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Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance

A recent preoccupation with space and place has drawn together theorists and workers in a wide range of disciplines, including human geographers, archaeologists, architects, cartographers, psychoanalysts, sociologists, poets, novelists—and theatre practitioners. There are therefore a range of lenses, a range of vocabularies, through which site-specific theatre and performance can be considered. In this article, Cathy Turner focuses on Mike Pearson’s descriptions of site-specific work, particularly his involvement with archaeology, before proposing that we might find a useful, complementary vocabulary within psychoanalytic theories of object relations. She refers to performances by Lone Twin and to her own work with site-specific company Wrights & Sites, who created An Exeter Mis-Guide and A Courtauld Mis-Guide in 2003. Cathy Turner has produced a number of site-specific ‘mis-guided walks’, tours, and performances in her work with Wrights & Sites since 1998. She recently completed a Research Fellowship at Exeter University, investigating writing processes in contemporary performance, including site-specific work. She is now a Teaching Fellow at Exeter University and an Associate Lecturer at Dartington College of Arts.

Yes, I feel different. I feel I am becoming something else altogether. I am becoming a new field, a new forest and a new town.¹

FEW WOULD NOW dispute that space is produced not only by architects, urban planners, cartographers, and so on, but by the ways in which it is reconstituted or transformed by ‘the practice of everyday life’, the experiences and actions of subjects moving through it. Theorists of practice now emphasize subjective and inter-subjective experience of space. Michel de Certeau, for example, makes a distinction between ‘space’ and ‘place’, defining space as ‘a practised place’.² That is, space is created by the ways in which place is moved through.

Use of the terms ‘place’ and ‘space’ lacks absolute consistency within theoretical discourse.³ However, according to de Certeau’s definition, place is an ordering system,⁴ a set of material conditions which propose a ‘proper’ use. Space is produced by the ways in which place is used, and may articulate the ‘proper’ in various ways, or may transgress its implicit rules. De Certeau adds that, ‘In relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken.’⁵ Each occupation, or traversal, or transgression of space offers a reinterpretation of it, even a rewriting. Thus space is often envisaged as an aggregation of layered writings—a palimpsest.

The ‘Host’ and the ‘Ghost’

Some site-specific performance practitioners have similarly come to view space as a layered entity, and their occupations of it as a form of interpretive spatial practice. With reference to their work as directors of Welsh performance company Brith Gof, Mike Pearson and Cliff McLucas have used the terms ‘host’ and ‘ghost’ to distinguish between the site itself and the ephemeral architectures that may be built within it:

I began to use the term ‘the host and the ghost’ to describe the relationship between place and event. The host site is haunted for a time by a ghost that the theatre-makers create. Like all ghosts it is transparent and the host can be seen
through the ghost. Add into this a third term – the witness, i.e., the audience – and we have a kind of trinity that constitutes the work.6 (McLucas)

Site may allow the construction of a new architecture, the ‘ghost’ within the ‘host’. Host and ghost, of different origins, are co-existent but, crucially, are not congruent. The performance remains transparent. . . . Site-specific performances rely upon the complex superimposition and co-existence of a number of narratives and architectures, historical and contemporary. These fall into two groups: those that pre-exist the work – of the host – and those which are of the work – of the ghost.7 (Pearson)

The ‘ghost’ of the superimposed structure occupies the ‘host’ site. Here, Pearson and McLucas are referring primarily to scenographic structures within performances such as Tri Bywyd (1995), where, at the ruined farmhouse Esgair Fraith, other sites are superimposed onto the space, as physical architectures (scaffolding structures). However, both Pearson’s and McLucas’s use of the term ‘ghost’ also seems to encompass those events, narratives, and performances arising from these structures and the spaces they represent.

Meanwhile, the ‘host’ comprises not only the ordering vocabulary of place but the resonances of its former articulations. The ‘host’ is already the layered ‘space’ formed by lived experience, so that the givens of site-specific performance comprise not only the machinery of ‘place’, but also the patina it has acquired with past use.

Thus, at least two frames of reference co-exist within the performance, each with its own narratives and histories. Both Pearson and McLucas emphasize that every site is always a space still in process, whose meaning is never complete. The ‘ghost’ within the ‘host’ is a catalyst to that process. The work’s structures, in tension with those offered by the site, produce, through performance, a new version of what Lefebvre terms ‘lived space’, a contemporary spatial practice. As Pearson writes:

We might envisage performance . . . which is aware of its nature as a contemporary act, as the latest occupation of a place where previous occupations are still apparent and cognitively active, the friction of what is of the place and what is brought to the place.8

The event of the performance is seen as the rewriting of space through a new occupation of site in tension with what precedes it. The ‘host’, including its other previous and current occupations, can offer resistance to this rewriting. It remains distinct from the ‘ghost’ and cannot be ultimately identified with it. Indeed, the ‘ghost’ is transgressive, defamiliarizing, and incoherent.

Who Haunts Whom?

The image of the ‘ghost’ that haunts the site seems interestingly recurrent in site-specific performance. And whether the site haunts the work or vice versa often seems intriguingly unclear. For example, in several of Geraldine Pilgrim’s recent large-scale works, including Spa at the Elizabeth Barrett Anderson Hospital (2003), audience members are told of a ‘ghost’, or ‘ghosts’, whom they soon encounter. In texts describing works in two disused hotels, Pilgrim concludes both her accounts by asserting that, through the work, the building has ‘come back to life’.9 More ambiguously, my colleague Phil Smith created a ghost figure for Wrights & Sites’s journey along Exeter Canal, Pilot: Navigation (1998) – her white robes, covered in text, suggest, once again, the palimpsest of the site, evoked or activated (or faked) through the ‘medium’ of the work.

This question as to whether the site haunts the work or vice versa could seem naïve (for, in one sense, clearly the work fakes its own ‘ghosts’), but it could also begin to point to reasons why the distinction between what is ‘of’ the site and what is brought ‘to’ it sometimes disintegrates within the performance process and event: place and work may be co-creative.

For Brith Gof, however, creating a deliberate disjunction between site and work has proved a fruitful methodology. To some extent, this distinction has reflected the position of the English immigrant in Wales: the careful distinction between what is ‘of’ the place and what is brought ‘to’ it has been
politically important. By choosing deliberately clashing narratives and images, Brith Gof have often drawn attention to the disparity of ‘host’ and ‘ghost’ Spectacular site-specific performances such as Gododdin (1988), not only create new architectures within an existing space, but draw on an epic mix of industrial, mythic, historical, and contemporary elements, creating a discordant multitrack composition, a layered response to the narratives of site.

Nevertheless, Pearson admits that sometimes those in Brith Gof who were English by birth may have identified sites of national tension as significant, partly because they discovered themselves within these places.\(^{10}\) What one is best able to find in a site are, perhaps, those elements that can be recognized as one’s own. The performance is not entirely ‘transparent.’

In his documentation of Tri Bywyd within Kaye’s Site-Specific Art, McLucas suggests that the work takes place between the various strands of storytelling, the various architectures.\(^{11}\) Meaning emerges in the spaces created by the interpenetrating structures of ‘host’ and ‘ghost’. Nick Kaye suggests that a work such as Tri Bywyd upsets the boundaries between performance and site, quoting McLucas: ‘A place and what is built there bleed into one another.’\(^{12}\)

Perhaps this is another way of beginning to wonder, ‘Who haunts whom?’ However transgressive the relationship between work and site, the theatrical space of play implicates each with the other, revealing each in juxtaposition to the other.

**Theatre/Archaeology**

Since leaving Brith Gof in 1997, Pearson’s own performance work has continued to develop. From the early 1990s, he and the archaeologist Michael Shanks have established a link between site-specific performance and archaeology that goes beyond analogy. Archaeology is posited as performative (an enactment of the past in the present) and site-specific performance is viewed as an archaeological investigation of place. **Theatre/Archaeology,** as with Pearson’s earlier formulations of site-specific work, suggests a palimpsest-like layering of ‘host’ and ‘ghost’ spaces, but it is more complex and developed in its description of their involvement with one another.

In Theatre/Archaeology, Shanks states that archaeology is concerned with ‘the things left of the past translated through the cultural and political interests of the present’.\(^{13}\) Since site is always a material trace of past events, all site work is potentially archaeological. However, ‘interpretive archaeology’ goes further in suggesting that the ways in which we interpret and order this past is an inseparable part of archaeological enquiry.

Julian Thomas writes, ‘What we have to consider in archaeology is the way in which human beings, in their concernful dealing with the world, come to restructure their symbolic orders through a process of encounter and forgetting played across time.’\(^{14}\) Since being-in-the-world includes a sense of the past, there is an archaeological component within everyday life: ‘a melancholic aspect of our social fabric’.\(^{15}\) Lefebvre confirms this view: ‘The past leaves its traces. Time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a present space. . . . Thus, production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas.’\(^{16}\)

Pearson trained as an archaeologist, therefore his use of ‘archaeological rhetoric is more than metaphorical. Much of Pearson’s and Shanks’s writing clarifies the usefulness of performance as an aspect of archaeological method. However, what does archaeology offer performance? We can find a number of suggestions within Pearson’s work.

Besides the hybrid form, ‘theatre/archaeology’. Pearson is also interested in the archaeology of performance – the documents and traces of the live event. Much could be written about this aspect of his work and there is not space to do it justice here. However, a number of his productions (several with Mike Brookes) have been engaged with the assemblage of documentation as part of the performance. For instance, in Polis (2001), different sections of the audience see and document different events, scattered through
Cardiff. An overview of the performance is only possible through an imaginative interpretation of the documentary material (videos, polaroids) at Chapter Arts Centre.

This documentation is a ‘non-site’ in Robert Smithson’s sense of the word. His ‘Non-Sites’ of 1968 present mapped information and undifferentiated objects collected at outdoor sites: they draw attention to the absence of site in their failure fully to present it. On the other hand, in this and some of Pearson’s other works (Carrying Lyn, 2001; The First Five Miles, 1998) the performance is only fractionally ahead of its documentation or mediation, and the possibility of witnessing it is very real. The work plays between presence and absence as the live performance constantly disappears into the non-site of memory, media, and archive.

In both Polis and Carrying Lyn, the live performance finally enters the space of documentation, compressing the live and the mediated event into a single space and moment. And in another sense these two works highlight the space of documentation as a performance space, since the presentation and interpretation of documentation itself becomes a performance event. They trouble the distinction between presence and absence, the record and the live event, in a way that usefully speaks to current debates surrounding performance and the ways of archiving its traces.

I have previously mentioned the layered narratives of Pearson’s work with Brith Gof. Pearson’s perception of a layered space continues and could be related to the notion of a dispersed space. The First Five Miles thus takes place on a hillside and on the airwaves simultaneously, witnessed by those few who walk with Pearson on the hillside, those who listen at home, and those who position themselves in between, on the hillside in parked cars, with the radio on. The radio programme offers the audience the choice of prioritizing either the English or the Welsh language, by turning the balance to one or other speaker. In each case, the other language is audible in the background, another sonic layer.

Bubbling Tom (2001) is a performance in which Pearson leads the audience on a tour of scenes from his early childhood. Fiona Wilkie has written about the way that layered narratives emerge as the audience members insert their own memories into the narration:

The comments of the audience created a textual layer of the performance. . . . It is through the spaces and gaps of the performance that Bubbling Tom allows different forms of memory to co-exist and engages the memories of its spectators.

In his work since Brith Gof, Pearson has often produced works that move through space rather than occupying enclosed performance arenas. This might reflect the sensitivity that hesitates to appropriate space, making a distinction between what is ‘of’ the place and what is brought ‘to’ it; but it also implies that the performance is a journey, not an object, and that site is encountered in process, rather than offering a secure location within which to set up camp.

To summarize, Pearson’s archaeological performance foregrounds the act of ‘reading’ both site and artwork, presenting layered perspectives rather than an authoritative viewpoint. There is an emphasis on how we construct an image of past events, including those of the performance itself. Pearson sometimes envisages his performance as generating a new kind of ‘case report’, providing forensic details of multiple narratives, poetic interpretation of fragmentary evidence, a reconstitution of space through its practice. Neither site nor performance is fixed or graspable, yet both seem to be glimpsed in passing.

A Vocabulary of Fracture and Absence?

Archaeology offers theatre a vocabulary of strata, fragments, ruins, narratives, traces, monuments, past, and absence. We can see in Pearson’s work that it is enormously suggestive and he has made fascinating uses of it. The company I work with, Wrights & Sites (comprising myself, Stephen Hodge, Simon Persighetti, and Phil Smith), have been influenced by Pearson’s involvement with archaeology, to the point of creating a performance
called *The Dig* in 2000 – but how far can we, who are not archaeologists, take the association? Does the rhetoric of archaeology bring its own histories with it, pulling back from the ‘new’ archaeological sensibility that is sought (and practised) by Pearson and Shanks? Are there parts of our practice the (for us) analogy with archaeology leaves unmapped?

Pearson offers a definition of archaeology as ‘a material practice set in the present which works on and with traces of the past. What archaeologists do is work with evidence in order to create something – a meaning, a narrative, a story – which stands for the past in the present.’

Does this emphasis on the past (albeit the past-in-the-present) mean that in the tension between presence and absence, archaeological performance will tend always to point towards what is absent, fragmented, lost, and displaced? Will it pull away from theatre’s (admittedly troubled) focus on the phenomenological experience of the present, or presence?

To what extent can the archaeologist confirm the embodied and playful experience of weather, contours, structures, vegetation, objects, other people in their ‘otherness’ from us, while still retaining a sufficiently objective awareness of what is guessed or known, unknown or unknowable?

Pearson and Shanks address these needs by proposing an integrated approach; while acknowledging its value, they also point out the potential pitfalls of Christopher Tilley’s phenomenological approaches to archaeology, suggesting that the subjective experience of space can be over-emphasized. They suggest that ‘walking the land with an eye to the experience can easily lapse into a “past-as-wished-for”,’ and they stress the need to ‘put a past onto the phenomenological experience of being present’.

They argue against a polarization of objectivity on the one hand and involvement on the other: ‘For Tilley, it sometimes seems we are to walk the ancient countryside in order to escape the constraints of social science.’ However, there may be times within performance, if not within archaeology, when present involvement requires a central focus.

**Aspects of Inter-Subjectivity**

And the inter-subjective? Are the metaphors taken from archaeological (and forensic) investigation (traces, evidence), the images of excavation (layering, strata, fragments), inevitably inclined to suggest narratives that are in some sense discrete, rather than shaped through inter-relationship and/or linked through historical cause and effect? (Any association with Foucault’s use of the term ‘archaeology’ would tend to reinforce an anti-genealogical view.)

Does the proviso that these layers are ‘folded’, that they inter-penetrate and ‘bleed into’ each other, go far enough to answer this concern?

Pearson and Shanks, for example, suggest that each of the parallel narratives in *Tri Byangd* was ‘seen through or in juxtaposition to the others, whilst never acknowledging each other’s existence’ (my italics).

And what about the significant exchanges that take place between those involved in the event? Even though we cannot represent the site, can we stand outside it, if we are each part of each other’s contexts?

To return to our starting point, does the prevalent image of the palimpsest or layered space sufficiently acknowledge inter-subjectivity? And doesn’t it rather suggest that the subject (or artist) is outside space, inscribing it, or deciphering the layers?

I am reminded, at this point, of Pile and Thrift’s critique of Probyn’s image of the self as ‘a combination of acetate transparencies: layers and layers of lines and directions that are figured together and in depth, only then to be rearranged’.

Problems lie in the seeming stability, transparency and autonomy of each layer of the self – and a self seems to stand outside the layers choosing the arrangement of the layers. . . . Other metaphors will need to be found, other maps need to be drawn, which are more capable of elucidating the fixity and fluidity, the ambivalence and ambiguity, the transparency and opacity and the surface and depth of the mapped subject.

Similar problems apply both to the composition of site and to the positioning of the self with regard to it.
There are elements within Pearson’s performances that go some way to answering these concerns and illustrating his ‘integrated approach’: both social interaction between audience members and phenomenological experience of site are considered elements in some of his work, though they are not usually its central focus.

Pearson and Shanks, despite their reservations, quote Tilley with apparent approval:23 ‘To be human is both to create this distance between the self and that which is beyond and to attempt to bridge this distance through a variety of means.’ If archaeology is seen as one perspective on this human project, then it excludes very little. On the other hand, there may be times when it is useful to seek another vocabulary, to enlist another range of emphases. The following present useful alternatives:

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

**Potential Space**

From my first involvement with site-specific work, I have found it useful to refer to psychoanalytic theories of object relations, as developed by psychoanalysts such as D. W. Winnicott and Melanie Klein, and others, such as Marion Milner, whose *On Not Being Able to Paint*24 is particularly interesting.

By referring to this body of work, one need not return to notions of either site or self as fixed or finite entities. One need not imply an unproblematic notion of a located self, or a resolution of the tension between conceptual and ‘real’ sites. One need not make an absolute distinction between material and human objects. Nor is there a need to consider this vocabulary as an opposing alternative to the archaeological approach to site-specific performance, but rather as complementary; and as offering, I believe, the useful set of emphases required above.

Winnicott suggests that creativity begins in the liminal area between mother and child, me and not-me, imaginary and ‘real’.25 A playspace, or ‘potential space’ (sometimes termed ‘intermediate space’, ‘third space’, or ‘transitional space’) is first realized as the child gradually separates from the mother, just at the point where the child begins to establish the boundaries of its own subjectivity.

This space belongs neither to mother nor to child, but to both simultaneously. It separates them, but it also connects them. It is both a physical space, the environment of the child’s play, and, simultaneously, a metaphor for the relationship of mother and child. The child’s physical space cannot be a ‘potential space’ without the bond between them; on the other hand, the ‘potential space’ is established in three dimensions, through their physical separation, yet nearness.

It is a paradoxical space: objects and identities are both separate and merged, simultaneously. Within this space, it is agreed that one will never ask whether an object or other element is found there, or is created by the child. *It is always both.* The distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds need not be made explicit. Yet through the gradual introduction of reality (small failures of the world – including mother – to correspond to infant demands) there is a partial working out of the relationship between what is ‘me’ and what is ‘not-me’. There is creative play between illusion (the magic of omnipotence) and disillusion (the failure of the outer to correspond to the inner imperatives).

This process is enabled by the mother’s ability to give the child a sense of being ‘held’ although without literally holding the child as in the initial stages of its development. The ‘potential space’ is founded upon a safe-enough context in which the child dares to explore the possible boundaries of a sense of self.

Winnicott suggests that the establishment of this ‘potential space’ in early childhood is crucial to the adult’s creativity. Since human
beings never complete the process of working out the relationship between what belongs to them and what to the outer world, there is a continuing need for a space of interplay between self and reality, where new relationships can be forged and where the necessary madness of childhood can be revisited. In these later years, it is in this ‘potential space’ between subject and object, inner and outer, imagination and reality, that cultural experience and all creativity can occur.
Frameworks for Illusion

Milner has described this space as a ‘frame’, which contains the area of accepted illusion.26 I remember my section of Wrights & Sites’s Pilot: Navigation, in which the audience held up empty frames and composed the sunset they saw . . .

Winnicott establishes the importance of the ‘transitional object’: the initial object – such as a soft toy or blanket – used by the child as a symbol of the union of the mother and the baby:

at the place in space and time where and when the mother is in the process of transition from being (in the baby’s mind) merged in with the infant and alternatively being experienced as an object to be perceived rather than conceived of. The use of an object symbolizes the union of two, now separate things, at the point in time and space of the initiation of their state of separateness [italics in original].27

Developing this idea, Gilbert Rose has used the term ‘transitional process’ to describe the adult’s continuing creative adaptation to the world, through the dynamic interplay between subjective and objective reality.28 Deri confirms that: ‘Play, artistic creativity, and appreciation are the direct, natural successors to the early good transitional objects; all require the capacity for creative “magical illusion”.’29

Michael Szollosy has applied this theoretical framework to literature, suggesting that ‘the reader experiences words and stories not as foreign entities but as subjective objects, filled with both a personal and a cultural significance, where meaning emerges from the paradox between these spheres’.30 This sentence demonstrates just how close this vocabulary can come to echoing the description of the layered space of ‘host’ and ‘ghost’, yet with the crucial difference that within the ‘potential space’, we do not need either to separate or to conflate these elements. This is a paradoxical space of exchange and transition.

Milner rarely uses psychoanalytic terms within works aimed at a general audience. However, all her work is underpinned by her psychoanalytic training and practice (her membership paper for the British Psychoanalytical Society was supervised by Melanie Klein and she later became a colleague of Winnicott’s). In On Not Being Able to Paint, she suggests that the arts provide a ‘transcendence of separateness’ which allows us to
bridge the difference between what is ‘me’ and what is ‘not-me’.

In the arts, although a bit of the outside world is altered, distorted from its ‘natural’ shape, to fit the inner experience, it is still a bit of the outside world, it is still paint or stone or spoken or written words or movements of bodies or sounds of instruments. It is still a bit of the outside world, but the difference is that work has been done, there has been a labour to make it nearer one’s inner conception, not in the way of the practical work of the world, but in an ‘as if’ way.\[31\]

She suggests that this relieves the despair engendered by the discrepancy between the inner and outer world:

Not only is it temporarily transcended, surely also it is permanently lessened. For in the satisfying experience of embodying the illusion there has in fact been an interchange.\[32\]

If all creative activity enables an extension of ‘potential space’, an engagement in ‘transitional process’, this applies to theatre within a theatre building as well as to site-specific performance. But where site-specific art is, as Miwon Kwon suggests, a response to ‘the sense of alienation and fragmentation in contemporary life’ and the consequent need to consider ‘the nature of the tie between subject/object and location, as well as the interplay between place and space’,\[33\] it makes the shifting relationships between ‘me’ and ‘not-me’ a field of deliberate enquiry.

Could we also say that while theatre in a theatre building establishes a relatively unchallenged environment, within site-specific work the precariousness of all play (because of its relation to the real) is foregrounded? Site-specific work is not without its own ways of ‘holding’, but it plays at the edges of the frame, exploring the boundaries of the ‘potential space’.

Anni Bergman points to an analogous use of physical space during early childhood, when children, as they gradually move out from their involvement with the mother, display an increasing tendency to play at the edges of their shared space, swinging on gates, opening and closing doors, occupying thresholds, looking out of windows or playing with toy cars or tricycles which are ‘small home bases on wheels’.\[34\]

Site-specific work frequently tread a line between the play-world and reality, sometimes provoking conflict, sometimes providing moments where the two seem uncannily coincidental. It looks for the chance intrusion that becomes the chance discovery. Christopher Bollas examines the effect of chance on our use of objects to express ourselves:

These aleatory objects evoke psychic textures which do not reflect the valorizations of desire. We have not, as it were, selected the aleatory object to express an idiom of self. Instead, we are played upon by the inspiring arrival of the unselected, which often yields a very special type of pleasure – that of surprise. It opens us up, liberating an area, like a key fitting a lock. In such moments we can say that objects use us, in respect of that inevitable two-way interplay between self and the object world and between desire and surprise.

If we were to study further the intermediate (or third) area, I think we should find that one important characteristic of the third area is that the individual uses things while knowing that the aleatory vector is so prominent that he will also be played upon by the object. . . . We know where to find, as it were, third areas which maximize the interplays of life.\[35\]

Site-specific performance is an art form that frequently makes surprise inevitable, while foregrounding our relationship with a wider environment. We could suggest, therefore, that rather than offering a fractured space, where site-specific performance takes place in the clash or dynamic between what is ‘of’ the site and what is brought ‘to’ it, this theoretical framework places the event within a ‘potential space’, where these elements are envisaged as co-creative. Temporarily, we create a space where we do not need to ask which elements we have invented and which we have found there. However, in playing the site-specific game, we are bound to encounter aspects of the world that do not conform to our imaginations. We are floored in our omnipotence, but make new discoveries. We embrace surprise. This applies to our encounters with other human beings in the space, as much as to our encounters with objects.
Rachel looks into a new space, 'Mis-Guided Tour' of Newtown, Exeter, led by Simon Persighetti of Wrights & Sites, June 2003.
So who haunts whom? The balance tips, and tips again, finding equilibrium in a reciprocal process of mutual haunting.

**Lone Twin’s Transitional Processes**

When might we choose to adopt this vocabulary to describe site-specific performance? It might be particularly useful in approaching work which foregrounds the moment of encounter and the transgression of boundaries, as opposed to the interpretation of space and event. Clearly, the two are not mutually exclusive, or even separable. The difference is one of emphasis.

The very name, ‘Lone Twin’, captures the paradox of Winnicott’s ‘potential space’, within which the child hatches out from its symbiosis with the parent and where it can therefore simultaneously be alone and yet double, merged with the (m)other. (Milner writes of the echoes of this experience in later life, describing it as a feeling that ‘one is also a couple’). And Lone Twin (Gregg Whelan and Gary Winters) describe its/their activities in words that hint at a transitional process:

This ability to bridge the divides of (a) place, to find a new location by moving the parameters of perception, is at the heart of Lone Twin’s work. This work cannot be categorized as theatre, yet it takes place through performance, usually in journeys through town or country, often in an engagement with thresholds: crossing the river Chelmer; traversing twin bridges over the Glomma; attempting to carry a telegraph pole in a straight line across Colchester, and so having to negotiate boundaries en route. Is this interest in frontiers one reason why Whelan and Winters sometimes dress as cowboys? Or is this an ironic reference to the omnipotent urge to take possession of space? Or does it simply reinforce a sense of play?

Physical endurance is an important aspect of their work, as if part of the discovery, or transcendence of the boundaries of self and site, must take place by pushing the body to its limits:

A move towards the edges of my body with the question; how far does it go, how much further before it says this is not nice or well-behaved or kind, this-is-upsetting-me performance?  

And of course the performers’ physical efforts draw the attention of passers by, producing a point of entry into the game.

Wearing clothes appropriate for a long walk. After the spring thaw in Kongsvinger, Norway, walk across one of the town’s two bridges. On reaching the other side turn and walk back over the bridge. Repeat this action for eighteen hours. Make friends with the people you meet during this time, where appropriate ask questions and share information about the river Glømma beneath you. On completing eighteen hours, leave the bridge and walk towards the ruin of the town’s first bridge. Carefully take your socks and boots off and lower your feet into the Glømma. Try and stay in contact with the friends you make.

Such activities, as they suggest, provoke encounters with others. A playful current in their work is the childlike plea: ‘Walk with me, walk with me, won’t somebody please walk with me?’ Edges are blurred. New spaces and relationships are produced. The water of the body sweats into the river; river water is made to evaporate through the body’s heat; ice melts into the street.

Within such performances, there is no need to make a distinction (though there may be differences) between what belongs to the site, to the audience, or to the performers. In fact, part of the point of the performance is temporarily to trouble all such distinctions. All participants are players in the game and aspects of the site. This is not to say that all are congruent or identical in their view or playing of the game, but all are involved in the exchange. Lone Twin put it like this:

We looked for ways we and our work could somehow become the places we found ourselves in. We worked to find actions that would put us in a meeting with the geography of our circumstances. We looked for commonalities between our location and ourselves.

For each participant in the game, site is constituted as the ‘not-me’ which I engage in play.

**Becoming Mis-Guided**

Similarly, though in very different ways, Wrights & Sites’s *An Exeter Mis-Guide* is designed to maximize the possibility of creative exchange, to instigate a game that is precarious without being absolutely unsustainable. The *Mis-Guide* is a book, rather than a performance in itself (though there have been related performances or ‘tours’). Though each of us has our roots in the theatre, it rather belongs to a tradition that runs from Walter Benjamin through the Situationists to a recent proliferation of related work, including Joël Henry’s ‘Experimental Tourism’, Tim Brennan’s East End walks, Iain Sinclair’s London drifting, Urban Exploration, and others.

However, though it is not theatre, it is conceived as the stimulus for a series of actions, or performances, to be created and carried out by readers, who become walkers in the city’s spaces. We have suggested a series of ways of negotiating the city of Exeter, some of which are very specific and detailed, some of which are very open. Some of the ‘walks’ (a term which we use to include all means of negotiating space) give a specific route, but most offer some kind of imaginative game or provocation. ‘Walk Bites’ are tiny suggestions scattered through the book (‘Loiter without intent’; ‘Where would you put your “x” on Exeter?’; ‘Seek and sense invisible boundaries’).

We say that what interests us is ‘mythogeography’, by which we mean to imply not only the individual’s experience of space, but the shared mythologies of space that are also part of its significance. Our guidebook places the personal, fictional, and mythical on an equal footing with factual, municipal history. In this multiple view of what constitutes place, we share many concerns, and are very much influenced by Pearson and his layered ‘theatre/archaeology’. However, one could also read the *Mis-Guide* as an open invitation to reimagine and remake the city while simultaneously discovering it anew: it becomes a ‘potential space’.

A number of walks deal specifically with this imaginative re-creation (or recreation) of
the city. In a deliberate reversal (though not a rejection) of archaeology, readers are invited to 'Look for ruins on which the future can be built.... Make your own statue, make your own thing. Erect a monument to a fictional event. Imagine new areas of the city. Make maps of them.' Two 'walks' suggest that the walker turn urban planner. Another suggests that the walker maps his/her own body onto the city. Another suggests that the walker create a memory map, then walk it in reality, examining the ways in which the two measure up: 'What have you included? What have you left out?' As for Winnicott's child, 'Every object is a found object.' The whole city becomes a field of transitional objects, part created, part discovered.

Other walks involve exploring or playing along boundaries: the river (see 'Water Walk', above) the edges of habitation, the divide between the city and country, the railway, the home, the parish. Others, again, invite an exploration of the city through an emphasis on a particular sense – touch, smell, sound – like a child discovering it for the first time. Still others foreground relationships...
between people, whether fellow walkers, or the unseen person who has built a shelter beside the canal. All these walks suggest a rediscovery or re-definition of where we are in relation to the city and its other inhabitants. There may be times at which reality resists us, and through these tensions we can perhaps discover the contours of our own playing.

In the sense that it offers security and structure, each ‘walk’ might perhaps be seen as a ‘holding environment’, giving the walker the confidence both to play and to transgress the game or other boundaries (one ‘walk’ literally suggests that the walker should ‘play safely in a forbidden place’). The Mis-Guide hopes to enable a potential space between walker and the city, but not one that is sealed off from the possibility of challenge.

On the one hand, the walker’s identity is merged with the city, projected through the same imaginative play which allows the city to be introjected in turn. On the other, the walker emerges from the city, by discovering the boundaries between real and imagined, familiar and unfamiliar spaces. At the same time, new spaces and spatial relationships are produced by the new and unexpected
spatial practices (games) that are provoked. Any emphasis on personal involvement may seem in danger of ignoring objective analysis, but the Mis-Guide does not dismiss the importance of historical awareness or of political critique (indeed, a local historian was included in our steering group). However, it places its emphasis on the changes that might be brought about through the creation of new spaces, both imagined and practised. In this, some of the ‘walks’ approach activism – explicitly, such as in ‘Peace Walk’, or implicitly, as in ‘Exeter A–Z’, where the participant is encouraged to insert their own messages into the advertising on the buses’ LED displays.

There is archaeological process here, too: curating an alphabet of the street; reading the signs of the city’s surfaces; tracing a culverted brook. These aspects are, however, more pronounced in a recent development of the work, A Courtauld Mis-Guide, made for the East Wing Collection at the Courtauld Institute in London. This A3 fold-out offers four walks through the four gates of Somerset House, each of which (though none are straightforwardly historical) could be read as a response to the densely recorded histories.
and artefacts of the place which made us feel, in Smith’s words, that we were ‘wrestling with a giant millipede of associations’. Archaeology must remain an important way into site-specific work.

A Vocabulary of Encounter and Negotiation

My need for two different, but complementary vocabularies could seem a peculiarly personal one. However, Simon Whitehead’s review of Jennie Savage’s Anecdotal Cardiff (a bus tour, 2003) in the current on-line Live Art magazine, comes very close to using both vocabularies in reference to a single performance.

Savage has recorded subjective responses to the city, and these are replayed as the bus (‘a small homebase on wheels?’) approaches the relevant sites. Using an archaeological metaphor, Whitehead suggests that ‘the artist has excavated the ordinary and found the remains of an ephemeral undercurrent of the city’. But he also suggests that the piece meshes subjective and objective worlds, and evokes:

the intimate made public, the public, for now, seeming an intimate place. . . . The individual witness is exposed, given credence. It was like someone leaving the door of their home with their jacket inside out, like seeing a stranger’s breath on a winter morning.

In looking at work relating to site-specific performance practice, one can identify vocabularies both of fragmentation (fracture, layering, gaps, incompleteness, absence) and of merging (relationship, dialogue, the past-in-the-present, presence). For example, Kaye quotes McLucas as follows:

From the beginning of the work it’s fractured, it’s deeply, deeply fractured. . . . It actually leads you into techniques which are of multiple fracture. . . . We are dealing with a field of elements, and with symphonic relationships which can sometimes be made to work and sometimes can’t. . . . They are more discursive and have gaps in them – you can see other things through.

Almost hidden in the language of fracture and ‘gaps’ (dislocation) is the attempt at convergence, ‘symphonic relationships which can sometimes be made to work’. Against the rhetoric of deconstruction and making strange, which highlights an important aspect of site-specific work, there is also, paradoxically, the suggestion of merging, of relationship, and of the dissolving of boundaries. Winnicott’s theories offer a vocabulary, or a conceptual framework, which does seem to contain the paradoxes of site-specific performance without irreversible fragmentation on the one hand, or false resolution on the other.

In doing so, he offers a way to discuss those aspects of site-specific work within which I encounter what is external to me and we play at remaking and rewriting each other – within which I renegotiate my relationship with the outer world.

Notes and References

3. I am grateful to Mike Pearson for drawing my attention to Walter Brueggemann’s use of the terms, which conflicts with de Certeau, though it speaks to the idea of site as palimpsest: ‘Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocabulary, and envisioned destiny. Place is space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made and demands have been issued.’ From ‘The Land’, in Geoffrey Lilburne, A Sense of Place: a Christian Theology of the Land (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 26.
5. Michel de Certeau, op. cit., p. 117.
27. Ibid., p. 97.
32. Ibid.
34. Anni Bergman, ‘From Mother to the World Outside: the Use of Space During the Separation-Individuation Phase’, in Grohnick and Barkin, op. cit., p. 160.
37. Lone Twin, op. cit., back cover.
38. Ibid., Section 8.
39. Ibid., Section 7.
40. Ibid., Section 3.
42. Ibid., p. 14.
43. Ibid., p. 81–2.
44. Ibid., p. 86.
45. Ibid, p. 64–5.
47. Wights & Sites, op. cit., p. 9.
48. Ibid., p. 50–1.
49. Ibid., p. 66–7.