

The Other Workspace

An exhibition in parts

Ben Cain
Aernout Mik
Sally O'Reilly
Laure Prouvost &
Francesco Pedraglio
Jamie Shovlin
Cally Spooner

Herbert Read Gallery
4 March - 8 April 2011
Open Tuesday-Friday
10am - 5pm
Saturday
12-5pm
Free entry

5 March – 8 April 2011

Tuesday – Friday 10am-5pm

Saturday 12-5pm

Opening Event:

4 March 5-9pm

Part 1

Ben Cain solo

4 – 19 March

Part 2

Ben Cain, Aernout Mik,

Jamie Shovlin

22 March – 8 April

Performances & Workshops

Laure Prouvost and

Francesco Pedraglio

2pm, 1 April

Sally O Reilly

2pm, 2 April

Cally Spooner

5pm 8 April

UCA Canterbury,
New Dover Road,
Canterbury CT1 3AN

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www.ucreative.ac.uk/galleries

UCA Herbert
Read
Gallery

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Performances and Workshops
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Francesco Pedraglio
2pm, 1 April

Sally O Reilly
2pm, 2 April
Booking advised: contact
+44 (0)1227 817456
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Cally Spooner
5pm 8 April
followed by closing event

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How to understand a space that points to, but cannot contain, the amorphous relationship between the world and its representations?

In his notes for the 1967 lecture, *Des Espace Autres*, Michel Foucault describes heterotopias,

*"...real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."*¹

He proceeds to provide a set of principles for the "study, analysis, description, and 'reading'" of these places. These principles cover a wide range of places and ideas: Heterotopias are sites for 'crisis', 'change', 'deviation' and include theatres, gardens, honeymoon hotels, brothels and colonies, amongst others. These seemingly disparate spaces are linked by their connection with ritual ("the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place") – one must behave or have behaved in a particular way to gain access. They are also united by their otherness (this is Foucault's sixth principle) – they provide uncanny mirrors to the spaces outside themselves, or, alternatively, embody rules so different from those of the outside world that they 'reveal' it to be 'illusory'.

Foucault says that the heterotopias seem to "suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect."²

The modern gallery has gone a long way towards procuring heterotopic qualities for itself. Admittedly, recently-built galleries in converted grand houses might have preserved some original ornament in acknowledgement of the persistence of historical, social and subjective 'content' when it comes to a viewer's encounter with an artwork. However, this cannot undo the fact that since the eighteenth century, secular art has demanded an environment in which the artists' work can be separated from everything which surrounds it. Which is why, when an everyday object like a 'firehose' is encountered in a pristine, white-walled gallery, it "looks not like a firehose but an esthetic conundrum".³

Even today, when post-structuralist thinking has suggested that if the experience of something is contingent on its surroundings (and also what is excluded from surrounding it), then the meaning of that thing must be understood to include those surroundings, a break in continuity with the 'everyday' somehow remains part of art's remit: Art should be the product of a radical, special or spiritual way of thinking.

Of course, a great deal of the art of the last forty years has sought to address the issue that art's 'special' thinking has less agency as an instrument of social change when it is confined to galleries, and has therefore sought to locate itself outside these environments. If this 'relational' model has succeeded in connecting art with people without using a site designated for this connection, has then the gallery lost the heterotopic power of 'opening and closing' that separates the gallery experience from everyday life? Can the rituals and otherness associated with the gallery now occur anywhere? Does this mean that heterotopias are transferable; every place can become the brothel, colony, honeymoon suite...?

The Herbert Read Gallery has occupied several sites and roles in its twenty five year history. The only constant over this period is that every summer it has hosted the degree show.

The gallery has been located in spaces on the campus that could quite easily have been used for other purposes: studios, workshops or offices. In this art college everything is painted white, and art can appear in almost any location. The current gallery could swap roles with a computer room or become part of the refectory; it is only the presence of specialist equipment in the other spaces that identifies them with their specific functions. The walls play a part in separating one room from another, but the definition of these other spaces is more a matter of the human use of the tools within them.

To some extent the integrity of all heterotopias is similarly reliant on 'correct' procedures and use of tools. People and objects need to be 'put to work' in order for any site to succeed in maintaining a stable identity. Perhaps this is also the case with the gallery, the meaning of which is less defined by its walls or the art it holds than the signifying process the viewer brings to these things, and how its placement in an educational institution might flavour this. In this sense the gallery is less a space for engaging with 'finished' objects, and more a space where those objects, as the hybrid product of artists', institutions' and viewers' work, come into being. The space is created through this collaboration between these different factors.

Of course, that phrase, "put to work", suggests there is some unevenness in this collaboration. Indeed, it is tempting to attribute a hierarchy of tools and workers to this situation, where the art is the viewer's tool, the viewer and artists are tools of the gallery, and the art institution is the tool of commerce or a social agenda, and so on. But what happens when, either actively, or through apathy, one of the collaborators resists another? If a viewer enters an 'empty' gallery without perceiving the firehose which is actually an artwork as anything other than a functioning firehose, does this reinvent the space as a broom cupboard? Might partial indifference or distraction create a partial space, and if so, might it also follow that the roles of viewer, artist, artwork, and institution could become partial, hybrid, amorphous?

1. Michel Foucault, "Des Espace Autres", *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, n°5, 1984, pp. 46-49. Translated from the French by Jay Miskowicz.

2. Ibid

3. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Expanded edition 2000, p. 15