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Abstract: There are many ways to engage with the term material thinking. Through a discussion of the individual and their role in the construction of place, this essay explores the practice of material thinking, through a particular focus on what it is to be *in* this practice of material thinking, this practice of the making of the made. This discussion explores material thinking as an embodied and placed creative practice undertaken by someone, somewhere; what I call an emplaced practice of local invention.

Key words: Space, place, practice, embodiment

Emplacing local invention

Introduction

There are many ways to engage with the term material thinking. For example we can consider material thinking as a process; we can explore it through the lens of the materiality of a thing that is being made; or we can focus on the relationship between the thinker and the material. In this essay I wish to explore the practice of material thinking, through a particular focus on what it is to be *in* this practice of material thinking, this practice of the making of the made. Through an exploration of different ways to conceive and articulate the experience of space and place, this discussion will explore material thinking as an embodied and placed creative practice undertaken by someone, somewhere. This is what I am conceiving of as an emplaced practice of local invention. Whereas Paul Carter in his text *Material Thinking* (2004), argues that it is the relationships between people, in particular the dynamics that occur through collaboration, that enables material thinking; in this essay I am concerned with the individual, their experiences, their sense of their placed self and what they bring to this creative practice, whether an individuated practice or one in engagement with others. Collaboration involves a connection between two or more people, and it is the experience of each of these individuals, as individuals, and what they bring to and experience through the collaboration which is the focus of this discussion as is the experiences of an individuated practice.

Like Paul Carter I am interested in where material thinking happens; considering these locations to be the catalysts and the contexts for creation. In the course of his book's development, Paul Carter considered calling it either 'Dismembered Spaces' or 'Placings.' It was through these titles that he endeavoured to focus on the importance of *where* things happen in creative production. However, whereas his interpretation of this *where* was the space between collaborators, in this text I wish to shift this interpretation of *where* within material thinking from the space *between*

material thinkers, to the space or location *of* material thinking. In so doing, I argue that the practice of making, the materialising of ideas through materials and processes, is a process of place-making: a realisation of the localised acts of material thinking. This shift from the *space between* to the *place of*, is central to this dissertation. The place that I am referring to within this discussion draws on de Certeau's interpretation of place as practiced space (1984).

Through this paper I will explore the connection between local invention and self within the practice of material thinking through the constructs of landscape, site and place. In this context landscape refers to the terrain on which we traverse, it may be contained within structure, be a vast plain or a region, yet it all times it refers to the surface beneath our feet. The term site refers to a geospatial fact, a cartographic point that may be marked by a building, a monument, a mountain or some other point of reference. Finally the term place, as I have already stated, will be defined as *practiced space*, with the term being situated within Deleuze and Guattari's notion of '*smooth space*' (1987).

Edward Casey writes:

'Smooth space provides room for vagabondage, for wandering and drifting between regions instead of moving straight ahead between fixed points.' (1998, p. 304).

Place is more than *where* we are, place is also *how* we are; how we know and connect to locations and actions. A sense of place is a realisation of meaning. I propose that these terms (space, place, site and landscape) can aid us in understanding the materialising of thought, as practices of located making. It is from this perspective that I will explore the practice of material thinking as a form of local invention, through an exploration of the localised acts of making and creating, the realising acts of invention. Informed by human geography and landscape theory, this text engages with and articulates the *place of practice* as an experience of the local.

Place, space, location – where are we?

To conceive of material thinking as a practice of local invention, is to accept that this act of invention occurs somewhere, and is undertaken by someone. This 'place' is in effect made in 'practice'; and, in the context of this paper, we will review ways that we make this place of creative practice.

We may describe the locale of creative production in terms of space and/or place. Across many different domains (past and present) there has been much discussion and exploration of what these two entities are, and how they relate to and are realised through, lived experience. On one side, Michael Crang and Nigel Thrift argue that '*space is the everywhere of modern thought*' (2000, p. 1), whilst on the other side Edward Casey (1997) argues that it is place that is everywhere and that it is our current preoccupation with space that has caused us to distort or ignore the importance of place. It is difficult to separate these intertwined entities, space and place, and it may be foolish to even try to do so. As Doreen Massey states, '*space is always under construction... space is a product of relations between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the processes of being made*' (Massey 2005, p.9). In this way we can perceive of space as a malleable construct, something that has potential to become, to be realised, to be manifest. What we may for example refer to as the space within a

box, the void space, or the space between. This is a perspective that is supported by Jeff Malpas who argues '*that space is a form of non-temporal dimensionality*' (Malpas 1999, p. 120). For this is the paradox of space – it is both not bound by time (space exists beyond the limitations of human understanding of time) and exists in time and is transformed to become place through time; for '*place is the pause in the temporal current of time*' (ibid p. 15).

Place is the lens, the pause and the location, in which experience happens (de Certeau 1988, p. 117). Place is where life and its many attributes, are manifest. To understand *who* we are as realised through the actions of life, is to engage with *where* we are. Place is the location where this *who* (self) exists. '*There is no possibility of understanding human existence – and especially human thought and experience – other than through an understanding of place and locality*' (Malpas 2005, pp. 15-16). If this is the case and space is 'practiced place' it is the practice (the materialising of thoughts through actions) which gives space meaning and transforms it into the familiar, and quite often the strangeness, of inhabited place.

Lucy Lippard states that '*(c)ulture is usually understood to be what defines place and its meaning to people. But place equally defines culture*' (1997, p. 11). It is from this perspective that we can say that the practices and outcomes of material thinking are integral to our understanding and creation of place and that this varies from one site to another.

Local

'Material Thinking and its' inventions are local and are thereby unlikely to result in the generalisable. They will always be in and of themselves, located in their immediacy; but this is not to separate them from community.' (Carter 2004, p. 9)

Paul Carter argues that the practice of material thinking results in unique outcomes. Unique in that they belong to their specific context, and creator, these are what he refers to as 'local inventions'. But, what is it to be local? To have local knowledge? To be 'a local'? To manifest local inventions?

One way to understand the idea of *local* is as an experience of *here*; used as a measure of proximity, *here* is a way in which we understand the location of things. In this case *here* is the place where I and the things of my present world are, either in the literal sense of the *here and now* or the *I am* of my identity (of my situated self); for example, I live or work *here*. Given this, is it possible to inhabit only one *here*? Many of us live or are connected to multiple *heres*, we live in multiple homes physically and/or in absentia. I live here and I also live here – this second here would better be understood as *there* but only until I get *there* at which point it transforms to *here* and where I was, is now *there*. The *here* of this line of thought, is in fact a *here* of location or site. At times I am more or less connected to this *here* through nostalgia or practicality, either way this *here* is a pause in a trajectory of time. It is one of the many places (pauses) that we inhabit. However these pauses in places, whether for a short or long time, do not necessarily make me a local, nor do they guarantee that I will have local knowledge. To be 'a local' of a particular place implies connection that often has stood the passage of time and is marked by my connections to others, my family or school friends for example.

If this is the case, then can they, these pauses, these heres, be sites of local invention? According to Paul Carter this would be possible through the social connections that occur through collaboration as they provide us with the means to create the basis to become 'a local' within a specified community and locale. It is in this way that the inter-connected practices of material thinking that link individuals with others and which place each person in place. But what if I am alone, working in an isolated manner? Can I only know place and the local if I am consciously working with others?

I argue that the constant within creative practice is the individual, the creative practitioner, and it is the knowledge and experience of the individual as they transit through the multiple sites of place that is local. The true site of local knowledge is the self. As we travel across the regions of practice, we are like Deleuze and Guattari's nomad (1997) with their life strapped upon their back; and the constant in the trajectory of practice is the self as it transitions across the region and between the places of practice.

Landscape

Landscape is more than the land that we stand on. Landscape is natural and artificial; it exists beyond us and it is within the realm of our physicality. Landscape exists within our minds and our imagination. Anne Whiston Spirn (1998) speaks of the language of landscape. For her this is a language that evolves over time and evolves through its structures and creates its own stories. Landscape takes many forms. Beyond the mass descriptors such as desert, forest, arid, lush; how we understand and experience landscape is individual and, like many aspects of our lives, its meaning is unconscious and unexamined.

... even if we can locate ourselves we haven't necessarily examined our place in, or our relationship to, that place. (Lippard 1997, p.9)

We know landscape through our unique experiences of it, intellectually and through our bodies.

'Landscape is both the context for places and an attribute of places' (Lippard 1997, p.9).

It is by traversing the landscape that we engage with it and it is the relationship between body and landscape that is reflective of self and place. Edward Casey claims that, *'both body and landscape are so deeply ingrained in the experience of the human subject as to pass unnoticed for the most part,'* (Casey 2001, p.41) and it is through *'reflective awareness'* (ibid.) that we are able to make conscious connections between ourselves and locations, and the things that happen there. Through the landscape we are able to identify and relate to place, for the landscape is of place, bound by borders and the horizon. As the body moves across the landscape, the 'self' (via the body) traverses from place-to-place.

'The language of landscape is our native language... The language of the landscape can be spoken, written, read and imagined' (Whiston Spirn 1998, P. 15).

Anne Whiston Spirn proposes that it is in the landscape that we find our true language and our true place. She expands on Heidegger's statement that, *'language (is) the*

house of being;’ stating that for her ‘*the language of the landscape truly is the house of being we dwell within. To dwell – to make and care for a place - is self expression*’ (ibid.). It is within the landscape that we inhabit, which may be urban or country, internal or external, that we discover and create meaning. To dwell in the place of creative practice, is to be in that place, to care for it, to nurture it and to know it.

Lucy Lippard supports this view explaining our connection as;

‘Place is latitudinal and longitudinal with the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what happened there, what will happen there.’ (Lippard 1997, p.7)

This is what she calls *the lure of the local*, the pull of place that operates on each of us and it is this lure that is realised as the place of desire in and for practice. The lure is based in meaning, and it is this meaning that creates the place of practice, a place that is rich in potential and complexity. To return to the nomad who traverses the landscape moving from one interconnected place to another, the drive or the lure that feeds the motion is this ongoing search for meaning and experience that results in the practice of material thinking. Creative practice is both a response to, and an articulation of, this localised place of material thought and the multiple forms that this exists in.

Experience – Existence

What is it that drives us in this connection to specific locales? Jeff Malpas argues that the only way for us to know place, which is to engage with space, is through our body schema (Malpas 1999). Our body schema is the means by and through which we position ourselves in the world, and it is the structure that allows action, the action to invent.

‘To be capable of action is at the very least, to be capable of bringing about some change in the world through a change in oneself.’ (ibid p.11)

Our sensorial understanding of where we are spatially, relies on an understanding of our whole selves as located. Place in this context is not a named location or site, e.g. a city or town or institution, rather it is a location or place of being. *‘There is no possibility of understanding human existence - and especially thought and experience – other than through an understanding of place and identity’* (Malpas 1999, p. 75). The body exists in space, and it is through awareness and connection to the features of that space that it is able to create a sense of place. This connection to or knowing of space is not static it moves and changes over time, in location and through actions (de Certeau 1984). The body is mobile, and as it lives life it moves through space to new locations, or as Casey (1997) would argue, life is a transition through a series of places each with its own meaning and identity.

The body is the physical form of the self, it is the conduit for material thinking. The knowledge of the self is accumulative, realised through a kind of melding of our multiple experiences resulting in a duration of self (Bergson 2002, p.186). This is the temporality of continuance in lived experience, not defined as past or present, merely duration (ibid).

The experience of the body as it transits through space is one way that we can conceive of embodied knowing and embodied creating. For most disciplines, the creative process is considered to be a static cerebral activity. Yet consciousness and cognitive activity are more than an act of the mind, engagement with the world and with knowledge can take many forms and does endure over time. Spoken of as experience, this experience can refer to expertise and accrued knowledge and experience as embodied knowing.

The body engages with the world through perception and then articulates this back, either as a primary source through movement and/or as a secondary where it informs other acts and outcomes. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty states, *'Perception becomes an 'interpretation' of the signs that our senses provide in accordance with the bodily stimuli, a 'hypothesis' that the mind evolves to explain its impressions to itself'* (Merleau-Ponty 1967, p. 39). A sentiment endorsed by James Edie *'For we call what we perceive, 'the world''* (1964, p. 26) and it is this world that we then articulate and relate to as we move through it and as we place ourselves within it.

Doubtful Space

'The body is our experience of what is always here, and the body in motion experiences the unity of all its parts as the continuous "here" that moves toward and through the various "theres".' (Solnit 2000, p. 27).

This brings us back to the possibility of us having multiple locales, multiple sites of inhabitation, multiple sites of invention. Georges Perec (1997) plays with our notions of space, place, habitation and expectations. Within his many essays he questions the notion of designing and naming the rooms of our homes on the grounds of specific use e.g. bedroom, why not allocate rooms to days of the week? Why is an apartment a single entity when we could locate rooms in appropriate sections of the city, have our kitchens near markets, our studies near libraries etc. In amongst his play with our sense of normality, he also presents us with a discourse on the mundane, the ordinary and the everyday. He is an astute observer of life in place and his observations draw our attention to abstract and sometimes unseen acts and artefacts of domestic life. He does this through simple accounts of the acts of the everyday, listing the objects on a desk, or a critique of postures for reading. He presents to us these 'normal' things and in so doing raises our awareness and questions the conventions of normality. Yet for all his posturing about the possibilities of going beyond or reconfiguring the norm, he ultimately presents us with his fear of the transience of our location, our beings and the certainty that may come with this.

'I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep rooted; places that might be points of reference, of departure of origin...Such places don't exist, and its because they don't exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, ceases to be incorporated, ceases to be appropriated. Space is a doubt: I have constantly to mark it, to designate it. It's never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it... Space melts like sand running through one's fingers. Time bears it away and leaves me only shapeless shreds.' (Perec 1997, pp. 90-91)

In perceiving of practice as a placed (located) activity we are faced with the fears and challenges voiced by Perec. It is the paradox of material thinking, of creative practice, the contradictions of pursuing the alternative whilst inhabiting the known. We desire consistency, stability and the place in which to create, and at the same time we seek the new, the diverse and the divergent. Perec is frustrated by his lack of control, no matter how much he desires solidity, '*it melts like sand running through [his] fingers*' (Ibid). Such is the nature of creative practice; it is a transient and accumulative phenomenon and the closer we come to feeling that we know what it is, it moves, shifts and we are lured into the next exploration. It is a space of doubt that we wrestle through as we move from place to place. It is through practice that we endeavour to create or find meaning, we seek out the width and depth hoping to stop the sand as it melts through our fingers, and in so doing create some sense of the being in place

Practiced Place

Paul Carter speaks of rain as being an '*in between phenomenon*' (1996, p. 53) something that sits between earth and sky and brings change, growth and sometimes, in the form of flood or in its lack, drought, devastation. In the landscape of practice the '*in between phenomena*' that facilitate change and transition can take many forms and bring with them diverse signifiers of the passing and transience of thought, action and time. At times we can identify these phenomena, name them, at others it is not so clear, they can be best understood as a hunch or an inkling that leads us, entices us in a new direction or back to something that is yet to be resolved. It is these phenomena that keep us moving from one place to another. Sometimes these places are actual, we physically move ourselves from one location to another – the studio, the library, the street, the café or another country altogether. Other times they are metaphoric, a state of mind or something imagined. No matter which, there is something in these locations that enables or inhibits material thinking.

The trajectory that we move along or through in this ongoing state of transience of material thought, is a spatial and embodied syntax that links one thing with another (de Certeau 1994). Georges Perec names this the *space of doubt*, and this doubt causes him much distress. He seeks to break open our sense of order and at the same time desires stability. He laments the inaccessibility of his desired consistency (*melts through his hands like sand*). Rather than seeking certainty, I think it is more appropriate to conceive of the experience of practice as 'being' (which is) in a constant state of cumulative evolution. From this perspective we can understand material thinking as a practice that takes place over a series of local sites that are linked in an ongoing trajectory of practice. The *place of practice* is more than a structure, it is a series (or flow) of acts, that exists as a thread through time and our multiple places. This is an enactment of anthropological place that includes '*the possibility of the journeys made in it, the discourses uttered in it, and the language characterizing it*' (Augé 2000, p. 81).

Through our body, our physical being, we construct and enable our experiences, knowledge and social connections which are essential to this process of feeling and finding our place of practice. Ultimately it is through our senses that we make meaning, that we express and we live, and in material thinking we attempt to embrace this and realise it in the making of the made.

As Edward Casey (2001) and Anne Whiston Spirn (1998) both argue, landscape is a language and a habitat, through which we make our 'homes' in the world, and it is through our interaction with the locations of practice as we move from 'place to

place,' the multiple sites of our working, that this occurs. This is a process of settling or finding a position, that may be comfortable or not, and it rewards, challenges or comforts us as we work through the negotiations that are creative practice.

To conceive of local invention as a practice of emplacement, is to understand material thinking as an evolving series of situated acts. Each of these acts is an occurrence in time and locale, even when it may be presented as repetition or mass production. The local of local invention refers not to a specific location on a map, or a place known by a name. Rather the local of local invention refers to the local of the individuated self, this is the one constant in which threads together the multiple sites of creative practice. To be *in* the practice of material thinking, is to navigate through the spaces of doubt and certainty, whether they be here or there. Material thinking is a temporal phenomenon realised through the constraints of the location of its existence in place. To practice material thinking is to inhabit the *place of practice*.

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