

'Places between': three tactics in critical spatial arts.

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Despite current enthusiasm for interdisciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity and collaboration in art and architecture, I argue that there is still a deep-seated anxiety concerning the edges and crossing-points of disciplines. This anxiety is expressed through a tendency to make separations between different disciplines rather than connections. Making connections is necessarily a difficult business because it demands a questioning of terminologies and methodologies normally taken for granted, and a willingness to let go and to allow transformation. . .

Theoretical debates concerning urban culture have reformulated the ways in which we might understand the anxieties around the boundaries of disciplines as well as the potential places in which connections might be made. From cultural geography, for example, we have the notion of the 'socio-spatial dialectic' which suggests an inter-active relation between people and places, allowing us to consider the city as multiple sites of desire and flux. From feminist theory, we can understand the 'internal' space of individual subjectivity and the 'external' space of the urban realm to be a series of overlapping and intersecting boundaries and thresholds between private and public, inner and outer, subject and object, the personal and the social.

It is at these thresholds that many of the current debates about public art practice are located. On the one hand, often considered to focus on their own 'private' worlds and the personal interests, artists who work in public spaces are often thought of as self-indulgent and arrogant. On the other hand, art works that attempt to relate to the 'public' as a particular social group or number of individuals who identify with one another, have often been criticised as simplistic and patronising. These kinds of ambivalent attitudes that respond to the placing of 'private' art outside the gallery in 'public' urban sites, raise important questions about the definitions, inter-relations and boundaries of the term public art.

The paper goes on to look at three modes of contemporary critical public art that help us to explore places between spatial theory and practice and between public and private. These are:

1. walking 'as if'

Recent work in feminism, cultural studies and human geography, is highly spatialised, with words such as 'mapping', 'locating', 'situating', 'positioning' and 'boundaries' appearing frequently. Positionality in these cases provides a way of understanding knowledge and essence as contingent and strategic – *where* I am makes a difference to what I can know and who I can be. For Rosi Braidotti, the nomadic subject describes an epistemological condition, a kind of knowingness or unknowingness that refuses fixity, that allows us to think between, or to think 'as if'. An emerging way of dealing with the complex relationship between space and subjectivity in terms of the fleetingness of travel, or 'gaps' in knowing, is the artist's walk. Walking exposes the audience to series of encounters with differing aspects of place, focusing

on the journey between particular sites as much as the places themselves. Knowing when walking makes manifest the ever-changing and transitory nature of our personal viewpoints in public space. This paper looks at Marysia Lewandowska's 'Detour' walk (Paddington, London, 1999) for the Public Art Development Trust as one such mode for rethinking our relationship with 'site'.

2. spatial dialectics

In *One-Way Street*, Walter Benjamin played on the juxtaposition of sub-title and content in each of his prose pieces, using the sub-titles to bring to life hidden meanings in the text. In art/architectural practice working dialectically can mean transforming places through the addition or subtraction of texts, sounds, light, objects. Such juxtapositions create spatial constructions which can reveal existing social relationships and histories in new ways, allowing audiences to respond dialectically with a public space, to re-think familiar terrain from a different perspective. This paper looks at poet Mario Petrucci's text-based installations in the Imperial War Museum, London as one such text-based critical intervention.

3. animate objects

For Luce Irigaray, the potential of inserting the word 'to' into the well-known phrase 'i love you' making 'I love to you' suggests a new social order of relations between two different sexes. This new ordering might also provide a new way of considering how certain objects can transform the power dynamics of the relationships made between the makers and the users of art, architecture and public space. Focusing on how relationships are made between makers and users can constitute a major part of the conceptualisation and realisation of an art project, providing its aesthetic and formal value. This may tend towards the choreographic, where the work is manifest less as a final object and more as an event, a social sculpture, or series of relationships or exchange that individuals make 'to' one another. Such working methods necessitate engaged and committed contact with others, they present opportunities for questioning one's own ways of thinking and making. This paper looks at the benches produced by art-architecture collaborative practice muf in the UK in this context.