Audiencing artscapes:
Encounters between art and audience at Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Saskia Warren

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Department of Geography
University of Sheffield
Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which the meanings of site art are inscribed by different audiences and their spatially contingent processes of audiencing. Theoretically and empirically it suggests the importance of the verb ‘audiencing’ over the static noun ‘audience’ to activate the dynamic processes involved in the production of art’s meaning. The thesis is based upon qualitative research undertaken over one year spent at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, West Yorkshire. It tailors archival, ethnographic and visual methodologies to address how examples of site art within their spatial context are audienced from a range of roles and positionalities. Audiencing is shown to occur non-linearly, with meaning inscribed variously during the processes of making, installation and exhibiting. Each chapter explores different facets of the relationship between site, art and audience, tracing the histories, discourses and situated knowledges that shape the meanings of the sculpture park and its art. Overall the thesis develops understandings of the geographies of art, suggesting how memory, environmental history and situated knowledges are essential to the embodied dimensions of interpreting site art, and exploring the ways in which audiences have read, produced and practiced the local landscape in differently scaled geographical contexts. This project also considers the ways in which the public can be convened and formed in different spaces, using the sculpture park as a case study to develop critical discussion on non-urban site art and non-urban public space. Together the chapters offer new methodological and analytic approaches to framing the cultural and social meaning of art. Mixed qualitative methods are adopted to explore the in-depth, complex meanings of site art within a range of peoples’ lives, revealing the creativity, relational geography and site specificity that lie at the heart of arts’ audiencing.
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