

On 'Projects 195: Park McArthur'

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This text considers recent work by the artist Park McArthur, in proposing that the materiality of disability access and the concept of dependency are the constitutive ground for what is often deemed site-specificity in contemporary art. Alongside the multi-valent term development, which is considered both for its use in urban planning and its use in medical-biological notions of progress, McArthur hosts an exhibition made from the space of dreaming and planning as a contingency for, and in, everyday social life.

Last night I took my friend James to a show I've never been to, twice. When we arrived, the show was both over and its ends ongoing. I'd been there before. He'd been here before now too. Where is a body if a body is but a situation in shifting conditions? To say that a body is a situation is to dislocate the notion of the conditional, implying that dependency is all there is, that independence is a transcendental dream possible only through an affixed location.^[1] But a body is every nowhere dependent.

The museum is a body too; it dreams residents in development whilst imagining itself independent. It misses how independence literally means 'in dependence', obscuring that an idea of bodies in development is a violent dream. In the margins of that dream is what's *under* development in Park McArthur's show. The reliance upon a framework of certainty leads some to say there was a last night, I was in my bed in London, James was in Devon, and 'Projects 195: Park McArthur' both occurred and ended at MoMA in New York between October 2018 and January 2019. I am uncertain that the show, like most of the artist's work, took place at a specific space and time; I am rather certain that affixing disability to anything (and nothing) yields a representable category, making palpable the violence held in the ideas of affixture and fixability.

The show is described as consisting of two framed works on paper, a modular stainless steel structure, two leather benches, a wall piece, and an audio guide. This 'visual description' audio guide is available both at the museum and online.^[2] The framed works and parts of the audio guide trace MoMA's endeavours as property developer of its most recent private luxury residential project 53 West 53. The show plots with those who cannot attend the site of the museum, centring an audio guide piece for those who, even in attending, are deemed to not *see*, for those that in attending and seeing the show would be everywhere but the museum anyway.

While deemed site-specific institutional critique, McArthur's work is a challenge to the locality of site and a problem for critique itself. In staking a claim to the site, site-specific works are made (to reproduce institutional) property. It is eerie to witness how dependency on a site is the very thing that makes the work singular, separate, and hence fit for commodified exchange. This eeriness calms upon remembering that the canon of Western

art relies on the separation of objects into nationally, racially, and historically – which is to say developmentally – distinct movements and groups, since it too is a product of violence, put forth by the Modern Grammar of thought.^[1]

Institutional critique limits the work to thought that centres the institution as its locus, makes it the property of thought, and performs a particular onto-epistemological fixing. Critique requires an object of thought, relying on and reproducing notions of centre and periphery. Critique and development (be it of property, cognition, or anything else) have shared stakes in these understandings of localisability. Here, the reliance upon a framework of certainty and an insistence upon the belief in an ability (to find oneself) forges the separation necessary to render a locale possible. I want to stay with what consensus-formed reality has historically figured impossible: the material persistence that has been insisted upon as immaterial.

PARA-SITES is both an artwork and an audio guide visual description tour for the show, available in the exhibition space and off site.^[4] The show is shaped *by* and made with the materiality of access, dissolving the illusion of ‘accessibility as resource’, conjured in the dream of institutionality. This dream affixes access *to* something, conceiving it as a geometrical translation – a function of moving an object over a specific distance, where the object is not affected or altered by the travel. Part of a transcendental imaginary, this figuring of translation believes in the possibility of change without affectability. The idea of having access *to* something functions precisely like this kind of translation: it is a delivery to a specific location, with a predetermined shape and form, devised predominantly through the rhetoric of inclusion that occurs unchanged by its conditions.

The violence of accessibility *to* a given site (be that an institution or a body) is enabled through

a form of epistolary address, which establishes a *relation* as a ‘connection between spatially separate things’.^[5] It is not merely violence that separates; separation violates by providing the conditions by which violation can occur.

Access materiality – i.e., access as a primary material presence – is rather nonconditional (meaning it does not have an opposite to be defined against). Access, despite being often imagined as ‘access to’, cannot be affixed *onto* representation. Like geometrical translation, ‘access to’ is merely a figuration and a practice of an epistemic process that assumes separability. Nonlocal translations necessarily entail varied expressions of entangled registers.

Making access a primary material presence of the work denies the museum its claim over reception, rendering the site of the museum non-specific. The museum is denied both its figuration (as foreground) and its status as (back)ground support for the work, whilst unfolding that the material grounds of access have always been the primary sites, which are necessarily *plural*. What happens when this work is everywhere and nowhere? How can it be specifically somewhere and still strangely anywhere? Nonlocality initiates entanglement as a problem for the tools of knowledge since this shows that separation and determination of particles is an illusion.^[6] By showing that observation itself affects the experiment, nonlocality initiates the displacement of linear temporality and spatial separation (which together sustain the category as the centre for thought), violating the framework of certainty. Observation – a fixing of a frame – makes the idea of a site possible. *PARA-SITES* rebounds the site: it makes palpable that, in dependency, a site cannot form a locus. Disability has always felt that which quantum physics terms ‘entanglement’; that all particles in dependence affect one another. McArthur’s audio guide re-sites and recites the entire show without being *in* it.

This practice makes palpable site-specificity's debt to disability, which is to say it reveals the latent dependency of site-specific works *on* or *to* their site at the seam of their construction. It is not that McArthur makes something exceptional to site-specificity; rather she reveals that specificity never had anything to do with a discrete site. Site-specificity's indebtedness discloses a materiality that precedes form, that remains fugitive to being fixed. Materiality can and will come in and out of form and site because access necessarily entails a plurality of such sites and forms.

PARA-SITES is a cut, hole, or portal, through which a multiplicity of sites may arrive, or need not arrive; they need not arrive at the museum, yet still they surround the 'centre' it is conceived to be. This cut functions like a break in scale or a shift in register that is nonlocal in its very methodology. Nonlocality does not play out through the audio guide's placement online or through a promise of an art show *being* more accessible. Rather, it displaces the very ground of the show from the museum to nowhere and anywhere. It is a hole that cuts to something, the closest words for which I could find are nonconditional love, or a dissolving fog, or traces of perfume that need not have a form but could always arrive in a form, and will be affixed into form as long as the world as we know it is premised upon being known.

In a work titled *Is this an investment, pied-à-terre, or primary residence?* McArthur wraps the title of the show around a wall in the exhibition space. Prior to MoMA's introduction of a numbering system, the museum held 86 projects that were not counted. McArthur's show was meant to be numbered and titled 109, but instead gets titled '195', thereby augmenting the site of the show to the moment when the museum will run a project 195 in its own numbering system. What will that project be called? What is the site of this broken sequence, which in its breaking seems to both tilt and

multiply away from causation? What does it mean to cut the developmental logic that sequence only seems to enable? The site of this work is no longer merely a wall of the gallery space, nor the multiple press releases on which it will appear. Any attempt to affix a site to the artwork is broken by the realisation that even though it appears to fall into multiple sites, none of them are *the* site. And yet, what could have been more site-specific than writing on a wall? What could be more prophetic than that which is written about a time that has not come yet but will? Separation violates by making discrete that which is blurred or crowded, it takes a composite and makes it property, rendering individual parts without being whole. The episteme wakes the dream, but 'to nonlocate' (to not locate) is to dream while awake. It is to dream into being from another plane or time.

The closing parts of the audio guide call us to dream a building that does not exist. This invitation is doubled in the work titled *STUDIO/HOME* - a modular stainless steel structure consisting of twenty stackable components that were continuously rearranged throughout the duration of the show. Like an improvised doll's house, it, too, keeps rearranging in my mind. Sometimes tucked into the corner pocket of the hall, sometimes spreading into the hallway, the sculpture, described in the audio guide as an 'invitation to imagine', folds, crawls, and changes shape. Amongst the many dreamt features of this building are artists' studios, a large ramped indoor pool with an electric lift, a large open kitchen, and differently-sized apartments with adjustable features. *PARA-SITES* announces:

Income, either by minimum or maximum, are [*sic*] not the determining factor for living here and the desire to change apartments (or whom someone lives with) would not require a resident to move out unless they wanted to. Today, many of this building's features are

dispersed and shared among multiple living spaces, places, and homes, but one all-inclusive structure remains a dream.^[1]

STUDIO/HOME occurs against a background of development in order to draw out the idea that critique is not the figuration made here: dreams are. They are McArthur's material too. Dreams are a way of being held in a collective without *having to have* one. They need not have a locale, because like unconditional love they can be but need not be specific, they, too, are nonlocal. This is not to say that in gifting us a dream it becomes shared. Rather, it functions like a score, a perforation. McArthur's breaking of sequentiality is out of (nonconditional) love in its most ubiquitous sense: it comes through *anyone specific*, it arrives through all forms and need not have one, and yet in the known world it is often found to feel incredibly localised.

When I say, 'I want to think with a show I have never been to', I only say it because I have been to the show that has come with / been to me; it arrives in many places, it is in my bedroom, right now, everywhere, all the time, in no time at all. I say it to insist upon thinking of the show travelling to me (to denote it as a problem for space-time) and through me (to denote something about the relationship of inhabitation and host). It is to say that an idea of time travel, which is often conceived of as a problem of or for time, is perhaps actually also a problem for how we have come to know travel. I say it to highlight the dangerous repercussions mediumship carries for the idea of property, and to relay mediumship as an alternative modality to relation. It is to say something about love and debt, since both exceed any notion of locality but can and do arrive locally. It traces the desire to make art that has a multiplicity of form; it is to live not *in* but *as* a daydream.

This article has been minimally edited to accord with The Contemporary Journal's style guide.

This contribution to the Journal was supported by the editorial advice of Stefan Nowotny.

DOI:

10.31411/TCJ.01.09

Cite this piece as:

Ronkina, Geelia. 'On 'Projects 195: Park McArthur''. *The Contemporary Journal* 1 (March 09, 2020). [<https://doi.org/10.31411/TCJ.01.09>].

[1]

By 'affixed' here I mean the representational dream of the Enlightenment project that lives through the hope of becoming a (necessarily independent or self-determined) subject. Determinacy, separability, and sequentiality make that fantasy corporeal. These formulations are borrowed from Denise Ferreira da Silva, whose work the thoughts in this piece relies upon and is indebted to. Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

[2]

The Museum of Modern Art, 'Projects 195: Park McArthur', accessed July 5, 2019, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5016>.

[3]

To 'develop' is to put in order of growth, it is an ontoepistemic tool that maps and envisions progress as advancement at a determined rate and direction. A residence is a site that contains the body of that vision. Cf. Ferreira da Silva, *Toward*, xv-xxxviii.

[4]

The Museum of Modern Art, 'Park McArthur. PARA-SITES. 2018', accessed July 5, 2019, <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/55/807>.

[5]

Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'On Difference without Separability', in *Incerteza Viva: 32nd Bienal de Sa o Paulo: exhibition catalogue*, ed. Jochen Volz and Ju lia Rebouc as (Sa o Paulo: Fundac ao Bienal de Sa o Paulo, 2016), 64.

[6]

As taken up in quantum physics, nonlocality discloses what Da Silva calls 'the impossibility of comprehending existence with the thinking tools that cannot but reproduce separability and its aids, namely determinacy and sequentiality'. Ferreira da Silva, 'On Difference', 63–64.

[7]

The Museum of Modern Art, 'Park McArthur. Live-Work Residence. 2018', accessed July 5, 2019, '<https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/55/816>'.