S C A P E

Massey University Research Seminars 2011

Title: Who Cares? Creative Research Practice in the Space of the University
Presenter: Dr Maria O'Connor
21st March 2011

[SLIDE ONE, 1] TITLE: WHO CARES?

[SLIDE TWO, 2] ACADEMIC STATS

Who Am I [Research-wise]

Teacher: Spatial Design Postgraduate Programme (AUT), Theory Spatial Programme, Supervisor (Honours, MA, PhD)

Creative Practice: Writer, Filmmaker, Spatial Installation practice

•*Passions:* Continental philosophy of Derrida, Deleuze + Guattari, Heidegger, Blanchot, Levinas, Foucault, French Feminist philosophy (Irigaray, Cixous, Le Doeuff, Kristeva etc.,), literature, experimental cinema, architecture, spatial design, intersection between art and architecture; ethics and politics of: sexual difference, image, space; sensate, material and reflective experiences

•*Less passionate about:* truth as correctness, metaphysical values of: stasis, light, fixity, logic, binaries, rationalism, individualism, transcendental signifiers; fundamentalism, objectivity

[SLIDE THREE, 3] TITLE INTRO

TITLE: *Who Cares?*

Qualifier [aka Sub-title]: *Who Cares? Creative Research Practice in the Space of the University*

Introduction

It is obvious enough that to *do what we do* we must **care** about it. This suggests that **caring** and **creative practice** are linked. We could expand this thought and say that **creativity must be cared** for. Or rather, that the **suppression of our creativity** produces work that is **disingenuous (insincere)**.

My research practice **cares** for itself by asking about the **effects of creativity within the Space of the University.** My presentation today is framed therefore by **3 key** thematics:

- **The Space of the Institution (University)**
- **Ethics (care) for the sake of maintaining creative relevance**
- **The Politics of difference as an approach (aka methodology) for research**
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Part One

The Space of the Institution (University)

We are all in it! My role as an educator makes me more implicated than you in this **Space that is governed,** like any institution, by constraints and policies that affect our practices (teaching, learning, creative making and social practices).

My **PhD research** concerned itself with an **ethics of sexual difference**. I recognized through a deconstruction of the western metaphysical philosophical tradition (that impacts on so much of our identity formation within Institutions like the University) **that language was inherently gendered.**

My **PhD opened with this quote by Virginia Woolf as provocation** for thinking education **beyond the "plan".** She states here, "For we have done with this "education"! As **spatial designers** you will, no doubt, be aware of what she might mean by the (old/new) **plan**.

The "plan" infers something prescribed, as in **inherited forms of knowing** and can allude to **a rational scheme** that philosophers of power and space like Michel Foucault would suggest **regulate our bodies to behave in certain preformed manners**. The Panopticon principle being one of his most well known examples of a **diagrammatics or plan of power for spatial undergrads here.**

Bernard Tschumi's design work is another s**eminal spatial example of a deconstruction or detonation of the Cartesian plan.** As a methodological strategy for activating chance, the irrational, and undermining pre-given programmes his work **responds to the human condition that we are far from rational beings**. **Parc de la Villette in Paris** offered the **public the opportunity to inhabit the parc in ways that reinvented their own programmed associations** to the ontology of parkness.

Woolf's fiery provocation here insists on another kind of "education" **that is perhaps, based on our intuitions and the unknown—** and, yet, as we know as creative practitioners this is not so simple. **Art and design are new to University infrastructure and their ways of being are now largely determined by this space:**

In PhD Viva, that is, the Oral examination set up as the defense of my PhD thesis, **2 out of the 3 examiners described the opening Preface as obfuscating**; i.e. a fortress wall

that impeded the structural opening to the work. **Indeed, it was not easy in terms of outlining a rational logic to work ahead**. Rather it was a **poetics of writing that challenged conventions of academic writing,** which French Feminisms such as that espoused by Luce Irigaray would describe as the language of the ruling symbolics —that is, **academic conventions are based on masculinist self-sameness housed in rational systems of knowing**. As she quotes in her text, *The "Mechanics" of Fluids'* , "the syntax of discursive logic [is] based on masculine self-sameness". (from *This Sex Which is Not One*).

The Preface of my PhD engages in a **creative practice of writing** proximate to Irigaray's *speaking (as) woman (parler-femme)* as that experimental process that traces the desire of the body. Indeed, it is a **Spatial proximity** that Irigaray describes at the end of her *Fluids* text as being in "**such close touch with itself that it confounds your discretion"** … of a **self-confounded by not having yet understood everything**.

As you witness in this slide from the Preface, **abbreviated passages across English and French languages appear disconnected,** yet **act as dialogue points with each other, and also other texts that intersperse the thetic** moment of the work. Rather than a rational explanation the **writing inscribes another kind of immersive experience that is based on a political questioning of who is the author** (authority) i.e. **where do we inherit the identity in which we read + write from. Conventions** suggest it is the individual I that speaks and addresses the reader. Jacques Derrida, founding father of deconstruction would suggest it is the reader who signs the text (and indeed who is this reader?). **Destabilizing a hierarchy of reading conventions, long footnotes act as analytical moments** again in dialogue with its above "body".

In the first instance, **the Preface, acted to dislocate with a care for feminine difference**. The result in the Viva, as all good defenses should encourage, was that I **denied two out of three examiners their desire for me to re-write the preface so that it became an accessible 'plan' to the thesis**. My refusal, I am told is unprecedented. Without wanting to sound like an anarchist (not that I have a problem with this label), **my refusal disclosed to the examiners their own stranglehold within the conventions of a masculinist (and metaphysical) logic that supported a static notion of research rather than research as an experience of political and ethical change**.

<mark>[SLIDE NINE, 9] GORDON MATTA-CLARK'S ANARHITECTECTURE</mark>

One of my favourite stories with **respect to challenging the spatial codes of "education",** in light of Woolf's fiery provocation, comes from Gordon Matta-Clark's spatial intervention with the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies in NY during the 1970s, to which Peter Eisenman was the director at the time. Matta-Clark was not afraid to use the term **anarchic in his spatial practice of the mid-70s he termed "anarchitecture".** He realized that **architecture could be used to symbolize all the hard-shelled or fixed cultural reality that difference pushes against**. His most provocative work '**Window Blow Out'** sought to undermine **the foundations of the architectural establishment from which he had gained his architectural education**.

Window Blow Out (1976):

In December 1976, Matta-Clark was invited by the Institute of Architecture in NY to exhibit together with the **New York Five** (made up of Peter Eisenman, John Hejduk, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathamy and Richard Meier) in the show *Idea as Model*. **Matta-Clark was therefore exhibiting with people he had studied with at Cornell University.** They were **his teachers**, and architectural practitioners in their own right. Matta-Clark was appalled at how this **group of practitioners (with the kind of prestige they carried) paid little attention to the problem of decaying buildings in NY**. He is quoted saying **"I hated what they stand for".** In Matta-Clark's eyes, **Architecture saw the problem of decaying buildings as an opportunity for redevelopment — decaying buildings were structures for removal in the interest of renewal and urban planning.**

For the exhibition his proposal was to **place mounted photographs of buildings in NY that were in states of decay and had been vandalized in the windows of the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies.**

While setting up the show, **Matta-Clark entered the building armed with a gun he'd borrow from artist friend Dennis Oppenheim and proposed to shoot out only the windows that were already cracked but in fact he proceeded to shoot out all the windows of the Institute.** The Institute fellows such as Peter Eisenman were beside themselves. The second component of the exhibition i**.e the mounting of the photos in the windows subsequently was eliminated from the show, and the windows were replaced with very few people seeing it.**

Matta-Clark's provocations disrupted prescriptive spatial codes that have been enhanced by architectural elite or egos driven toward monumentalism. He had a concern with an **ethics viewing modern architecture as a dehumanizing experience due to its neglect of the neglected or, rather the too easily forgetting of histories through the force of corporate enterprise and the egos that *will* such desire.**

More importantly perhaps, for our purposes today, Matta-**Clark took creative risks for the sake of bringing new possible encounters by disrupting the strict urban syntax of a city. As de Certeau and others have brought into our consciousness, the city is an endless play of signs – a place to be read and re-read. Matta-Clark** deconstructed institutional settings with **creative urgency and a care for the possible otherness of place.**

==*[SLIDE TEN, 10] PART TWO: ETHICS – MAINTAINING CREATIVE RELEVANCE*==

Part 2

Ethics (care) for the sake of maintaining creative relevance

==*[SLIDE ELVEN –THIRTY THREE [11-33] Spatial Design POSTGRAD: HONOURS + MA WORK*==

[Put on the showreel of Honours/MA works – backdrop/wallpaper while I go through next part – I hope you are able to multi-task and listen to me and watch the wallpaper of projects flick by]

But what do we mean by ethics? Ethics always involves one's actions and this sense it infers an effect on others. Ethics is a relation between oneself and others. As **an act it suggests it has a performative character — it is eventful**. As designers, writers, teachers, students, artists etc., i.e creative practitioners **our actions impact on others.** Ethics concerns itself with both a care of the self and a care for others.

In what I've said so far therefore within the realm of creative practice, **ethics is an event of care, productive in creative agency.**

I mentioned at the start that without care we would probably not be here today. **You care about your design practices in as much as you have engaged in further postgraduate study.** And, I care about learning too inasmuch as I've taken on a role as an academic.

Let us bring back Foucault who wrote a very significant text on ethics, power, space and the body called *A Care of the Self* — It was his third volume from *The History of Sexuality* and was primarily concerned with the techniques and procedures that govern human behaviour particularly with the **role of sex in Greek and Roman antiquity**.

It is however **his comments on Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*: *Capitalism + Schizophrenia* that I draw on now.** In the preface to their book, **Foucault, describes it as "a book of Ethics." (p.13 xiii)** Further, he suggests that the strategy of the book is to ask the question **"How does one keep from being a fascist, (especially) when one believes to be a revolutionary militant?" (13, xiii).**

Without giving you a lecture on ethics although it may appear that I am, my concern for **my research and teaching nexus here is to be mindful of the micro-fascist tendency that resides in our desire to be believed in.**

True believers or to put it another way belief in truth without differences, Deleuze and Guattari suggest returns us to repressive roots based on control. This is counter-intuitive to creative relevance. **Creative identity here engages the other. Identity does not equal Zero, but rather multiplicity.** In my own research **I practice the ethics of *Anti-Oedipus* pursuing the slightest trace of fascism in the body.**

The Postgraduate students I work with understand **my approach is based on this sentient condition knowing that I'll affirm their creative adventures, risk-taking, inventions, interventions, anarchism so that they accede to their desires and at the same time question their awareness with respect to desire also as an egoistic enterprise.**

As my title for this talk, *Who Cares?,* alludes in its question: **If we are creating for the sake of ourselves, then what kind of self is this? If we are creating for the purposes of others, how are we opening up a space for such difference?**

Mark Seem the translator of *Anti-Oedipus* suggests that the **ethical strategy of Deleuze and Guattari's book is one of listening to others — Their schizoanalysis is the process of ego-loss in their listening to the voices of** literature, art, philosophy, psychoanalysis, political and critical theory etc., The **compositional nature of the text is one of delirium without the pursuit of a correct and final position to take (and know once and for all).**

Taking from the wallpaper of Honours and MA projects that have been on display, I'd like to address one as **a way of inaugurating a threshold across my own creative**

research practice. In doing so, it will provide a closure to this talk with a rather shameless viewing of a film work of mine *Desiccations* made specifically for a conference in December last year at the Bartlett School of Architecture in London. Shameless, in terms of time, as I will be screening all 11-minutes of the film to you.

Part 3

The Politics of difference as an approach (aka methodology) for research

SO, already I have begun addressing *the politics of difference as an approach for research* – THROUGH SOME of the REFRENCES to Foucault, Deleuze + Guattari. These are METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES THAT COULD be described UNDER this listing of TERMS:

-Schizoanalysis (Deleuze+Guattari)
-Delerium
-Rhizomatic
-Ego-Loss
-Listening for otherness
-Tracing our desire
-Sensate over Rational
-Reflectivity (over objectivity)

Through introducing a spatial student's MA project, these terms find further relevance – **primarily with respect to issues of belonging through filmic spatial installation practice:**

SARA ROMANO'S WORK:

Sara Romano's Is/Land Life is a film installation project. It dealt with issues of belonging through the point of view of a life as an always shifting and moving condition – a condition **experienced as moving from place to place as part of a phenomenon known as transnationalism**. Sara is Serbo-Croatian in origin and now lives in NZ. The **question of identity or belonging came from shifting and adapting.** She viewed landscapes or places she lived as surfaces that shifted. She folded these surfaces into the way we belong with the **Space of the Screen**. Somehow, **screen technology appropriated and mimed her condition insofar as much of our daily encounters are experienced at the level of a bewitching existence framed by the Scre**en (whether it is the TV, Film, Computer Monitors, Cell-Phones, I-Pads, Windows in the buildings we inhabit etc **… Reflection here occupies an interstitial modality for being.**

Identity for her equaled non-belonging whereby belonging does not equal a fixed locale. She merged this experience of belonging, located in movement, through the shifting identities of others which we are engaged with today via screens. A similar sentiment to

Guliano Bruno's *conceptual shift from* Voyeur to Voyager (See her book *Atlas of Emotion: Art, Architecture and film*). Identity for Sara came from a place of radical otherness in the sense that the other amounted to a screen. Her creative methodology embraced place not as an object for knowing but rather a **purely reflective surface** (she used different methods of engagement for experiencing the screen and surface conditions)— Critical Theory would aim at the same methods for knowing subjectivity based on reflection and not stable objects for knowing (or objectivity).

Italio Calvino in his autobiographical writings on the experience of writing about cities, suggests also that the relation between the *SCAPE* (city, self, country etc) is activated through questions of surface and depth, interior and exterior, visibility and invisibility, adventure and consultation, youth and maturity. He suggests that the surface is a complex weave of imagination that is located through exterior codes of belonging i.e. his knowing Paris for instance is partially via all those writers and imaginations that have created canonical descriptions of this place. Imagination or creative knowing is also an interiority that probes through the surface and that forms our own imagination from the lived and everyday experiences we encounter. If it appears that I'm setting up a binary between interior and exterior, this is not so. (see Hermit in Paris and Other Autobiographical writings).

Creativity as a politics of difference from my own methodological point of view is the negotiation between the surfaces of exterior knowing and the depths of interior singularities. Both conditions permeate and complicate our sensate experiences so that neither is neat and decidable. The film *Desiccations* negotiates the surface as a rich material skin saturated in exterior elements (sensate, material, melodramatic) that attempt to permeate our sensate interiors for inaugurating bodies of difference — difference beyond pre-given or planned models of desire.

==[SLIDE THIRTY SIX [36] DESSICATIONS==

Desiccations

The Bartlett conference in London was dealing primarily with the question of sexual difference in relation to the work of Luce Irigaray, who I've mentioned earlier with respect to writing (*parler-femme*) as an experimental disruption to patriarchal codes of knowing based on logic and rational systems.

Very briefly, the work, in part addressed her concept of *parler-femme* (or speaking-as-woman) in relation to her notion of proximity where a self is in such close touch with itself it confounds one's discretion - a confoundedness through not having yet understood everything.

The work aimed at this … in the sense it does not desire to know everything of what it says. It aims at a **close touch that celebrates a movement of sensate cinema** (discussed in contemporary experimental film circles) that desires for the suspension of mastery that has appropriated cinematic experience via narrative-based, linear spatio-temporal models and prolific psychological approaches.

==[SLIDE THIRTY SEVEN [37] REFERENCES==

END