves to us before they change or we bring some new psychic dynamic to them. We can no longer suppose that knowledge moves seamlessly across borders. The deployment of a rapport model in thinking site specificity foregrounds the relational negotiations that take place within the contact zone, insists on the multiple inhabitations of these spaces through psychic subjectivities and material conditions and in so doing goes some way to articulate différance.

In a world of mobility where Squanto is the emergent norm where does meaning locate itself within this flux? Lyotard's concept of *blocking together* permits the coexistence of the psychic subjectivities and material conditions that compete within space, that account for local knowledges and accumulated histories. The flow of knowledge and ideas across borders and its subsequent translation is not a fluid process because, just as Lefebvrian space is loaded with obstacles, the production of knowledge must negotiate this tangled subjectivity too. The concept of rapport foregrounds this negotiation but recognises that meaning itself is contingent.

Through this project's excavation of site specificity a clearer picture begins to develop as to how site might be disrupted. *Tilted Arc*'s ejection from its ambient space marked the death of the work itself and many would argue that site-specific work post-*Tilted Arc* betrays the principles upon which the practice was founded. The community that opposed the presence of *Tilted Arc* characterised the work as an assertion of a private agenda on public space. It would seem then that the siting of the author is what causes contention within the space of the encounter. Indeed, Serra's exploration of the potentiality of site specificity's critical function reiterated once again the negotiations that occur within the contact zone

> Unlike modernist works that give the illusion of being autonomous from their surroundings, and which function critically only in relation to the language of their own medium, site-specific works emphasise the comparison between

two separate languages and can therefore use the language of one to criticise the other. [60]

In the same way that contact languages result in some deterritorialisation, the critical languages at play within the contact zone require negotiation. Serra had effectively 'hijacked' what had previously been considered as 'invisible space'[61] so that *Tilted Arc* came to represent a symbol of imposition on the daily lives of the people within its contact zone. Its later removal was tantamount to the reterritorialisation of public space. Meyer, in his definition of the functional site, makes claims for its temporary nature. The stubborn, monumental work that *Tilted Arc* came to represent, clashed with the very site for which it was produced, unable to accommodate the enduring, fixed logic behind which the work was conceived. *Bowville* on the other hand, built up a presence over time in a singular event to set forth a proposition to the community that could not be described as collaboration and could therefore not deterritorialise its audience. Through this rapport the community found a space from which to speak that did not involve the artist speaking on their behalf and a multitude of subjectivities were uncovered.

This project has been one that tries to articulate the dynamics of meaning through the evolving notion of site. Perhaps then, I am positing the formation of meaning as a rapport model, as the momentary negotiation between subjects. But what are the implications of thinking site specificity as a rapport model? Does site specificity betray its earlier aspirations to immobility when operating within the functional site and advocating nomadism? Can site specificity retain its potency? The process of multi-sited, or what I would like to term 'functional' interpretation in the age of Squanto, is not a controlled process of comparison that operates across a linear spatial plane. Rather, relationalities emerge from contact with what is essentially a mobile, multiply-situated object of study as these are integral to it. The sense of a 'porous reality'[62] that surfaces from tangled histories, psychic subjectivities and dislocated sites threatens the semantic link between content and site. Thinking of site specificity as a rapport model helps to mark this semantic slippage until, retaining its original force, site re-emerges as the relational negotiation of "subjects in difference".[63]

This project has been an attempt to articulate the dynamics between the sign and what is signified. We are not, finally, dealing with a crisis of site but a crisis of the structures of

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[60] Serra quoted in p. 75, Kwon, M. <u>One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity</u> (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
[61] The 'hijacking of invisible space' was a term used by Amelia Jones in her talk "Postmodern Flâneurs" at Goldsmiths College, University of London, 15 January 2004.
[62] p. 122, Wallis, B. "Excavating the 70s," <u>Art In America</u> Vol. 85, September 1997
[63] p. 81, Clifford, J. <u>Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century</u> (1997) Harvard University Press

meaning and interpretation as they organise themselves in relation to site. The deterritorialisation of site engenders multiple meanings that, through site's itinerancy, become continuously created and dismantled. The task of interpretation is therefore to articulate difference and as such will always remain to varying extents, partially buried.

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