Sites And (Human) Non-Sites Of A (Sub) Urban World

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Tacita Dean's *Trying To Find the Spiral Jetty* (1997) is an audio work that recreates the artist's search for the actual site of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970). Dean followed faxed directions from the Utah Arts Council and went with a guide who "had no idea what he was looking for." According to Dean it was the fact that she could never be sure that she had found the jetty that led her to construct a narrative of her trip. In many ways this potentially futile search for the authentic site of Spiral Jetty would probably have pleased Smithson immensely, because his maps of non-sites were designed not to lead the reader to a specific place but to complicate the place of site, to "throw one off" in all directions. In a 1970 interview he described how "the points of pick-up, or the points of collection, tend[ed] to be scattered throughout the site" which meant that there was "no possible way of" definitively positing these points: "if you go to the sites, there's no evidence other than the site, you're sort of thrown off the non-site"(218). Reading a map of a non-site becomes a constant pull between the physical materiality of the site and the non-site, and its further abstraction on paper. Smithson called it "a map that tells you how to get nowhere [...] If you look at the map, you'll see it is in the shape of a margin - it has no centre. It's a frame, actually"(249). Smithson's 'NON-SITE MAP OF MONO LAKE CALIFORNIA,' which appeared in the journal *0-9* (edited by Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer), highlighted the fact that for Smithson the

becomes absent. Mayer makes a distinction between points that can be described in terms of their position according to the material layout and visual qualities of the page ("at a line", "at the left elbow of Billy Graham", "at an empty space next to a bridal veil") and those that must be plotted or defined in terms of linguistic or semantic definitions ("one more than nine", "wet and spongy"). Her site is already one of mediated representations which further the complexities of the shuttling energy between the site and non-site. Mayer asks what it means to define, to fix, and to name at the same time as unfixing the structures that usually carry out this operation.

If the newspaper on June 13, 1969 is Mayer's site then the container for the non-site is the page of *0-9* on which the poem is reproduced. According to Smithson the existence of the non-site replaces the site as "the centre of the system" and casts the site out to "the fringe or the edge." Describing his "Non-site Map of Mono Lake California" he writes:

> As I look around the margin of this map, I see a ranch, a place called the sulphur pond; falls, and a water tank; the word pumice. But it's all very elusive. The shorelines tell you nothing about the cinders on the shore. You're always caught between two worlds, one that is and one that isn't. (249)

This place of capture between the two worlds that the non-site offers is paralleled in Mayer's poem through all the indeterminacies that the apparent specificity of a project such as mapping the centers of successive pages of a newspaper fails to deliver: "at the empty space next to a word below and air-conditioner", "at the empty space next to the skirt of a dress", "at the empty space below a word" — points of reference that are in fact blank spaces. Like Smithson's translocation of rocks, cinders, and asphalt, Mayer translocates the centers of the newspaper to another site which is detached from its original context. However, unlike Smithson, Mayer tracks the process of displacement itself, i.e., how sites are translated between media and across the very real imagined

boundaries of linguistic usage. This tracking opens a space between sites; as Deleuze and Guattari write:

> Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. (25)

It is precisely this middle ground, "at the empty space between a piano and a word," that Mayer's text charts.

This space of transport between site and non-site is also explored by Fiona Templeton. "Human Non-Site" presents a subject/object in flux that moves between sites of replacement and displacement of the self as object:

> How I came back as the person who left, having lost elasticity, heirlooms and other proofs of existence, and by a quite different means of transport, substituting the purchase of bread for forms of politeness, of invisible recognition, only to find the stable door bolted to keep me on all fours, a safe bet with a name you'd choose sight unseen, a bit off, slightly ahead [...]. (214)

The barrage of clauses reflects the circuitous route by which the subject does not move from site to non-site as intact and extraneous from its landscape but becomes the non-site itself. This is effected through "a different means of transport"; words no longer take you from A—B, from one site to the next but as with Smithson's maps of non-sites they "throw you off" in the direction of other possible sites/sights via an excess of everyday idioms, such as "on all fours", "a safe bet", and "sight unseen".

To be thrown off is to be deterritorialised; as Deleuze and Guattari write, deterritorialisation is "the movement by which 'one' leaves the territory. It is the operation of a line of flight" (508). The

displaced and replaced non-site is a vehicle of self which is transported in language as process, without recourse to linear time or orders of syntax. Templeton's human non-site locates itself within a "place of change" and so resists "the place of reason", a place of definable co-ordinates on a map of fixed semantic certainty. This mode of transport has its own logic ("the reason the reason changed it reasons a landscape apart"[214]). Like Mayer, Templeton is interested in the site between non-site and site, a mode of transport as being which defines itself as a kind of absence of site that hasn't yet been reached, ("Some places you have to have to be the way you are, aren't there"[214]).

Templeton calls her play *YOU-The City* a "site-specific" play as there is "no stage other than the real environments described in each scene" (vii), it is as "an intimate Manhattanwide play for an audience of one" (ix). This audience of one (the client) is passed and directed from one performer to another across the city. These performers deliver a monologue to the client that also allows for a certain amount of improvisation in response to however the client might choose to respond. Unlike the maps of non-sites Templeton's staging of the play is not apart from its site, but like Smithson's maps it casts the audience out in all directions across a broad area of site in which they are constantly in transition and never static for long. The monologues are often delivered enroute to the next *rendez-vous* point. The client is placed in a position akin to that of Templeton's human non-site who is self-reflexively aware of its own status as material that has been displaced and removed in transit: "I can see them from here, nowhere unless there is more than one they, maybe my getting it" (214). At one point the client is suddenly made aware of the possibility of changing his/her role in the play during an exchange in which the client finds him/herself not with another performer but with another client, who assumes s/he is a performer. At this point the first client has to make a choice as to whether to move from the role of client into that of performer. The choice inserts the subject in an intersecting process akin to Deleuze's characterisation of subjectivity as mobile, changeable and transitory. It re-sites subjectivity at a transitory moment of identity between that of client and performer that is

replete with the potential for a redefinition of the relationship between the two roles. As Elizabeth Grosz points out:

> The space of the in-between is the locus for social, cultural, and natural transformations: it is not simply a convenient space for movements and realignments but in fact is the only place—the place around identities, between identities—where becoming, openness to futurity, outstrips the conservational impetus to retain cohesion and unity. (91)

By inhabiting the space between the site and non-site as a third space, Templeton articulates the possibility that the "Definite isn't only, only here." She unfixes determinacies of language through complicating their relationship to site and context, thereby asking, "What does it cost who to lock who in language?"

During Carla Harryman's recent play *Performing Objects Stationed In Platform on the Sub (Urban) World* "someonelse" dreams of "a beautiful woman/ who is trapped in a cell" which might be "a jail cell or the/cell of an organism or a technological speck,/or a clone say of a microchip"(16). *Performing Objects* continues many of the themes from her earlier *Memory Play* (1994), including the way in which identities are constructed by demographic and cultural mappings beyond our control:

> **Instruction**
> It is too bad this is not a city. For instance, I could tell you exactly in which block or set of blocks the citizens would begin to be lost and if you were in one of those blocks, I could make a recommendation. . .
>
> **Pelican**
> . . . that could have been researched in a manual. I have what we're looking for in my pocket. Look

> here, file five thousand three hundred and thirty point zero two's topic is, "We dream of each other's EARTHQUAKE." Your numerical FUTURES are not mentioned. Therefore I reject your recommendations. And explanations. And what precedes them. [...] (17)

Like Pelican, Harryman rejects the theorisation of herself as a statistical attachment to pre-determined sites, including those of gender and of narrative.

In *Performing Objects Stationed In Platform on the Sub (Urban) World* Harryman uses the city of Detroit (E-troit), where she lives, as the site through which to explore the shifting subject/object relationships among the figures of C1a, C1b, C2a, C2b and C3. These figures are themselves already refracted across multiple sites. (C1): white woman/mother/sky, and (C2): child and child as future adult , are effectively staged as four persons whose boundaries are porous and indeterminate, in which the site of the self is unbound from its own singularity in time and space. These figures, like Templeton's transitory 'human non-site' move between locations of unreality and reality resisting the "open jaw" of determining narratives whose directional flow, as the villagers realise, parallels that of "getting up and going to work" (16).

The backdrop to the play is E-troit, a place in which relationships between sites have been so clearly bounded and mapped that: "the people in the village—which was really a huge city that you couldn't move around in very easily such that the people in the village took their breadcrumbs for granted having forgotten where they came from"(19). The space of the play resists these constraints, not by presenting a Utopic space apart from E-troit but by engaging with it as a site to be mapped according to a quite different set of connections and possibilities for language and utterance. Harryman's E-troit is a non-site into which she transposes the urban alienation and disjunction found among sites and people that have apparently lost their connectives (their breadcrumbs home) and begins to work with it as a site for other possibilities for narratives and conjunctions between subjectivities.

The heightened artifice of the play echoes both the stylization of seventeenth-century masques and Brecht's defamiliarizing techniques, both traditions which clearly implicate the audience as participants. The non-site that is the play, sampled and modified as it is from multiple sites/sightings in Detroit, throws itself out into the space of the audience. As C1a states, I "want people to stand still and look at each other while props dance as emanations of absent fabricators" (26). Harryman's 'human non-sites' are themselves 'props;' agents and objects of a sited imagination.

In 1972 Smithson made a series of distinctions between site and non-site. He characterised the site as having "open limits", "scattered information", of being an "edge", a "series of points" and of being of "indeterminate certainty." In contrast he defined the non-site as having "closed limits", "contained information", "a center", "an array of matter" and being of "determinate uncertainty." While he defined the site as "some place (physical)", the non-site was "no place (abstract)" (152-3). These distinctions rapidly blur once the original translation from site and non-site to map of the non-site has been made in a translation of objects into language, and this blurring is reflected in Harryman's oscillation between the "some place (physical)" of the site (E-troit) and the "no place (abstract)" of the non-site ("inside of a cloud" [4]). In effect, the text refuses to seal either site as a closed unit, for each is implicated by the other.

Smithson's terms of site and non-site are useful models to consider in relation to contemporary texts of site as they resist the territorialisation of poetic language within a discourse of site as a static moment in space and time. In Mayer's "DEFINITIONS AT THE CENTER OF THE NEWSPAPER" the concepts of site and non-site help to elucidate the translocation and translation of material from one context to another. Templeton creates a circular dynamic between the two terms, inhabiting site itself as well as the space between site and non-site. Her figuration of the human non-site is similarly paralleled by the way in which Harryman's dispersed subjectivities (sites) periodically intersect with each other across the plateau of a wider urban landscape. Like Smithson's maps of non-sites, Mayer's, Templeton's and Harryman's writing

calls the apparent singularity of the term site-specific into question. Their writing opens up a dialogic relationship between the material properties of site and language itself. This place of exchange and translation functions as a space in which to figure alternative forms of subjectivity and agency in response to site as a broader category of cultural and social definition.

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