Session 3 'Framing a Homeless Sculpture'

Speakers:	**Identified as:**
Clare O'Dowd	**CO'D**
Sam Lackey	**SL**
Alex Potts	**AP**
Audience (Rest of Attendees)	**AQ(Audience Questions)**

Clare O'Dowd

My name is Clare O'Dowd, and I work in the Art/History Department at Manchester University. I first became involved with John and Charles with their project a couple of years ago for the event that John mentioned, looking at Charles's sculpture. One of the things that came out of that event was this idea of homelessness. My work and my research resonated with what they were doing in terms of the relationship between sculpture and architecture, and particularly artists who use architecture within their work as a sculpture medium. So I wanted to briefly talk about that and explain how I fit into all of this, and then turn it on its head a little bit and think about what happens to us as viewers when we are looking at this sort of thing.

One of the artists that was key to my research and has already been mentioned today was Mike Nelson, and in particular the pieces that I've looked at from Nelson's work were a Psychic Vacuum and the Coral Reef, the large labyrinthine pieces. The Psychic Vacuum from 2007 was based in a New York market building, and it was in a really vast space. Nelson broke it down into component parts, used the existing architecture and filled it with objects, clues. So there is a kind of story and a kind of narrative to this piece, but it's one that's completely contingent: it's contingent partly on the objects, but largely contingent on a reflexive response from the people who are viewing it. So the response to this and the experience of this is different for every single person.

The fact that Nelson used architecture as a key medium in his work means that there is an effect on the viewer that is a kind of displacement. We are not allowed to feel at home in this work. We are not privy to the stories behind these spaces. We're displaced and we are effectively, when we enter these spaces, homeless. Nelson continued this theme throughout the 15,000 sq.ft of this installation, dropping carefully placed clues to suggest possible stories and narratives throughout this, throughout the existing space and at the end of it, the viewer was rendered completely displaced by several thousand tons of sand. We're back to sand as a metaphor for mutable and changing sculptural spaces.

So for a viewer, the effect of this is disorientating and displacing, and one of the things that I've been considering for the last few years is the question: does homeless sculpture or can sculpture produce a homeless viewer? So I am turning this on its head in a way, and looking at it from an opposite

perspective. One of the things that is key to Nelson's work and some of the other artists I've looked at is this idea of context and the way that context for the art work and context for the viewer operate so differently.

Another key example for me is Gregor Schneider, the German artist who originally made a very large artwork in his own home. This is Haus ur which is in the town of Rheydt in Germany. Schneider worked for many years on this house, tinkering about with it, adding walls, adding windows, blocking off doors, blocking off rooms and then began to take the rooms and reconstruct them in art galleries. When you see these rooms in art galleries, you know that they are ostensibly part of Schneider's house but they are reconstructed from memory. So there's a relationship with the architecture and with the concept of home, but at the same time we're not allowed to be at home in them, we are homeless, displaced. A particularly good example of this is this Kafeezimmer from Haus ur, which is a rotating room. This room rotates imperceptibly 360 degrees on its axis. So once you've gone into the room you never quite know where you're going to come out again and it's an incredibly disorientating experience. But again, it produces a kind of homeless viewer.

The final artist that I've looked at in some detail is Gordon Matta-Clark, because Gordon Matta-Clark literally makes buildings into art. He doesn't just put things in them, he chops them up and he renders them uninhabitable. Now these don't exist anymore so I have no experience of Mata Clark's work in the flesh, so to speak. But to look at them from photographs and to imagine, to conceptualise the experience of being in this building and having to hop over the dividing line, produces a similar sensation of displacement, discomfort and homelessness: a kind of modern or postmodern homelessness.

Finally Conical Intersect from 1975 operates in a very similar way, drilling a very large hole through two adjoining houses in the middle of Paris. So these are no longer homes, they are sculptures: we can't live in them anymore, nobody can inhabit these buildings. So as a viewer, we're put in this strange position where we can understand what the material is, what the place was, but we're not allowed to be at home in it.

Now when I was thinking about this project, this homeless sculpture, obviously I can't bring pieces like this to the Whitworth, so I wanted to turn it on its head and think about the way in which context works for artworks, the way in which we position ourselves in relation to them and think about them, and I chose two sculptures from the Whitworth collection. I chose Lynn Chadwick's Beast no 26 and the very small Henry Moore reclining figure, which has the parenthetic title "Bowl". I found both of these sculptures faintly disturbing for different reasons. I found the Henry Moore one faintly disturbing because the parenthetic title implies certain functionality to this object and I found that quite weird. There's a scale differential in operation here as well. The Henry Moore sculptures that I've encountered previously have been on a

vast scale compared to this very, very, small piece. So this is a small bowl and it's also a reclining figure and I also place it mentally into context with the rest of Henry Moore's work.

The second piece, "Lynn Chadwick's Beast": I wanted to try and rethink this object. Both of these have very rarely been on display since they were purchased by the Whitworth and I think Beast has only been displayed once in its history at this institution. Lynn Chadwick's series has very much been intertwined with Herbert Read's 'geometry of fear', and that kind of conceptualising of it as a very anxious piece of its time, in the context of the Cold War. But I don't look at it like that. I think this may be a generational thing, I don't know. That's one of the things I want to possibly look at in relation to this sculpture and I want to try and figure out what these sculptures are doing to me to displace me and to make me feel sort of slightly homeless when I look at them. I'm not sure that homeless is necessarily the right word for this in terms of my viewing experience, so maybe that's something else that we can work on, a kind of conceptualisation of what is happening to me when I see these things. But those are the two pieces that I chose that disturbed me the most and that's why I've picked them.

So that's where I fit into this whole series of debates, so I want to now hand over to Sam Lackey who is the senior Curator at the Whitworth and she has a slightly different story to tell about homeless sculpture.

Sam Lackey

I do. So as Clare said, I'm a Senior Curator here at the Whitworth. When I was invited to be part of this, I wasn't Senior Curator at the Whitworth, I was Curator at the Hepworth Wakefield, which is a very different environment in lots of ways, and I'm going to mention that in my presentation today. The other thing I wanted to start by saying is that as a Curator, I have a different relationship to lots of things we're talking about, and that was a way I thought of trying to explore some of these subjects. Actually in my anxiety about this event partly and also Clare's helpfulness, she sent me an essay, the essay that was a point of origin for today's talk. It is a lecture that was given by Gunther Stern about Rilke's writings on Rodin, and it starts by saying 'things', referring to that other essay by Rilke. What I wanted to start by saying is that I work principally with 'things' and this is a gallery full of 'things', I realise today. I was hoping to be able to be able to talk about some of the things that are on display now, because of course, and this can always happen when you work in a gallery context, there's much that connects with the themes of today.

So we have a brilliant Raimondi and Raphael show upstairs that shows classical sculptures represented in print, and it shows them being discovered, being rehomed and being put in different architectural context. It shows a different version of homelessness for sculpture, a homeless that belongs to a different period. If you go into the Elizabeth Price Curates show that I will mention again later, there's this very literal, extraordinary literal sculpture of homelessness. It's a sculpture of a homeless person in a sleeping bag which

I know operates in a complicated way in relation to the things we're thinking about today, but it locates itself strangely, not least because I'm currently privy to a whole range of emails flying backwards and forwards about that work regarding the tape on the floor around it. This is where I'm hoping I can talk in a different way about what we're talking about today. The artist's intention is that work does not have tape or a barrier around it, and that's because he wants it to be mistaken for a homeless person. It's not going to work in the Whitworth, but in its original manifestation, that was the intention: that there was this ambiguity to the status of the sculptural object and that's what we're working with here all the time.

Then Clare also asked me to select an object from the collection, and the object I selected was the very representational carving by a British artist, Gertrude Hermes, that I recently put into an exhibition. It's called "Bird in a Hand" and I chose this again for the most literal of reasons: it's a carving called "Bird in the Hand" and it's called Bird in a Hand because it was made for a pub called the Bird in Hand. It's a carving with a specific original architectural intention. It never found its way to that home; it never made it before it was donated to the Whitworth by Hazel King Farlow, who was Peggy Guggenheim's sister and who actually gave lots of works to regional galleries in the UK. But in terms of a literal displacement or how an object might shift from location and meaning, I thought it operated really well.

The other thing I want to say is I'm slightly discombobulated by the fact that I'm not talking about objects when I'm surrounded by them, and instead I'm talking about slides, but I think this works well. This relates to my previous role where I worked as Curator at the Hepworth Wakefield Gallery. Thinking about post war British sculptures, as we have been already a few times today, this is Barbara Hepworth's 'Winged Figure' 1963 that was created for the site for a specific architectural context: the John Lewis building in Oxford Street, London, a particular commission. This wasn't actually her first proposal; she made another proposal to John Lewis that was rejected for not being 'Hepworthy' enough. They felt that this other proposal fulfilled the requirements of not only their architectural context, but the context of the artist too. This is a shot of the Hepworth Wakefield where I used to work, which as you can see has what is actually a prototype of that Winged Figure as a centrepiece of one of its galleries. This was a gift given by the Hepworth family to the City of Wakefield. It's interesting because the way it was talked about in the very first terms of the offer was of bringing Hepworth home, of homing her sculpture.

In fact these aren't really her sculptures: they're plasters and prototypes that were previously resident in a second studio that she had in St Ives, the Palais de Danse, shown in the space that was created for them after they were gifted to the City of Wakefield. There were a couple of conditions to the gift, and one of the conditions to the gift was that Wakefield build a brand new home or building for these objects, and this building had to be of international architectural distinction too. So quite loaded, but here, very specifically, a

home was made for objects, but the political context of that and the social context in the UK of when this project stated in the late 1990's is very particular, this rehoming. So that is something I wanted just to bring up as a way of thinking about homing sculptures.

The other thing that I wanted to say was that for the Curator, the relationship to the object is very different. It is in motion. This isn't my photo, it's from a brilliant Instagram feed called "The Art of Installation" which was taken by a technician that often shows sculpture in movement or displaced. There's something utterly compelling about seeing a sculpture in this way. For me it's something that I'm very familiar with, but there is something interesting in not thinking of sculpture as having a fixed place, and whether that means movement within the gallery or the actual movement into the object. There's something I think to be teased out there a little.

This is another example: I wanted to bring it back to the Whitworth where I work now, and this is a sculpture that belongs in the Whitworth's collection. It's Metzger's Flailing Trees, first commissioned in 2009 for the Manchester International Festival, and it was installed in the centre of the city in what was the Peace Gardens in the centre of Manchester. The Whitworth acquired this work, and installed it outside the front of the gallery. Recently it's been moved into other parts of the park, and, apart from this idea of rehoming this sculpture, I wanted to bring up the idea of a sculpture that destroys itself, that Metzger's proposition is a sculpture that's not intended to have a home.

But it doesn't work like this: I was talking to the Curator yesterday and she said that Metzger has given us permission to reinvigorate and remake this sculpture as many times as we want. We're allowed to make the decision when it dies. Its upended willow trees, twenty-one, with the roots in the sky. It does, as you can see, kind of regenerate where little sprouts of willow come out the side of it, but that's a temporary situation and it dies. It's currently situated on the other side of the park. So it's moved from a very specific city context, to the front of the gallery with the relationship to this architecture, and now with more of a relationship to our community context here.

I also wanted to talk about the Curators and about the kind of curatorial impulse to recreate moments as homes for sculptures: the idea of the exhibition recreation, or the idea that there's a moment when a sculpture has a home. That's something that a Curator is drawn to in rethinking their relationship or the public's relationship or a wider art historical context to those sculptures, that there's something important and significant in certain moments of a sculpture's life, that they are more at home there perhaps.

This is a very famous example but there are many many examples. It's the recent remaking of "When Attitudes Become Form" that happened in Venice and this is a photograph of the original installation. I wanted to suggest that as a point of reference, and also question the motivations about that idea of a home for sculpture. This is something that's been referred to already, which is the idea that sculpture often has a built in obsolescence. So this is a

photograph, again that I saw on Instagram that someone had taken of artworks that had been thrown away after an exhibition in Leeds recently. The artist countered by saying that these were second hand materials and he knew that they would never have a permanent home, that he wouldn't be able to afford to store them, that they were intended for exhibition. It's something we talked about already, this idea of a temporary home for a sculpture, a one off. I also wanted to mention here another idea that has been presented to me recently. A local group of artists in Islington Mill have a kind of curatorial and practical response to this which is a project called "Temporary Custodians", where they're proposing that they set up a storage space in Salford. For those of you that don't know Salford, it has many great empty spaces, where they would store or home artworks that artists can't afford to store, that galleries can't afford to store and they will give access to the public. They're not on display they're not shown in an exhibition context, they're shown in a storage context.

There's some really interesting thinking going on out there about how we care for, or how we home, or house contemporary sculpture and the proliferation of sculpture. So I think that's where I will finish.

Alex Potts

My presentation connects with something I've been puzzling about for some time but haven't really put my mind to properly. I've always been fascinated by the sort of strange uncomfortable and intriguing status of large scale public sculptures that were produced in the post war period, which was a big moment for creating modernist public sculptures in public places, and there's two issues that really interest me. I think it's the way that these works raise issues about both homelessness and about placing. I won't use the word site, I think it's been kind of ruined by the cause of site specificity, but I'm thinking of a way that these are sculptures where there's both a strong homeless dimension, but there's also a way in which they do relate to a place.

Now this relationship to place is a complex issues and it has two facets. One way you can look upon it is to say the sculpture relates to a place by virtue, in a sense, of the intentionality of the commissioners and the sculptor. The sculpture is in some sense designed to be in that place and to be appropriate to the place, whereas the other side to it, and this is something that I think is not taken into account enough normally, is that quite a few sculptures that do find a kind of home and a place, find the home by virtue of meaning, significances or whatever that are placed upon them by subsequent use. I think this is the odd thing about so called public sculpture, the way that the sculptor has to open her or himself out to its later use.

There's a way that it goes out into the world, and whether it's going to be a success in that place, whether it's going to tie up with that place and even how it's going to be related to its place will depend upon subsequent public use. I think there are two sculptors who have been very busy in this area of production, Henry Moore and Chillida, who posed these issues I think in

rather interesting ways. One kind of iconic sculpture in this respect is this UNESCO reclining figure by Henry Moore, and I think that's because Henry Moore was so ambivalent about it in his writing on it. It's very clear he wants to be sure that it be seen, that he was creating it for this specific place, but that this was an autonomous work, so he obviously got this idea that autonomy and homelessness do go together.

It's clearly not the case because, unlike many of his other public sculptures, this is not a motif that he had already created which he then either just reproduced or reproduced on a larger scale, it was made for this specific site and in his answers in an interview about whether this figure had any allegorical significance, it's quite clear that he had his doubts about this, because he so had to insist that he had no allegorical connection with the UNESCO collection. I think we can all think of ways in which it relates in a way in its conception to some kind of humanist ideology that was embodied by UNESCO. Now it brings up homelessness in another respect. Firstly that when Henry Moore talked about the relationship between sculpture and architecture, one of his few clear statements about it is when he said it is meant to contrast with the architecture, because so much architecture is boring and you want this thing of interest which intrudes on the space and creates something out of the space.

The other thing of course is, as with so many sculptures in public spaces, they get constantly moved around. This has always been in front of the façade but you can see in the older photograph it was just near the entrance and has been pushed to one side, and that is just because the site has changed. There has been a lot of re-building on the site, it just couldn't stay in the same position and I think that's another thing to remember about this notion about site specificity is that sites change. A work that's created as site specific will acquire a very different meaning as the space around it changes.

Now the other thing you might have noticed is this little Chillida here which I think is a good example of plot sculpture. It was done later. Henry Moore's commission was part of a series of commissions for major public works around the building and I think you could say that even the sculptures by people like him and Noguchi were not actually conceived in collaboration with the architects: they were part of the same project, part of a same large humanist public project which of course nowadays is totally inaccessible. You can't get into this space at all easily; there are so many security barriers to go through. I sneaked out into it in order to get this picture. So the whole function of the space of course has completely changed.

The Chillida here, a wind comb, was acquired rather later and I think this is another token modern sculpture that's been commissioned and dumped out there on the lawn. I don't think it has any particular place there, looks ok, but of course to see Chillida just in those terms is to misrepresent his own particular fascination with place, because I don't think you can think of a more place-specific work than this famous wind comb in San Sebastian, which was

interestingly done in collaboration with an architect. It's become a kind of tourist site as well as part of a park where local inhabitants of San Sebastian go on Sunday afternoon and it's particularly spectacular when there's a storm and the waves crash over it, but it is really, in a very literal way, anchored in its site, but also I think conceptually it works incredibly well within that site.

Politically I find this fascinating because this was conceived and really got seriously underway in the Franco years. Franco only died in 1975 and it shows how we probably have a slight misconception of what was going on in the later years of the Franco regime. It was a totalitarian, a very conservative regime, but there were some quite interesting initiatives going on, particularly in places like the Basque country that had a certain sort of autonomy and this was very much a Basque initiative to create a work there. So it was part of San Sebastian's work on itself as an important place. Where the two come together is that in the late 80's, a decision was made by the town of Guernica to create a kind of memorial park to Guernica. We tend to think of Guernica entirely in terms of a fascist bombing outrage, and Picasso's famous picture, and in fact, the local government wanted to get Picasso to donate his picture to Guernica where it would be put on display. He didn't do it, so they created a mosaic replica instead, but they then created this park and decided to call it "The Park of the People of Europe". It was a kind of celebration, a humanist celebration of peace and reconciliation, very much needed in the Basque country at that particular juncture when there was a fair amount of violence and separatist action.

The first work was this huge monumental piece by Chillida and the second one was the Moore. I think it's rather nice that they're not quite in dialogue with one another and to begin with, we mustn't overlook the fact that this park had another monumental or commemorative significance. It was commemorated as a centre of Basque nationalism. This particular square in the village was a supposedly site of the Basque council that went back to the Middle Ages. So this was a monument to Basque identity as well as a commemoration of this horrendous event, and you can see that Chillida has taken this in with the title "House of our Fathers", he's taken it very much in the direction of a humanist celebration of Basque particularity and here it's particular to the place: it isn't just a replica of another work, but it has a generic significance to works that he had been producing earlier. This is a House for Goethe which he did in Frankfurt, just a little bit before he finished this piece here, that's much larger and much more monumental.

It's interesting to think about what significance it has. One would think that it would have been relatively uncontroversial, but actually, after it was commissioned, it raised a massive outcry led by a competitor sculptor who was much more of a Basque nationalist than Chillida and he felt that the whole project was a kind of sell out to international art interest, that he saw Chillida not as a local Basque sculptor, but as somebody who had achieved international success and was just being commissioned to create a master

work which would enhance the prestige of the place. There were more local sculptors who would have been better adapted to genuinely Basque initiative.

I wonder about this. Here I think one has an issue: there's already a contradiction between the intended meaning, which was peacefulness, humanity and so on and so forth, and the way that it was taken up publically by certain people who objected to its conception. Looking at this work, I find it a weird thing. House of Our Fathers does have, at least for me a slightly sort of atavistic reign, but it shades into the slightly darker side of nationalism when you think of House of Our Fathers, even though it's supposed to be protective: here is the house and here is a little sculpture in the centre which it's protecting. So there is that complexity of meaning and depending upon the photograph, you can see that there are different connotations.

What sparked off the controversy really was that as soon as the Chillida was installed, the decision was to try and acquire a Henry Moore as well. Henry Moore was still alive when they thought of it, but when the agreement was finally consolidated, Henry Moore had died. There was this worry that when the Chillida was seen in the context of it being paired with a Henry Moore, which was just seen as a token grand piece of modern art, it raised questions about the Chillida and that was one of the reasons I think that the Chillida became a little bit controversial.

Now what is this in terms of place specificity? It got there because Guernica Council asked Alan Bowness who was running the Henry Moore Foundation at that point, if they could acquire a Henry Moore. He decided that this very last work by Henry Moore would be an appropriate Guernica piece. A version had already been installed in Perry Green so the Guernica work is another: not really a replica, it's a second version of this same sculpture, which was put up here. So in a way, this really is a homeless sculpture, which sort of found a home.

What I found intriguing about it is that if you think of this in relation to the Chillida, I think this weirdly has developed a kind of appropriateness to the site. The idea of a figure in the shelter: given the fact it has these origins in his earlier helmet sculptures where there are issues of violence of war and therefore a protectiveness within these conditions, it actually does rather intriguingly thematically resonate with one of the demands of the commemorative sculpture. So I would say that actually, as a result of being placed in this site without any participation on the artist's part, it has acquired a layer of meaning which I think makes it a more interesting, resonant sculpture. It's not Henry Moore's making, it's not the commissioner's making, it is in the way in which it happens to have been placed there. Of course it fits with Henry Moore's background because he was very active in protests against the British Government's refusal to help the Spanish Republican side during the civil war. It was quite radical; he belonged to the Artists International, so again there's a weird appropriateness in terms of his career. Here I think is genuinely a sculpture that is homeless in terms of conception,

but has become somewhat less homeless as a result of the context in which it was placed.

There is a slightly more comic example where Chillida and Henry Moore were placed in competition with one another, and that is their work for the German Government. Helmut Schmidt, chancellor in Germany in the late 70's was a friend of Henry Moore's and he decided he wanted a Henry Moore outside his chancellery in Bonn. He managed to get Henry Moore to lend the sculpture and it was placed here. It has nothing to do with the site; it's a work that comes in various versions. I don't know if any of you have seen it on a very high traffic corner just outside the art gallery in Toronto? Here you could say that this point about sculpture having enough presence to create a sense of place has certain cogency, because this is a real non-place, particularly before the new façade was built onto the art gallery.

So it was set up in Bonn, and Schmidt thought it would be completely uncontroversial, the German Government would love it and they would buy it. It took two years of controversy and it was almost rejected. Finally the German Government agreed to finance it and it found its permanent home here. Then German Independence brought with it real difficulties. What happens when you move the chancellery? Do you move the sculpture? There was quite a controversy over it. Schmidt was insistent that it remain in place because he saw it as representative of German Democracy. I think two shapes having it off together doesn't seem to really represent democracy, but nevertheless he thought so. There was also a way in which it got very associated with Helmut Schmidt because people found that it was appropriate to his physique and he was also rather fond of the sculpture. Well in fact the decision was made not to move it and it stays here, slightly abandoned, a sort of monument to a German past. It's acquired a new significance as a sort of monument to the Federal Republic and when the new chancellery was built, it was decided that it would get a Chillida.

Again it was a private initiative to put a Chillida sculpture in front of the Chancellery. I've been to the site and I think Henry Moore was very lucky that he didn't have his sculpture moved here: this is not a particularly friendly site for a sculpture. This was created as a site-specific work, and here Chillida really put quite a bit into it, in the sense that he really wanted this to be seen as a monument to the unification of the two parts of Germany. This met with a fair amount of general derision from the German press. The symbolism wasn't seen to work. I wondered, what does one make of this thing now? I think it works in two ways: firstly I think it remains here as a static representation of a kind of uneasy conflict between these two halves of Germany. Chillida didn't think of it this way, but it's a conflict that hasn't gone away and here they are, these two things wrestling with one another in what I can't see as a very harmonious way. The other way in which it has become a monument is that it's a wonderfully clinical kind of post-modernism: this is a Foster building, everything is clean and nice clear lines.

The Chillida sculpture is a lump of great big dusty, dirty industrialism, which again is a kind of monument to the old Germany of the past, to its massive steel industry that has largely gone into decline. It's now become very much a kind of relic from the past from its homelessness, which has become part of its meaning, part of its significance in that particular place.

I want to finish off with a fascinating interplay between site and sitelessness, in one strange commission that Chillida got in 1972. This is one of the first outdoor sculpture parks which was created under the Franco regime by a group of quite progressive sculptors. It's an area underneath a flyover. You couldn't think of a more unfriendly place, and Chillida got a commission for it. I think he came up with a very appropriate response to this place, with this dangling sculpture, and I think again I have to read Place of Encounters as ironic. This is not a place where you sit around a warm campfire and have a nice cosy relationship with the work.

It was just about to be sited when the very conservative mayor of Madrid got word of it, and decided to use this as his gesture against modernism and of course against the Basques. That was the other problem with Chillida: he was a Basque, not a proper Spaniard. So he concocted a fake survey of the safety aspects of the work and said that actually it presented a public threat, that it could dangerously cause damage to this roadway. Chillida immediately came back and said I have consulted engineers, I know that it's perfectly safe. He presented the specifications, but this made no difference, and the mayor rejected it. The mayor said, look you can have the sculpture in this place but it has to sit on the ground. Chillida said it's not the same sculpture then, so I won't do it. So it was removed. It was shown in the Met Gallery, and then the Miro Foundation decided that they would adopt it temporarily, so it was housed just outside the Miro Museum. Then in 1977 when things had cooled down in Madrid, it was decided that Chillida might as well have his sculpture back where it really belongs, so it's been put back here. I think this is a wonderful example of dramatic homelessness combined with a dramatic kind of specificity and attention to placing and placement.

I suppose my argument is that it's interesting thinking in the terms of homelessness and place creating, it's interesting to think in terms of how there is a real problem about these permanent public works actually gaining any real connection with their site, but perhaps the way we ought to think of it is to say this doesn't necessarily just have to do with the intentions and terms of the commission or even the thoughtfulness of the input. There's a huge contingent element to it and in a sense, the public meaning, the sense of placeness created by a sculpture of this kind is actually a social creation more than it is a purely artistic creation.

Discussion and Q & A

Clare O'Dowd

There are a few things in both of the talks that you two have given about the subsequent use of sculpture, and the shelf life of sculpture and the context that's applied to it after the fact. I think that emerges from pretty much everything that we've just looked at. So I wanted to try and think about that a bit more in terms of homelessness and think about homelessness and context and how far we can mitigate homelessness by applying context after the fact. Does it work, acknowledging the context that a sculpture arrives in later?

AP Well I think there are two issues to homelessness. I think there's a sort of metaphysical issue that the Stern article raises, a kind of condition of modern life and so on and so forth. I think you could say it's a kind of outgrowth of an insistence on sculptural autonomy. It's a creation, and the condition of homelessness in itself is the creation of certain expectations that sculpture assert this radical autonomy, that it is radically self-sufficient. I suppose the interest of all our talks in a way has been how this line is blurred. There is a certain level of autonomy, but there's a way in which a certain amount of autonomy is surrendered as soon as any kind of relationship is set up between the work and the place it is, unless it is land art or something where the work and the place are glued together in a sense, so you don't have this same sort of issue. I suppose we've all been talking about spaces that have public use.

So it's not as if the sculpture can just declare its own place: it's got a place already to deal with and it's got to negotiate it. That's part of what we're talking about. In a way you could say that the whole talk around homelessness and sitelessness has created an interest in site. Part of what's happened in the past four or five decades, is that there has been a much deeper engagement with the relationship between work and site than there was in the late Victorian period, when a sculptor would be commissioned to do a work for a particular place, but it wasn't made into a big conceptual issue that required a lot of thinking. I think we've created a situation where there's quite a few works that are conceived in such a way that they make some kind of thoughtful connection to the site, both in terms of the space and in terms of its social use and its political significance.

SL One of the things that fascinates me about it is the way that that changes in public spaces and the way that meaning will be conferred upon a sculpture rather than the meaning that resides in it. I think Metzger's Flailing Trees is an example of this. This now has a completely different meaning in the park than it did in the Peace Garden. I don't think it really means the same thing anymore and it has a whole new life in the park and it will continue to have that life as well. I was really surprised that Metzger has allowed the sculpture to be reconstructed when the express purpose of it originally was to

demonstrate this disintegration of the object. So now that gives it a completely new set of perimeters and meanings.

AP I think he's just saying you can re-enact it if you want.

CO He's handing over some of that autonomy.

SL Yes, you now get to decide what needs to be planted and it's not ever going to disintegrate in the way it was intended to.

AP Well it will, I mean the part of it is it is to disintegrate, but each remaking will disintegrate.

SL You've got something to say about remaking as well, thinking about Nelson and Schneider and their practice of remaking a work and it not being the same work, but being a remade work in a different home or site. Nelson and Schneider both go back to the same works and they both remake them in different ways.

JP I was curious about the motives for Metzger's decision, because I just find it curious in terms of his previous production. Why would he choose? Why do you think he's made that decision to allow it to be remade and decontextualized?

SL I wasn't party to those conversations, but I think it might be something about this institutional context, the acquisition of a work like this into a collection and the possibility that that has. Charles alluded to his work being collected by the Arts Council, and that being a particular point at which he started to think about its homelessness: when it found a home. We've also talked about things being in institutions, holding objects and not showing objects, and how that might be a point of interest.

AP Hasn't he also inserted himself into a different sort of circuit than his auto-destructive works, because it's a fairly grand work really? It's a different kind from his earlier works and I think maybe it's an honest recognition that that's what it is.

AQ One thing I was thinking about: when you're talking about re-contextualising where sculptures are in terms of their places, in this case it was the actual artist that has made that conscious decision to that, whereas the other pieces you were talking about Alex, it's almost like it was circumstantial.

AP Well he's leaving it open to certain stuff. I think the other thing to remember is it is an art piece after all this is not a sort of open public space. The sculpture garden here is an extension of the museum isn't it? So he's not dealing with the same problems as if he decided to put it in front of the City Hall in Manchester where it would be a very different set of issues that would be raised.

AQ I was just going to pick up on a point you made Alex about perhaps one of the early examples where the meaning and site are so intrinsically linked with land art. I think that the point that a lot of land artists reached was that the only way to ensure that was for them to become home owners: they needed to own the site of the sculpture. So if you think about James Turrell or Michael Heizer or Walter De Maria, they had to own it completely. I think that was the point that Smithson came to after he made Partially Buried Woodshed, a work where the meaning was conferred on it after the event, which is also a work that Mike Nelson has returned to. I think that was the turning point that, regardless of what your intention is, by making that work on Kent State University and in light of the events that happened there, that particular meaning became conferred on that work. So the work that Smithson was making when he died, for example, was made on a private estate. These were the only ways to have some control over that.

AP You could also say that of something like Spiral Jetty. He had a kind of passive control in a sense that this was a site, which only became a site by virtue of his putting the work there. It's incredibly difficult to get to. Interestingly of course it has been degraded by too many visitors.

AQ It's not so difficult to get to now. Ever since four wheel drive vehicles and GPS, it's much easier to find now and also it's returned, because for a while it was below the surface of the lake.

AP It's an in between state, it's not like the Kent State sculpture.

AQ It's also in between ownership because it's leasehold, so the land is leased. That lease came up relatively recently and the work was threatened, because there was an attempt to drill for oil again that was why the site had been abandoned in the first place. So I think in those terms, of the banality of home ownership, leasehold, freehold, those questions about ownership of land and of home has a lot to do with this.

AP Yes and actually one interesting example that I didn't include is Moore's Knife Edge Two Piece outside the Houses of Parliament. There was a whole dispute because it needed to be restored, and they couldn't work out who owned it and who was responsible for it. I think that brings up another issue, which is this issue of renovation. Most sculptures in open outdoor spaces need constant maintenance, so quite literally a work is not going to survive in anything like the form the artist wanted it to unless people are prepared to put some money into it and take care of the thing. Interestingly the Perry Green sculpture had to undergo a huge and very expensive restoration because it was looking all sort of patchy, smudgy and rather ugly because they got the patina rather wrong. Wouldn't you think too that even the ownership doesn't confirm permanence; it's a relative sort of permanence in what happens to your estate?

AQ I'm not sure what this quite connects with when you talk about Smithson. I've never seen Spiral Jetty, but what evidence I've gathered from anything I've read about it is that it was chosen not because it was an interesting site, but with some hugely deeply felt sort of passion for that place and the fact that its inaccessible or far away. Smithson had a deep feeling of connection with the place, he sort of felt as part of that site there.

AP That's almost a connection with a place that is rather like a romantic landscape painter, that instead of doing a painting of it, he has anchored it as his sort of place. The thing one must remember is it's only a few miles away from quite an important site, which is the Golden Spike, the place where the transcontinental railway finally join together. Of course it has no railway any more, it's only got about a hundred yards of track because twenty years after it they had to move the track because it didn't work particularly well there. Also I think that a dis-used oil place there is actually an important part of it. So there is this romantic response to it, but I think there are also these various specifics that already are creating some sense of place out of that area that I think he also responded to.

AQ But part of what you call the romantic response, the colour, the texture, the material, the barrenness, I mean they were very sort of physical and sensual responses in a way.

AP Yes and that's evident in his film.

AQ The water and the rocks and the sky. There was just one other point I wanted to make. I have this image of the Chadwick on the transporter and it sort of struck me. I think you mentioned words like 'un-fixity' or the lack of fixity to something. I'm not a great fan of Chadwick's sculptures frankly and I feel that thinking of the Houses of Parliament, for instance that run-down Burghers of Calais sculpture there, that any sculpture for me that really works has its own unfixity, in that by definition you can't get a sculpture. It's not just the difference between an object type sculpture and a more loosely structured thing. There's something intrinsic in any sculpture that's beyond the reach of the hand, because with your hand you can sort of feel the whole thing. Any sculpture beyond the reach of the hand, you just don't get all in one, so there's a sort of essential unfixity built in. I just thought that - sorry Chadwick - but you have to put a sculpture like that on a transporter to inject this quality of unfixity. I'm afraid that, in a way, if it was a better sculpture, it would have it anyway.

SL Well I guess you've got that start of Rodin I'm thinking about, opening up that kind of unfixity of sculpture, and that's kind of implicit in this

discussion. I just wanted to point to a kind of pleasure, a pleasure that might come.

AQ I wonder if we could come back to the homeless spectator actually, seeing as that was an interesting kind of inversion of the things that we've been talking about, and maybe think about it a little bit in terms of this kind of private space and how that excludes or makes homeless the sculpture. What made me think about that was thinking about Smithson…

CO I've been thinking about this through Alex's presentation in terms of the Henry Moore and Toreador in Guernica and the idea of the homeless spectator finding shelter in there. I thought it was really interesting that they were both architectural in nature and how they had that quality where potentially it looked as though you could find some sort of shelter in there, but clearly you couldn't. There's a definite quality of displacement to looking at those sculptures as well. I have a feeling of utter displacement looking at this, the idea that you can't find a way into a sculpture, not necessarily from an architectural point of view, but certainly that you can't get in. Like the Spiral Jetty: stepping inside it like you are somehow outside it and then as soon as there is the potential to take that movement inside the sculpture, it completely changes the perspective of it and the experience; the encounter with it. I think the Moore and that Chillida give that sort of potential.

AP It's an interesting point because I'm talking about the state of the public sphere and how people place themselves in the world, and you could say there would be something completely ludicrous about trying to create a sculpture which gave you a sense of extreme belongingness and grounding, it would just be inappropriate. So in a sense, we start off with the sculpture as working with these two parameters of a sense of displacement and homeless, and a kind of temporary sense of belonging in that place. I suppose actually Guernica is a good example of a place that was almost obliterated by the bombing: a good example of the precariousness of place within a contemporary home. I would also say that that's my slight problem with the Chillida, in that there is an appeal to a kind of deep sense of grounded-ness and this ancient Basque civilization that he is referring to. He even discovered that there was some megalithic cave on a hill that you could see from the sculpture and he felt he has to connect with my sense of a sort of home for Basque-ness. But I think the sculpture undoes that, because I think it's quite an aggressive and threatening thing and it certainly doesn't give you any feeling. It's neither a fortress that protects you from the outside and nor is it a nice kind of comfortable home, it's a weird sort of space. It's another case of an artist's talent outstripping the intentions in a way that he's created something that is true to its condition.

AQ I do remember one of the first things I was told in art school about making sculpture, is it has to do with the limits of what you can expect to do. You can't make a sculpture up in the air, for example. Of course although it might work in engineering terms, you couldn't feel secure in relation to it. I suppose it's the tension, the conflict the sculptor might work with, between the possibility of making something, especially an abstract sculpture, and how to overcome its objective materiality, which leads you to encounter it as an odd object, peculiarly stranded somewhere and here it's taken away. But also Chillida's sculptures do this strange thing of reaching out and around and getting hold of and so on. So they do provoke encounters: encounter is what they do.

AP Also, I think that's even true of the House of Our Fathers, where you feel it's coming down the hill. He made the point that it's a little bit like a ship, that it's sort of got docked there and it is a dressing for space around it. I think that sort of open mouth is a quite aggressive address of a space in front of it. So that's important. I was just thinking here about another issue you raised which you hinted at in the case of the Matta-Clark. I think there, that work embodies the notion of sculpture work as an event, which is epitomised in his film as well and in one of the films he has a second house he did, he actually shows the destruction. So he focuses on the dismantling and remaking of the house, so it's an event rather than a permanent thing. I think even the building next door to the Pompidou Centre was about to be demolished, that's why he was given permission to create that.

CO That's why he was able to create most of his works, because he was using buildings that would not exist soon afterwards. But there is a really strong performative aspect to Matta Clark's work and I think the films are just as important in terms of that performative strategy: that relationship with bodies and making and all the rest of it that happens in the films, but doesn't happen when you just look at the object.

AP It nicely ties up with the Heideggerian idea of a place as event as well. I don't think Matta Clark would have wanted to go there.

CO No, I think he would have accepted it but not from Heidegger.

AP Sam I have one question for you. It was interesting that we always see these views, the odd shots of When Attitudes Become Form, and you made a good point that the works seem to have a temporary home there, but I can't think of a single work which has been since that exhibition, or that has been envisaged in terms of its installation at that exhibition. We all know that there are certain works that acquire their fate because they're shown in one place and that then becomes the classic shot of the work. But I don't think any of those installation shots led to any of the work. Most of the works that you showed in those slides, I don't recognise, so there's something kind of odd that is going

on in that it's not the individual work, it's all the works isn't it. Can anybody think of a single work that has been...?

AQ Robert Morris. The Robert Morris work that was shown in that form, when he had, I can't remember the exact year, but he had a show probably about ten years ago, but that was completely making that same piece again.

AQ That was much more recent.

AQ This was some time ago, yes absolutely. Also the Flannigan rope piece, that's been used as sort of exemplar, a right way of doing it. There are a few.

AP There's a few yes, but it struck me how few.

SL The objects don't exist independently in the same way and that's where they have a particular identity, or that's how it's been construed.

AP Also there were two places weren't there, there was Berne and the ICA.

SL Yes, absolutely, and they were very different by all accounts in those places.

AQ The London one had a few artists brought into it.

AP And interestingly Charles Harrison couldn't stand Harold Szeeman. There was a bit of conflict there.