Particles of Moisture or other Substance Suspended in Air and Visible as Clouds

Approaching Ambiguity through Site-Related Creative Practice

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Kreider + O'Leary collaborate to make performance, installation and time-based media work in relation to sites of architectural and cultural interest. **Dr. Kristen Kreider** is Senior Lecturer in Poetry and Director of the Practice-based PhD Programme at Royal Holloway, University of London. **James O'Leary** is Lecturer in Innovative Technology and Director of the M.Arch Design Realisation Programme at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London. http://www.kreider-oleary.net.

Measure & Boundary

Between August 1968 and July 1969, the artist Mark Boyle asked a number of randomly chosen persons, blindfolded, to throw a dart at a large map of the world. Through this process, Boyle selected one thousand places on earth. Repeating the process using maps of an increasingly larger scale, Boyle pinpointed an exact location within these places to which he would then travel. Upon arrival, Boyle would throw a right-angle up into the air: the position in which it landed became one corner of a 6 x 6 ft. square demarcating the physical boundaries of a specific site. Each square then became the basis for an artwork.[1]

Boyle's 6 ft. square plots suggest site as an arbitrary geometric demarcation of physical space: fixed, finite and awaiting form. According to architectural theorist Andrea Kahn, a similarly limited – and limiting – view of site prevails in architectural design. Kahn takes issue with

this in 'Overlooking: A Look at How we Look at Site' (1996) where she emphasises the complexity inherent in any site: 'Always mutable, site is a collection of scales, programmes, actors and ecologies that include past imprints as well as future changes,' she argues.[2] From this, we appreciate site as a system of spatial and material relationships that change over time: imprinted with the trace of past changes; pregnant with the potential for future change. 'To paraphrase Hélène Cixous,' continues Kahn, site 'belongs to the order of 'feminine' continuity,'[3] by which we understand site as intrinsic to the natural continuum of time and space that is our worldly reality. For Kahn, a number of artists working in relation to site (e.g. Walter de Maria, Richard Long and Robert Smithson) recognise this complexity of site, whereas designers 'prefer to apprehend sites as finite, or fixed'.[4] Through this, Kahn argues, 'design thinking institutes a forceful myth: the contained and controllable site,' which she explicitly links to 'assumptions that the goal of design is rational order and the purpose of analysis is preparing site through documentation, making way for design's (supposedly benign) controls.'[5] Kahn's critique of how site is conceptualised within design practice raises a number of questions for us: an architect and poet who make creative work in relation to site.

Firstly, if the concept of site as a bounded and controllable entity paves the way for a design proposition predicated on

the rational ordering of space, and if the purpose of site analysis is conventionally understood to prepare the ground for this kind of proposition, then how does the goal of design proposition as well as the purpose and procedure of site analysis change when site is understood in Kahn's terms? Furthermore, if the typical function of an architectural drawing is to communicate clearly a design proposition informed by site analysis, then what are the implications for architectural drawing, in particular, if we conceive of site as this complex material, spatial, temporal – and, we would add, cultural – matrix, pursuing methods of site analysis and forwarding design proposition accordingly?

We suggest that to conceive of site as a multi-faceted and multi-layered complex presents a particular challenge to architectural drawing practice. The challenge, as we see it, is to engage with and communicate the complexity of any given site, whether this be in the site analysis, design proposition or, importantly, in the relationship between the two. We take up this challenge in the pages that follow. Here we use the form of a series of composite drawings to present the specific narrative of one of our creative projects, *Video Shakkei* (2011).[6] Employing pansemiotic features of language, these drawings communicate aspects of our original project: performance, installation and video work developed in relation to a number of carefully chose sites in the Kansai region of Japan.[7] They also incorporate elements of

our preparation for and reflection on the project. We consider the resulting drawings neither as site study, strictly speaking, nor design proposition, per se, but manifestations of representational form that include aspects of each: close analysis of material, contextual, social and historical aspects of site, on the one hand; imaginings of generative possibility, on the other. Our aim, ultimately, is to devise a drawing method in which the stages of site analysis and design proposition merge, as form emerges, through a subjective *response* to the complexity of site – or, more accurately, through the record or documentation of such a response.

Predicated on an aesthetics of response, we conceive of all of our work relating to site as both a form and act of communication: therefore, and necessarily, clouded by ambiguity. This prompts our critical investigation into the role of ambiguity for creative practices that relate to site, including drawing.[8] We undertake this critical investigation in the pages that follow through a writing sequence: one that is punctuated by seven statements on ambiguity derived from our creative and critical practice.

Crucially, we consider the writing and drawing sequences that follow to complement one another, while instigating a turning point in our collaborative practice: from an emphasis on representation and response toward pursuit of architectural proposition. On the one hand (/page), the writing sequence positions and vicariously analyse the methodology and aesthetics of our site-related creative practice to date. On the other hand (/page), the drawing sequence suggests ways that we might employ this methodology and aesthetics for the purposes of architectural proposition.

Through this oscillation, writing and drawing, we envision how a creative practice – one situated at a crossover between architecture, art and poetry; one capable of responding to the complexity of a given site(s) – can be employed in the pursuit and communication of a design proposition predicated on one's subjective relationship to place, with all of its attendant ambiguity.

1. To be human is to encounter complexity, as it is to grapple with ambiguity.

Site & Sign

In pursuit of our critical investigation into the role of ambiguity in drawing and other site-related creative practices, we return to Boyle's work of the late 1960's and early 1970's. At first seeming to align with Kahn's critique of the 'contained and controllable site', further examination of Boyle's work reveals a more complex notion of site emerging, akin to the 'mutable' site of Kahn's revision above. In *Journey to the Surface of the Earth: Mark Boyle's Atlas and Manual,* published as part of an exhibition at the Haags Gemeentemuseum (1970), Boyle writes: 'Once the actual square [i.e. bounded or measured site] has been selected a multi sensual presentation of the site will be made. This will be done in the medium most suited to the problems posed by the individual site.'[9] To make these multi-sensory presentations, Boyle would collect samples, make films, form casts, plant seeds and check his own and others' physical responses to the site.[10] Thus revealing the historical, contextual and experiential qualities intrinsic to each

specific site, Boyle's work exemplifies Kahn's claim that 'always mutable, site is a collection of scales, programmes, actors and ecologies that include past imprints as well as future changes.' Significantly, these site studies were both the means and the end of Boyle's practice. That is, he did not undertake them for the purposes of design proposition; rather, Boyle's intent, as an artist, was simply to communicate the inherent complexity of site.

How did Boyle communicate this complexity? J.L. Locher explains how, as part of his site study, Boyle would 'literally lift up the loose upper layer of the square with all its components in place, even the coating of dust' and then transfer 'the exact shapes of the immovable elements – the solid base, for instance large rocks or the hard pavement of a road,' onto a piece of fibreglass with wooden supports, fixing the whole thing with a coat of resin.[11] Through this procedure, which Boyle developed himself, he made the 'earthprobes': objects that could then be transported and exhibited in a gallery context. Below is an example of one of Boyle's earthprobes, 'Fixing' a site through the earthprobes would again seem to align Boyle's work with design practitioners who, in Kahn's terms, seek to 'contain' and 'control' site for the purposes of generating formal construction. However, a continued reading of Locher suggests differently. Locher argues that the earthprobes attempt 'not to portray a piece of reality, but just to present it to us literally as it appeared to him.'[12] Implicitly, Boyle contains the specific site in order to present it to the viewer reality in all of its 'thereness': absent of formal proposition; evading (or, more accurately, attempting to evade) formal representation.

Mark Boyle
World Series, Sardinia.
Elemental Study (red scarp), earth etc. on
fibreglass
183 X 183 cm
1978

This situates Boyle's work, for Locher, more in relation to the realist tradition of the Romantic period, originating around 1800.[13] These artists, writes Locher, sought 'to experience continuously changing reality itself rather than a "formed" reality'; however, once the aim became communicating that experience – (and, we would ask, is that not the role of all art?) – form was necessary: 'Without the use of a form with some degree of permanence it is impossible to convey something to others. The use of some kind of form remained, and is always, inevitable,' writes Locher.[14] Boyle's earthprobes evidence this concomitant mistrust and use of form as a means of communicating. As Boyle, himself, states: 'Most of all you suspect the way you formulate. And finally you say there is this, there is this, there is this.'[15]

Ultimately, Locher's reading suggests that, like his contemporaries alluded to by Kahn (de Maria, Long, Smithson), Boyle also recognises that 'we are always in the midst of site,'[16] when site is understood as, itself, existing amidst the natural continuum of space and time that is our worldly reality. It is this continually changing material, spatial and temporal continuum that the artist, Boyle, 'cuts' when measuring specific sites for his artistic engagement and 'cuts out' when dislocating these specific sites into the gallery context. Through this act of cutting and displacing, Boyle's work thus becomes a formal means of dividing the natural continuum so that site becomes a sign of the world's material reality: a sign with which the viewer engages in another context; a context in which it proclaims that the world, in all of its complexity, exists, and that we who exist are situated in and in relation to it. In Boyle's work, *site* thus becomes the *sign* of a relational existence: a sign of our existence in relation to material reality or the world of objects and things; a sign that, upon our reception of it, aims to communicate 'there is this, there is this, there is this.'

2. Our relation to the world is semiotic; that is, potentially ambiguous and multivalent.

Documentation & Frame

In 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects' (1968), the artist Robert Smithson, one of Boyle's contemporaries, writes that '[t]he strata of the Earth is a jumbled museum. Embedded in the sediment is a text that contains limits and

boundaries which evade the rational order, and social structures which confine art.'[17] To present this 'jumbled museum' of earthly layers, this irrational worldly text, within what he perceived as the confinement of the gallery system, Smithson encountered a similar dilemma to Boyle: how to contain, within artistic form, the complexity of site. Where Boyle resolves his dilemma of how to limit, thereby communicate, material reality in all of its 'thereness' through the earthprobes, Smithson resolves this dilemma through 'Non-sites': 'Yet if art is art it must have limits. How can one contain this 'oceanic' site? I have developed the Non-Site, which in a physical way contains the disruption of the site,' he writes.

What interests us particularly is not Smithson's 'Non-sites' so much as the network of signs that arises concomitant with their development: a network of signs emergent through what Smithson calls the dialectic of 'site' and 'nonsite'. Smithson theorises this dialectic in a footnote to his essay 'The Spiral Jetty' (1972) where, under the heading 'Dialectic of Site and Nonsite', he first lists characteristics of site as: 'open limits,' 'a series of points,' 'outer coordinates,' 'subtraction,' 'indeterminate certainty,' 'scattered information,' 'reflection,' 'edge,' 'some place (physical),' 'many.' He then lists characteristics of nonsite as: 'closed limits,' 'an array of matter,' 'inner coordinates,' 'addition,' 'determinate uncertainty,' 'contained information,' 'mirror,' 'center,' 'no place (abstract),' 'one'.[18] Between these two is a 'range of convergence' or 'double path'. Smithson writes:

> The range of convergence between Site and Nonsite consists of a course of hazards, a double path made up of signs, photographs,

and maps that belong to both sides of the dialectic at once …Two-dimensional and three-dimensional things trade places with each other in the range of convergence. Large scale becomes small. Small scale becomes large. A point on a map extends to the size of the land mass. A land mass contracts into a point. Is the Site a reflection of the Nonsite (mirror), or is it the other way around? The rules of this network of signs are discovered as you go along uncertain trails both mental and physical.[19]

In the specific context of Smithson's argument, neither site nor nonsite exist except in their relation: a relation made manifest through the 'range of convergence' or 'double path of signs' between the two.

How do site and nonsite manifest as elements in Smithson's artwork, understood here in terms of a network of signs? It is, we suggest, through Smithson's act of documentation and framing, as well as the interplay between theory and practice in his work. This is evident in the essay 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects' (1968) where, in the course of discussing a number of his site-related artworks, Smithson presents two juxtaposed images:

ROBERT SMITHSON, Non-Site, 1968. (Mica from Portland, Conn.)

Buckwheat Mineral Dump. Rock site in an uncontained condition before being contained in Non-Site #3 by Robert Smithson. (Photo: Nancy Holt.)

Crop of page from Robert Smithson's essay
Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects
1968

We read these two images in relation to the critique inherent in the artist's work. Writing in *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (2006), art and architectural theorist Jane Rendell argues that Smithson's dialectic – and land art, more generally – offers a critique of the gallery system by proposing alternative sites for art.[20] Within the logic of this institutional critique, 'site' is understood a material reality that exists, uncontained and unbounded, 'outside' of the gallery system. Meanwhile, 'non-site' is a material reality existing, contained and objectified, 'inside' the gallery. Site thus serves an emancipatory role in relation to the gallery system, whereas non-site is commodified and institutionalised by this very system. This is evident in the juxtaposition of images above. On the left-hand side is Smithson's *Non-site*: physically framed and explicitly titled, the *Non-Site* is presented as a bounded and commodified art object. In contrast, the caption of the image on the right reads: 'Buckwheat Mineral Dump. Rock site in an uncontained condition before being contained in *Non-Site #3* by Robert Smithson (Photo: Nancy Holt.)'[21] Smithson's caption suggests that site precedes and exceeds its containment within form, the form being that of the art object *Non-Site #3*. Yet, this caption is misleading: a 'containment' of site is as evident here in the photographic frame as much as it is in the physically framed *Non-Site* – also, interestingly, presented here as a photographic image; the *Non-Site* is a frame within a frame. Paradoxically, it is only through its containment within the photographic sign, itself situated in (i.e. framed by) the context of Smithson's critical writing, that site can be understood in terms of Smithson's concept of 'site': an uncontainable material reality preceding

and exceeding form. All of this leads us to conclude that it is through Smithson's act of framing and documentation, including his act of writing about his artwork, that 'site' and 'non-site' emerge as signs: signs within the network of signs that comprise Smithson's artwork, thus making manifest – and informing – his concepts of site and nonsite.

3. An image, itself, may not be ambiguous, as are its meaning and narrative.

/cloud/

We propose that Smithson's theory and practice of the dialectic between site and nonsite can be understood as a semiological system. Within the logic of this system, the photograph on the right-hand side in the 'Crop of page…' image is a sign that stands for what cannot be bound or contained within this system. Site, or the sign of site, thus serves as the constituent outside of the *system of signs* that is Smithson's art.

We base our proposition on a model outlined by art and architectural theorist Hubert Damisch in his book *Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting* (1972), where he draws from semiotic theory to analyse perspectival art in the West. At one point, Damisch refers to an early experiment by Fillippo Brunelleschi, using this as a conceptual model to analyse single-point perspective: the most predominant representational system in Western art. In this early experiment, Brunelleschi first depicted the baptistery of San Giovanni on a panel using single point perspective.
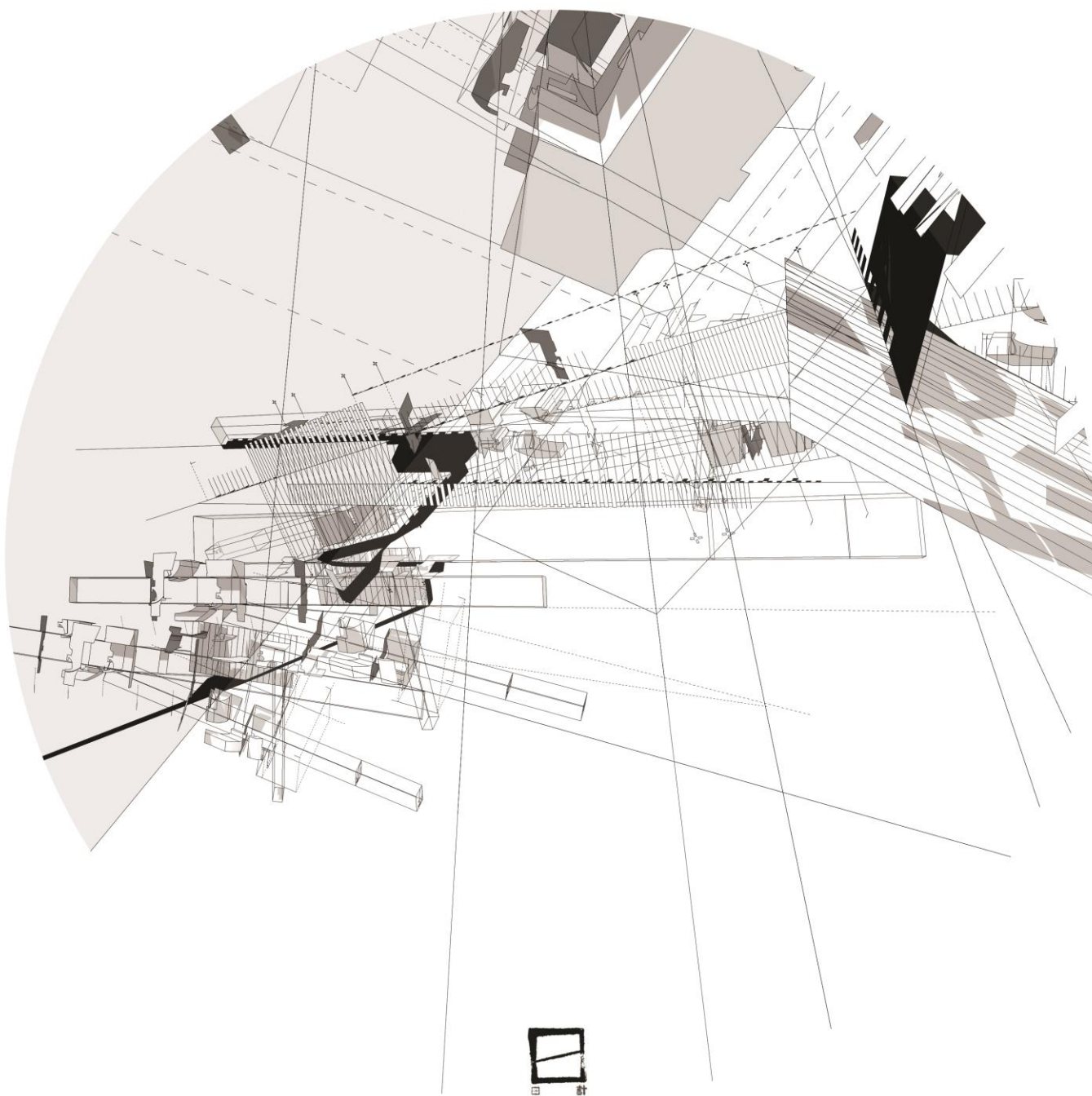
Kansai
Digital Image
260mm x260mm
2013

He then cut a viewing aperture into the panel at the vanishing point of the composition. A viewer, standing behind the panel and holding up a mirror to the front, could view the pictorial scene, through the mirror, in perfect perspective. From this point of vantage, the buildings were represented as perspectival images; however, 'Brunelleschi made no attempt to depict [the] sky; he merely showed it (*dimostrare*),' writes Damisch, '[a]nd in order to do so, he resorted to a subterfuge that introduces into the representational circuit a direct reference to external reality, and at the same time a supplementary reduplication of the specular structure upon which the experiment was founded.'[22] Damisch cites Antonio Manetti's *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi* (c. 1480) where Manetti describes this act of subterfuge, translated here as follows: 'As he had to show the sky on which the walls shown in perspective were stamped, he put darkened silver so that the natural air and sky would be mirrored there, and also the clouds to be seen in the air, pushed along by wind when it blew.'[23]
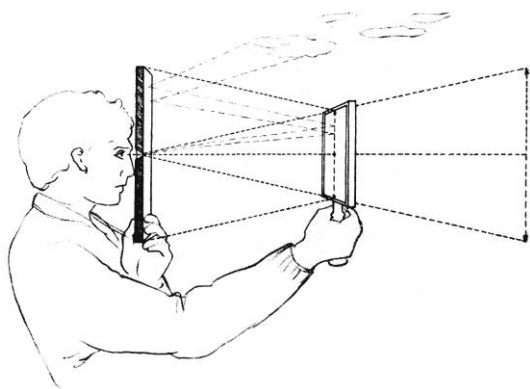
A reconstruction of Brunelleschi's first experiment

According to Damisch, the mirrored sky in this early experiment testifies to the limits of the perspectival system since one cannot represent within single point perspective: the sky without measure, the wind blowing the clouds. The mirror, writes Damisch, is thus an 'epistemological emblem' that 'reveals perspective as a structure of exclusion, the coherence of which is founded upon a series of rejections, and yet which has to make room for the very things that it excludes from its order.'[24] In Damisch's analysis, /cloud/ becomes a sign of the constituent outside of this semiotic system.

Damisch's argument becomes relevant to our reading of Smithson's essay at the point where Damisch writes that 'the functions imparted to *cloud* are … essentially semiotic: *cloud* is a sign, in the triple sense of a symbol (word), an icon, and an index.'[25] This 'triadic relation,' drawn from the semiotics of C.S. Peirce 'conditions all discourse on art,' argues Damisch, 'and on that account is fundamental to the present work. The graph marked as /cloud/ functions as a sign on several levels at once.'[26] As a symbol (the word 'cloud'), it is related to the material reality of clouds through a learned, cultural relationship. As an icon (the image of a cloud in a painting (or, in Brunellschi's experiment, the image of cloud in the mirror), it bears a likeness to objects and things in the world. As an index, it represents what eludes objectification (wind, air), but which is nevertheless recognisable through the effect it has on real objects (the blowing clouds in the mirrored image of Brunelleschi's experiment). Relating this to Smithson's dialectic, the photographic sign of the uncontained site in Smithson's dialectic similarly functions as a sign on

three levels: as a symbol (part of the network of signs functioning within a differential, oppositional system of the dialectic of site and nonsite where it symbolises the site as an uncontained material reality), as an icon (depicting an image of the reality of a site) and as an index (the material reality of the site is recognisable through a trace of the effect of light on it within the photograph). Smithson's network or system of signs is thus comprised of inherently complex signs, all of which frame, document and theorise the complexity of site.

What are the implications of this for appreciating the importance of ambiguity in drawing and other creative practices relating to site? To answer this, we return to Rendell's discussion of Smithson. According to Rendell, Smithson's dialectic suggests a privileging of site and, in keeping with her aim of theorising what she calls 'critical spatial practice' at the intersection between art and architecture, Rendell turns this privileged status of site on its head to think through the possibilities inherent in Smithson's dialectic for a critique of architecture. Drawing specific attention to the fact that Smithson's non-sites include maps and other forms of documentation, Rendell maintains that an architectural drawing can be considered a non-site. She then argues that, rather than seeing the drawing as being 'contained' by the institution of architecture, as Smithson understands the non-site to be contained in the gallery system, "it is also possible to think of things the other way around and to consider the architectural drawing as the site from which the institution of architecture can be critiqued.'[27] Like Rendell, we see the potential inherent in Smithson's dialectic.

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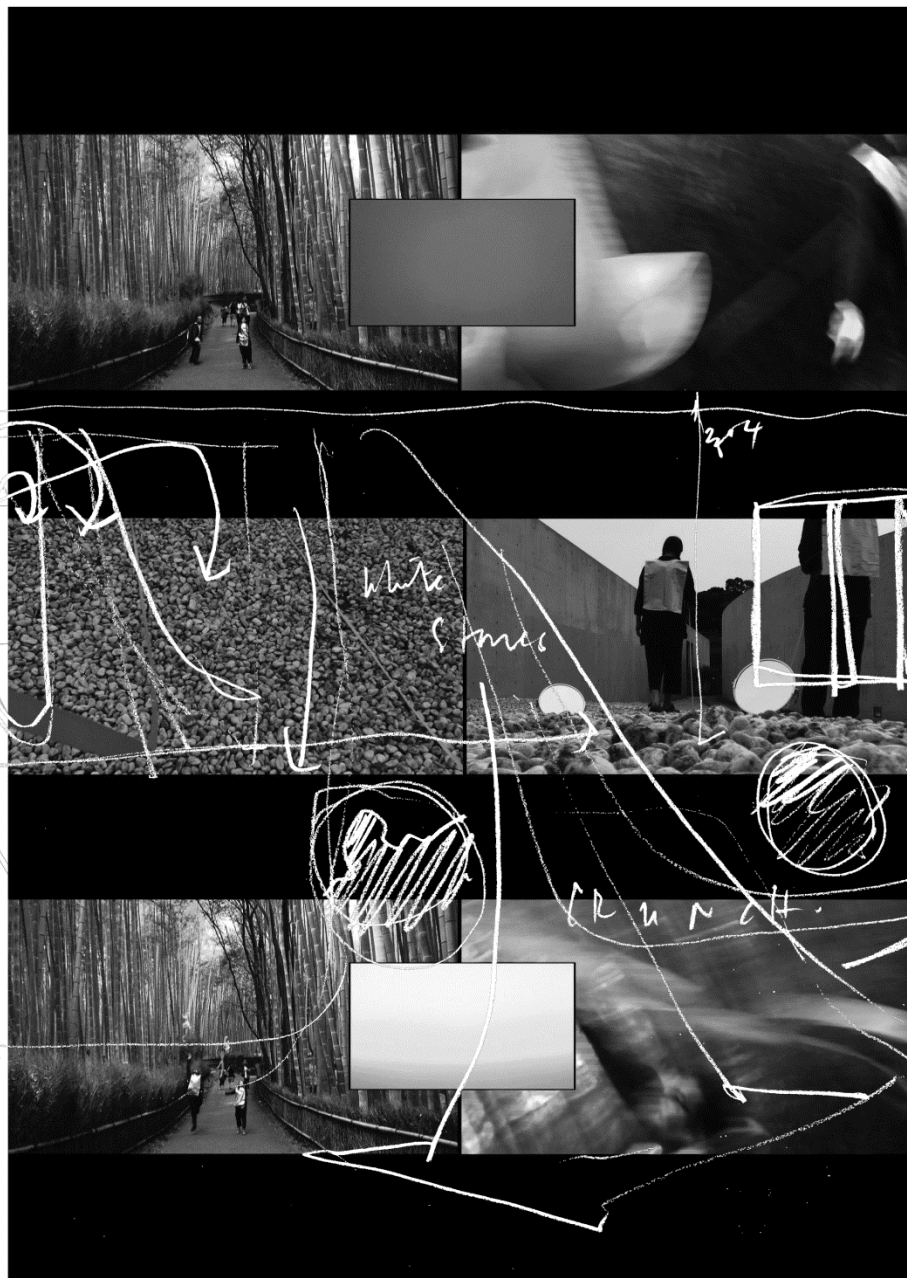
However, where Rendell emphasises the potential for the architectural drawing, as a nonsite, to become a site for architectural critique, we emphasise the creative and critical potential for drawing and other site-related creative practices to emerge as a network of signs between what Smithson would call site and nonsite, the former being understood, for Rendell, in terms of the architectural drawing. Alongside this emphasis, we promote the possibility of working with complex signs and drawing from the pansemiotic field of language – including, but not limited, to the language of architectural drawing – in order to account for that which lies 'outside' of conventional forms of representation: what we see as the complexity of site as well as one's subjective (embodied, affective, cognitive) relation to it.

For our part, working as Kreider + O'Leary, we seek to employ combinations and permutations of icon, index and symbol within assemblages of image, object, action and text to generate structures both narrative and poetic in response to a particular site. We consider this a communicative act. Thus nuancing Smithson's dialectic between site and nonsite with this extended appreciation of a dialogic relation between ourselves and site (and, indeed, between one another – a further complexity …), we infuse our work with a sense of responsibility. This belies the ethical imperative behind our work as, confronted by that which we often do not understand, we nevertheless attempt to respond to and through this ambiguity.

4. Ambiguity is a foundation for ethics, which subsides with authoritative certainty.

Performance & Place

How do we engage with site in order to experience, relate and respond to it? To answer this, we turn to an essay entitled 'Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/' where Rosalind Krauss draws from Damisch's *A Theory of /Cloud/* in order to discuss the grid paintings of Agnes Martin. Initially, Krauss refers to a phenomenological reading of Martin's work by fellow art critic, Kasha Linville, who pays particular attention to the space between a *close-up* viewing of one of Martin's gridded canvases and a view of the canvas from *faraway*:
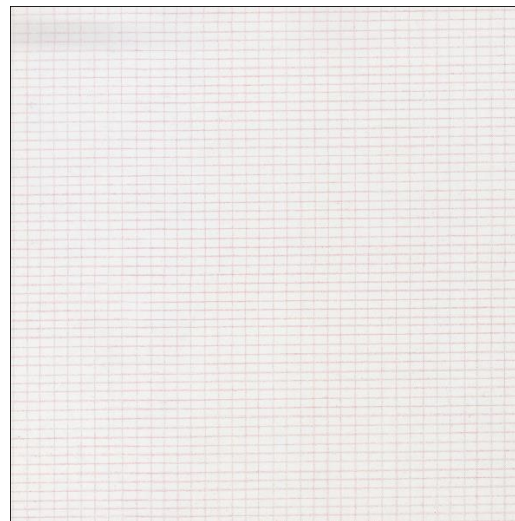
Agnes Martin, *close up* view of *Rose*
1965
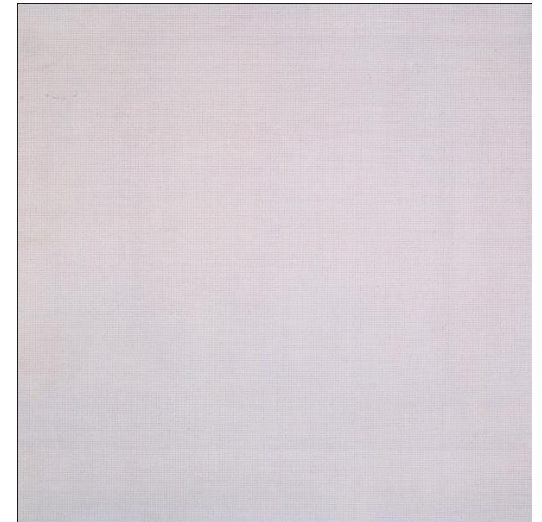
Agnes Martin, *faraway* view of *Rose*
1965

Paraphrasing Linville, Krauss describes how, when shifting between a close-up and faraway view of Martin's paintings, 'the ambiguities of illusion take over from the earlier materiality of a surface redoubled by the weave of Martin's grids or bands; and at this place the paintings go atmospheric.'[28] Krauss understands this viewing experience as 'haptic' rather than 'optic', whereby she relates it to Damisch's '/cloud/'.[29] Importantly, Krauss stresses that the phenomenologically-ambiguous 'atmosphere' arising between close-up and faraway can be experienced only in and through the *movement* back and forth between the surface of the canvas with its dense fibre and finely gridded lines and the distancing, totalising view of Martin's matrix. Is it possible, we wonder, to consider an engagement with site along – or, better to say, *amidst* – these lines?

Critical discussion of the term 'site-specificity' in art practice, particularly Nick Kaye's *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000), becomes a starting point for us to do just this: that is,

Osaka
Digital Image
260mm x260mm
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to consider an engagement with site in terms of an oscillating shift or movement between an encounter with site close-up and consideration of it from faraway. In this account, Kaye stresses the performative nature of contemporary site-specific art practice. This necessitates what he calls a 'transitive' rather than fixed notion of site. Kaye bases this definition of the transitive site on anthropologist Michel de Certeau's spatial theory in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1974). Here de Certeau argues that 'place' is an ordering of coexisting elements, comparable to Saussure's linguistic theorisation of *'langue'* or language as a system of signs. Place, like language, has 'proper' rules of usage that may or may not be abided in any particular enactment of this order. This enactment, which de Certeau likens to *parole* or the act of speaking, is realised in and through one's movement through place: that is, through spatial practice. So, the act of walking is a spatial practice that acts out the urban system, just as speaking is a spatial practice that acts out the linguistic system. Similarly, writing is a spatial practice that acts out the spatial order of a written text, while painting is a spatial practice acting out the composition of the finished painting.[30] We can extend this to include the reciprocal act of receiving a text or painting: the act of reading is a spatial practice acting out the spatial order of a text; the act of viewing is a spatial practice that acts out the spatial order of a painting. And, by means of a short digression, we can extend de Certeau's theory even further to account for a reception of Martin's work, as discussed by Krauss, via Linville.

In line with de Certeau, the act of viewing one of Martin's paintings acts out the spatial order of its composition. This,

in Martin's case, is the grid: Euclidean basis of a rational spatial order. Krauss's discussion, however, adds further dimension to this: the movement between a close-up and faraway view of Martin's paintings is also a spatial practice, but one

that extends beyond the enactment of the painting's spatial order as it is represented on a planar surface and into an enactment of the space *between* a close-up and faraway view. This extension in space and time gives rise to the atmospheric rendering of /cloud/ that is intrinsic to Krauss's interpretation of Martin's work.

Returning now to the discussion at hand: de Certeau summarises his theory of spatial practice as follows: '*space is a practiced place* … spaces are produced by the practice of a particular place.'[31] Kaye, writing about site-specificity in art practice, then uses this dictum as a basis for his concept of an 'underlying concept of 'site'' that has to do more with the performance of place than with 'any given or particular *kind* of place.'[32] This transitive definition of site, as Kaye calls it, feeds into his definition of site-specificity as 'a *working over* of the production, definition and *performance* of 'place'.'[33] Drawing from Kaye, we similarly conceive of an engagement with site through creative practice as a performance of place. However, and in keeping with our digression above, we add to this that this performance of place has a further dimension; specifically, the oscillating shift between close-up and faraway. This can be broken down as follows: engaging with site through a performance of place *close-up* encompasses one's movements or spatial practice 'on the ground' in a particular location. Here place is experienced phenomenologically in all of its 'thereness'

even as it is encountered, and read, in all of its semiotic complexity. Meanwhile, engaging with site through a performance of place *faraway* encompasses moving through the impressions and conceptions we have of a particular place, both those that we bring to it (e.g. through researching historical narratives, maps, cultural outputs, etc.) and those we take from it (e.g. through documenting remnants of conversations, video footage, photographs, drawings, written documents, etc.). Any engagement with site, we argue, acts out an oscillation between these two relations: an experience of site close-up and faraway. This, in turn, gives rise to one's reading and interpretation of the site and, ultimately, informs any creative response.

To summarise, any engagement with site can be considered in terms of a performance of place that is both a phenomenological experience and a reading of it. This is coupled with an engagement with site through the impressions and conceptions one brings to it, and those one takes away. All of this informs one's thinking in and through site; that is, one's interpretation of it. 'Site', as we understand the term, thus arises in a middle distance somewhere between one's close engagement with a worldly reality, in all of its material, spatial, temporal, cultural complexity and 'thereness', and one's conception of that reality from afar. Here, between the specificity of site, inhabited in space and time, and the impressions that we have of it, bring to it, take from it and make of it from faraway, emerges our interpretation and response; here, amidst our movements in, around, back and forth, meaning proliferates.
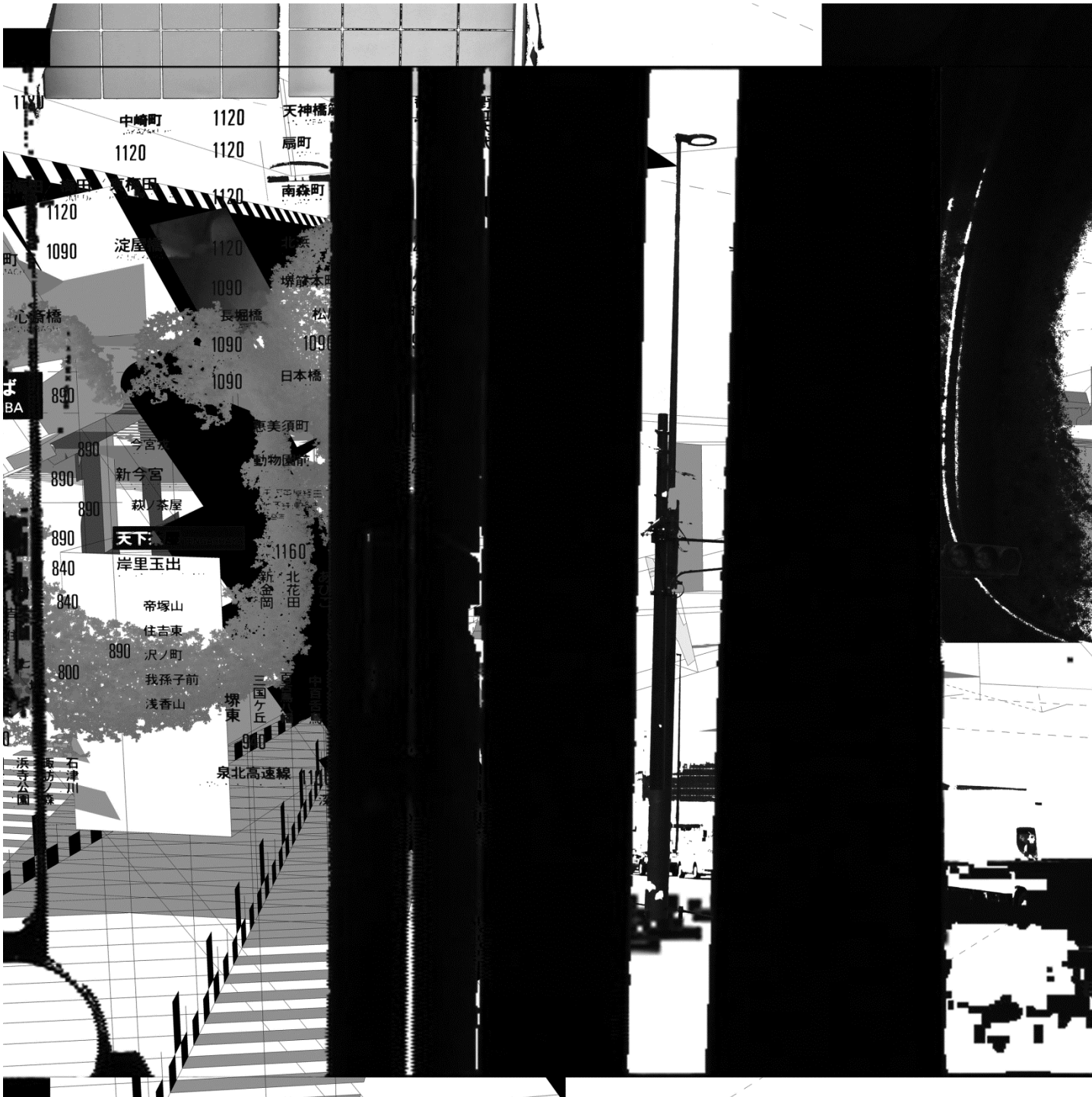
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Video & Installation

This proliferation of meaning brings us back to a question of form. Recalling our earlier discussion: in order to communicate, form is necessary. Boyle's form is that of the earthprobe, whereby the site becomes a sign of its own complexity. In Smithson's site-related work, a network of signs emerges through the dialectic between site and non-site. We aligned our work, as Kreider + O'Leary, with this network of signs; however, by foregrounding our dialogic approach, we suggested that the network of signs we produce communicates our subjective response to the complexity of site. This subjective response, we have just argued, emerges through a spatial practice or performance of place that includes the oscillation between *close-up* and *faraway*, whereby meaning proliferates. How, we now ask, can a network of signs account for this subjective and spatio-temporally dynamic approach to site, communicating the proliferation of meaning that results?

In her essay '*I/Eye/*Oculus: Performance, Installation and Video' (2004), art critic Kristine Stiles offers a compelling account of the history and aesthetic specificity of performance, installation and video art. Stiles traces the development of these three forms back to the 1960's, aligning their rise within art practice to cultural and institutional critiques aimed at the rapid rise of commercialisation. These three emergent art forms resisted commodification, argues Stiles, by including time-based aspects into a reception of the work, often by introducing kinesis (i.e.

actual or virtual movement) into the otherwise static art object.[34] With this 'augmentation of the real,' Stiles writes, 'performance, installation and video could be seen to undermine mimesis (imitation and illusion), the primary communicative means of traditional visual art.'[35] How is this so? Stiles explains that mimesis operates through metaphor 'or the illusion and representation of one thing (for example, a bird) in the form of another (a painting of a bird).'[36] Stiles compares this with metonymy, which 'specifies something by using the name of another thing with which it is *directly connected*.'[37] Meanings generated through metaphor are thus predicated on likeness, whereas those generated through metonymy are predicated on direct connection.[38] Having said this, it must be stressed that metaphor and metonymy are not mutually exclusive. Meanings, especially those cultivated through aesthetic strategies, are complex and arise through combinations and fluctuating degrees of metaphor and metonymy, amongst other elements contributing to the structure and poetics of an artistic message.[39] Stiles, for her part, recognises this when she writes: 'One could say that metonymy signifies both "*is connected to"* and "*is like*".'[40] This feeds into her claim that, even if performance, video and installation continue to work with mimesis, the primary communicative vehicle of contemporary art, the aesthetic specificity of these three media means that they necessarily augment metaphor with metonymy in the process 'by presenting human subjects who were doing real things similar to the actual human subjects viewing them, often in real-time situations and contexts actually linked to viewers.'[41] Ultimately, Stiles argues that performance, installation and video a) are capable of

embodying time-based and kinetic aspects within artistic form, requiring both 'artist and viewers to engage in temporal changes and duration over time'; b) 'include a wide spectrum of aesthetic practices' that may generate representation through likeness (or, indeed, its opposite of abstraction), but necessarily entails making meaning through the direct connection that they have to actions and events; c) link artists and viewers directly to these real-time events and experiences, drawing attention to a person or place, thereby 'enhancing reciprocity between art and viewer as interrelated subjects.'[42] All of this suggests that these artistic media are capable of accounting for a subjective and spatio-temporally dynamic approach to site, and communicating the resultant proliferation of meaning.

The work of artist Joan Jonas is particularly relevant to this discussion, as she often employs performance, installation and video in a single piece. Jonas has been developing her body of work since the early 1970's – she is a contemporary of the artists Boyle and Smithson, discussed previously. In her early works, Jonas would often record live actions and then edit them, or otherwise work with the display capacity of video, in order to explore a particular subject through the interrelationship between the two; that is, through combined aesthetics strategies drawn from performance and video. As critic Bartomeu Marí notes in the essay 'Other Times and Other Places: The Art of Joan Jonas' (2007), subject explored in Jonas' early works was primarily 'herself, the artist's body, her incarnations, transformation, deformations and reconstructions through her alter ego'.[43] Later works, however, show Jonas working more in relation to particular

texts, poems or stories and, through this, to the historical events and places to which they refer. As with the early works, these later ones also employ live action and recording, but do so in order to envelop them within the wider framework or context of what Marí terms Jonas' 'video installations'. Marí describes this process as follows:

> Fundamentally, Joan Jonas has done performances and installations in which video is placed at the service of experimental narrative projects. Concurrent with – and, it should be said, from a logical viewpoint, prior to – these installations the artist does performances that expose her to the public in varied situations … Her installations 'translate' the action into its more theatrical form.[44]

There is, then, a relationship in Jonas' work between the performance of a live action, be it in a gallery or other site, and the inclusion of a remnant or fragment of that performance, rendered on video, within one of Jonas' video installations.

Particularly striking is the word 'translation' used to describe the relationship between elements of performance, video and installation in Jonas' work. This implies that the video fragment of a performance is a sign: one that has particular meaning in one context, and whose meaning shifts in the context of Jonas' installation where it is situated amongst other semiotic elements that make up a work. Equally striking is the fact that the oscillations between performance and its translation into video installations are reiterated. As Roland Barthes points out in *Elements of Semiology* (1964), 'it is because signs are repeated in successive discourses and within one and the same discourse … that each sign becomes an

element in language.'[45] Arguably, in repeating these fragments of video, which themselves repeat Jonas' performative actions and gestures, within successive iterations of her video installations, Jonas is generating a system of signs that comprise the artwork. Moreover, these video fragments are signs that generate meaning, as Stiles has argued, both mimetically and through the direct connection that they have to places and events. However, the semiotic elements that make up Jonas' work are not limited to video fragments. Throughout her *oeuvre*, Jonas has worked with a number of objects, props and images, using these repeatedly in different works; for example, the mirror, the cone and the line drawing, often of an animal, are familiar elements amongst Jonas' assemblages. Altogether, we consider the video fragments – through this, Jonas' performative actions and gestures – alongside the objects, props and images elements within the aesthetic vocabulary or network of signs that is Jonas' artwork. Meaningful in one context (e.g. as actions situated within a particular space and time, relatively familiar objects in the everyday or recognisable animalistic forms), these elements accrue value and proliferate meaning in the specific context, and through the poetics, of Jonas' creative practice.[46]

An experimental narrative told through the pansemiotic features of language and including images, objects, actions and text embodied through performance, installation and time-based media, Jonas' work can be considered, on the one hand, as a type of poetry and, on the other, a kind of drawing, when both hands extend to meet within an expanded field of creative practice informed by the disciplines of poetry, art and architecture.


Lines in the Sand
Installation view
2007

And, although her's is not a site-related practice, per se, we consider Jonas' work to be a complex system of signs capable of accounting for a subjective and spatio-temporally dynamic approach to the complexity of site as well as communicating the resultant proliferation of meaning. We thus consider Jonas' work, and particularly the video installation, as a formal model for contemporary site-related creative practices, including our own.

6. Ambiguity propagates the proliferation of meaning.

Drawing & Writing

In the aforementioned book, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* de Certeau argues that the term trajectory suggests a 'temporal movement through space, that is, the unity of a diachronic *succession* of points through which it passes, and not the *figure* that these points form on a space that is supposed to be synchronic or achronic.'[47]

Ise
Digital Image
260mm x260mm
2013
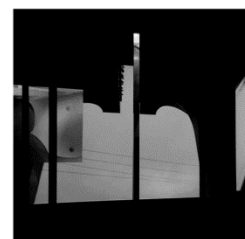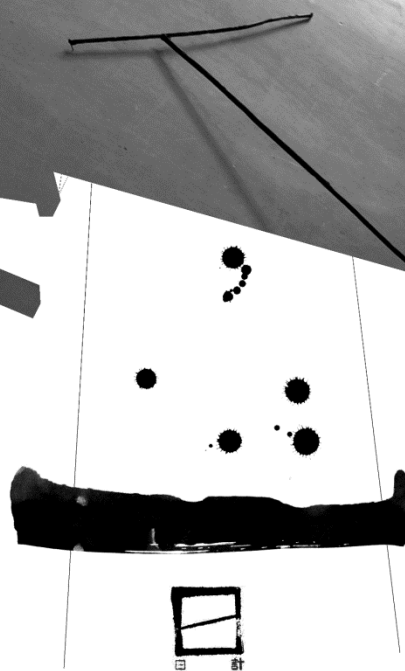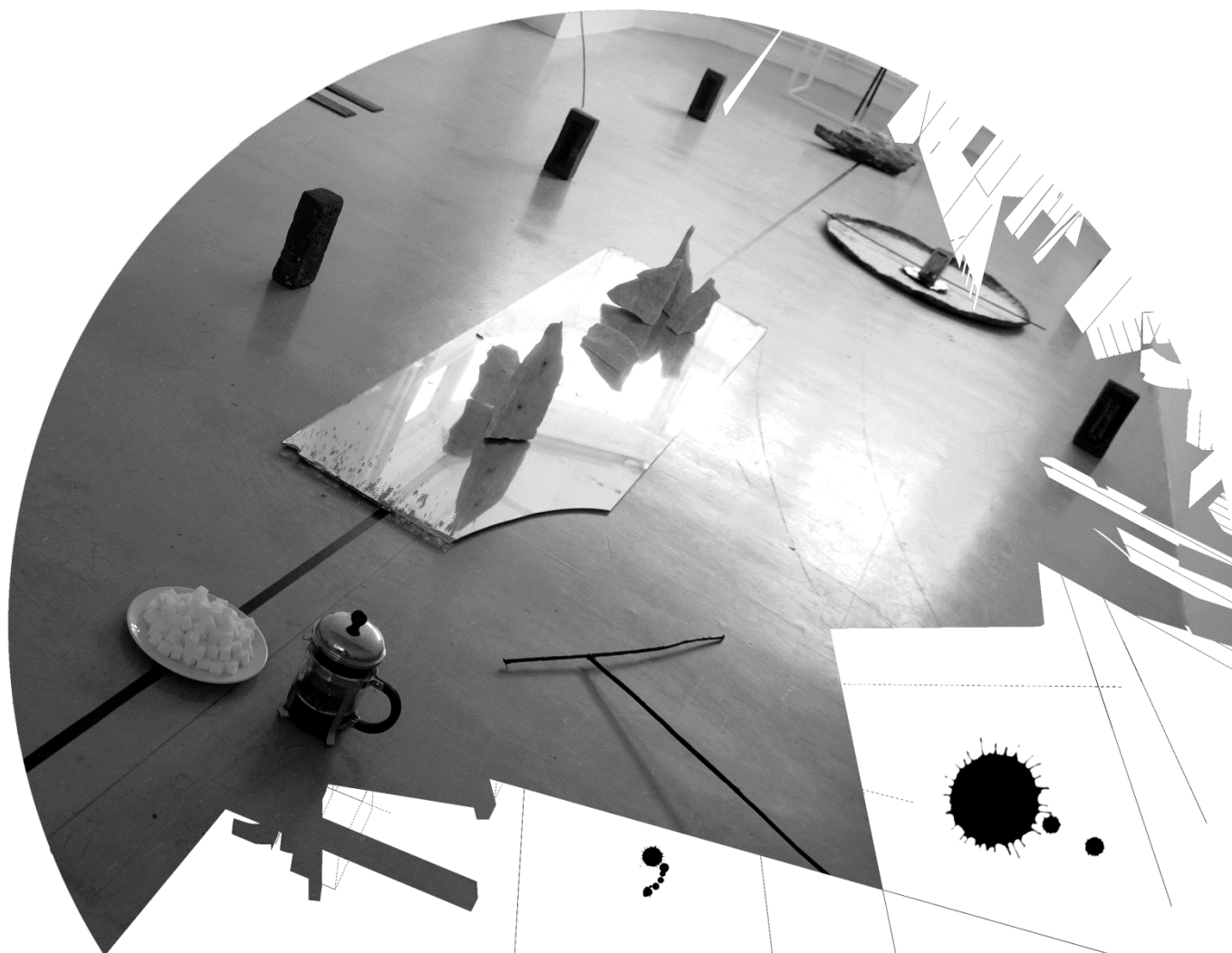
Such a 'representation', as he describes it, is merely 'a mark *in place of* acts, a relic in place of performances: it is only their remainder, the sign of their erasure.'[48]

Throughout the course of this essay we have written and drawn a trajectory that leads the reader through a critical account of site-related creative practices and, in tandem, guides one through a specific narrative of one of our own creative projects. From topic to topic, place to place, we have moved through spatial practices of writing and drawing.[49] The strands of our argument are coextensive and related, but are not the same: each has its specific aim. The result, however, is one text: this text, structured (inter)textually so that the reader, oscillating between paths of writing and drawing, might come away, if not with a full picture, then at least an impression of the importance of ambiguity for contemporary site-related creative practices that include, but are not exclusively, drawing; that include, but are not exclusively, our own.

7. Ambiguity opens onto a process of thought, and is creative.

Endnotes

[1] Locher, J.L., *Mark Boyle's Journey to the Surface of the Earth* (London, Hansjörg Mayer, 1978): p. 11.
[2] Kahn, Andrea, 'Overlooking: A Look at How we Look at Site or … site as 'discrete object' of desire', in *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and Interdisciplinarity,* eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Rüedi, Sarah Wigglesworth (London, Black Dog Publishing, 1996): p. 176.
[3] Ibid., p. 176.
[4] Ibid., p. 176.
[5] Ibid., p. 176.
[6] *Video Shakkei* (2010) draws from the Japanese practice of *shakkei*, or 'borrowed landscape'. In this project, we engaged with a number of sites in Japan - from ancient Shinto spaces of ritual in Ise to the futuristic Umeda Sky building in Osaka - to perform a series of sequenced actions or 'live drawings.' These actions were recorded simultaneously from differing points of view using high definition video as well as recently developed embedded miniature video camera technology. Edited together in series of filmic composites modeled on the multi-scaled architectural drawing, the recordings relate architectural space to performed event, and this to narrative sequence. The result is a hyper-digitized, absurdly choreographed and poetically rendered image of place. See: http://www.kreider-oleary.net/_Work/W_Video_Shakkei.htm
[7] All drawings relate to the project *Video Shakkei* (Kreider + O'Leary, 2010). Special thanks to Andrew Walker, who assisted with the production of the drawings. Supported by the Bartlett Architecture Research Fund.
[8] For clarification, we consider 'drawing' here in an expanded sense, inclusive of multiple semiotics and various modes of enactment.
[9] Boyle qtd. in Locher: *Mark Boyles' Journey*, p. 11.
[10] Ibid., p. 11.
[11] Locher: *Mark Boyles' Journey,* p. 14.
[12] Ibid., p. 15.
[13] Locher cites in particular the artist Constable and the philosopher John Ruskin as exemplary of the realist tradition's practice and ethos (p. 17).
[14] Locher: *Mark Boyle's Journey,* p. 44.
[15] Boyle qtd. in Locher: *Mark Boyle's Journey,* p. 15.
[16] Kahn, p. 176.
[17] Smithson, Robert, 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects (1968),' in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996): p. 110.
[18] Smithson, Robert, 'The Spiral Jetty (1972)' in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996): p. 153.
[19] Ibid., p. 153.
[20] Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2006): 37.
[21] Smithson: 'Sedimentation', p. 101.
[22] Damisch, Hubert, *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting* (1972), trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002): p. 123.
[23] Damisch: *Theory of /Cloud/*, p. 280.
[24] Ibid., p. 124.
[25] Ibid., p. 140.
[26] Ibid., p. 140. Notably, in 'Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/' (1999), discussed below, Krauss refers to Damisch's argument and, in a footnote, writes: "In the formal notation of semiological analysis, the placement of a word between slashes indicates that it is being considered in its function as *signifier* – in terms, that is, of its condition within a differential, oppositional system – and thus bracketed off from its 'content' or *signified*" (Krauss, 'Agnes' 210). However, given Damisch's claim is that /cloud/ is a sign functioning on three different levels, /cloud/ is not a 'signifier,' an element of Saussurian linguistics; rather, /cloud/ is a sign in the Peircian sense: a sign that functions on several levels at once. Its meaning cannot be grasped solely in terms of its 'condition with a differential, oppositional system,' as Krauss argues: only as a symbol (the word cloud) does it function as such.
[27] Rendell: *Art and Architecture*, p. 40.
[28] Kraus, Rosalind, 'Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/', in *Bachelors* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999): p. 333.
[29] 'Haptic visuality' is a term drawn from art historian Alois Riegl's *Late Roman Art Industry* (1927). In the essay 'Video Haptics and Erotics' (1988), film theorist Laura Marks draws from Riegl to describe how haptic visuality, in contrast with optic visuality, "draws from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinaesthetics' with the result being 'the viewer's body is more obviously involved in the process of seeing than is the case with optic visuality" (Marks 332). See an extended argument by Marks in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
[30] De Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1974), trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): p. 98.
[31] Ibid., p. 117.
[32] Kaye, Nick, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London, Routledge, 2000): p. 3.
[33] Ibid., p. 3. Elsewhere, in *Art and Architecture*, Rendell likewise draws from de Certeau's notion of 'space as a practiced place' to discuss site-specific practice, drawing this together with her overall theory of critical spatial practice to argue that "in 'practicing' specific places certain artworks produce critical spaces" (Rendell, *Art* 19).
[34] Stiles, Kristine, '*I/Eye*/Oculus: Performance, Installation and Video', in *Themes in Contemporary Art,* eds. Gill Perry and Paul Wood (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004): p. 183.
[35] Ibid., p. 183.
[36] Ibid., p. 185.
[37] Ibid., p. 185.
[38] The terms 'metaphor' and 'metonymy' are used in poetic theories premised on structuralist linguistics; for example, the work of linguist Roman Jakobson. For this reason, although they loosely correspond with meanings generated through 'iconic' and 'indexical' relationships, they are by no means coterminous with these relationships, drawn

from Peircian semiotics. Given the potential for Peirce's semiotics to account for visual imagery, it is, ultimately, be more productive to think of video, performance and installation in Peircian terms; however, extending Stiles' argument in this manner is beyond the scope of this current argument.

[39] For a full discussion of the poetics of artistic messages, see: Kreider, Kristen, *Poetics & Place: The Architecture of Sign, Subjects and Site* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

[40] Ibid., p. 185.

[41] Ibid., p. 185.

[42] Ibid., p. 197.

[43] Marí, Bartomeu, 'Other Times and Other Places: The Art of Joan Jonas' in Joan Jonas, *Timelines: Transparencies in a Dark Room* (Geneve, Museu d'Art Contemporanie de Barcelona and Centre d'Art Contemporain Geneve, 2007): p. 8.

[44] Marí: 'Other Times', p. 9.

[45] Barthes, Roland, *Elements of Semiology* (1964), trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967): p. 15.

[46] For Jonas' discussion of objects and props as a vocabulary, see 'An Exchange Between Joan Jonas, Susan Howe and Jeanne Heuving', *How2.* Online. Available
http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v2_3_2005/current/workbook/joans/intro.htm

[47] De Certeau: *Practice of Everyday Life,* p. 35.

[48] Ibid., p. 35.

[49] In *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002). Miwon Kwon argues that contemporary site-specific art practice actually consists of a performance of 'one place after another'. This characteristic nomadism within contemporary site-specific practices demarcates a '*relational specificity* that can hold in dialectical tension the distant poles of spatial experience.' Importantly, the relational specificity that arises is embodied within the resultant artwork that, as Kwon suggests, is structured (inter)textually.