Future Reflections
A Dialogue/The Third Space

Marsha Bradfield (MB), Katrine Hjelde (KH), Catherine Maffioletti (CM) and Future Reflections Research Group (FR) are discussing what they mean when they refer to The Third Space in their workings. Is The Third Space about the collaboration, writing and presenting; or is it a space in between, a space of overlap, a discursive site, or something else? They are collectively and individually troubled by their Future (Re)turn diagram and its (in)ability to convey this concept in a meaningful way. Future Reflections Research Group believes that by asking the "right" questions a dialogue may open up this area, The Third Space, for re-entry.

FR: I am having a hard time with The Third Space. The more I engage with it, the more bewildered I become.

KH: Let me begin by responding to this with a quote from our paper/script for Detours III, where we seem to be describing this Third Space.

By asking and re-asking the same questions in the paper/presentation/surveys, we intuited a third space. While this space remains allusive insofar as each of us perceives its dimensions differently, we agree it resides in a liminal zone, somewhere between the individual and the collective, between understanding and misunderstanding, between the articulated and the in-articulated.

FR: So, you are saying it's a complex space/place?

MB: Yes, but let's talk origins instead of definitions just now. The provenance of this term can be traced back to our preparatory discussions for The Art of Research seminar, for the performative paper titled, Future Response: Is the Question the Answer1. Consider the following:


FR RG
Comment [1]: There is no indication that this is the "Thirdspace" as outlined by Edward W. Soja in the book of the same name. But, maybe "Thirdspace" and The Third Space share some traits? (Blackwell 1996)

FR RG
Comment [2]: The quote, is clearly not a description as such, we seem to be doing our outmost to cover our tracks with what may be seen as little more than word play.

FR RG
Comment [3]: Soja says that to explore "Thirdspace", it needs to be guided by some form of potentially emancipatory Praxis. Maybe, some idea of praxis will be relevant here too? Soja, Edward, W. Thirdspace. (Blackwell, 1996)
Another distinction explored [in this paper] concerns art and Research as separate fields. Much has been written about this split, both around the conviction that art can only be research (with a lowercase “r”) and about the possibility that art can compose Research (with an uppercase “R”). As our contribution to this ongoing discussion, we assert the possibility of an in/between—a third space—an overlap of these areas. Similar to that to which Turkka Keinonen defines as the third field (FX), this common ground is comprised of practices, methods and values shared by art and Research (2006)²

KH: It is almost as if The Third Space created itself as a response to Turkka Keinonen, who in his paper – Fields and Acts of Art and Research, ³ suggests the possibility of “a third field,” i.e. FX. This is, thus, indicative of our context specific response to this particular conference. Turkka Keinonen’s argument presumes that art and research are distinct areas of activity, which he calls the field of art (FA) and the field of Research (FR). To hypothesise the interaction of these separate fields, he considers various models of engagement and speculates on the ways in which they might benefit the development of art and design.⁴

FR So, The Third Space started as an overlap between Research and art, as an area which shares practices, methods and values. But what is it doing in “Future (Re)turn”?  

KH: For Detours III we began to expand this notion conceptually, spatially and temporally; perhaps each of us is expanding this idea in a different direction? We need to unpack it here; what does it mean now and should we, perhaps, call it something else?

² Ibid., 8.  
⁴ Ibid., 43.
MB: Let's just work with the term The Third Space for now. Renaming this phenomenon won't make it less confusing but I agree this compulsion to name is curious... Yet, it's through naming and renaming (among other processes) that we negotiate FR's heterogeneous organisation. FR is sustained through discussing its various aspects—talking about FR affirms its existence. Dialogue is the material practice through which we produce FR's immaterial labour.

FR: All right...

MB: Talking around/through/by/over/under The Third Space is a way of describing it on the one hand while circumventing its definition on the other.

FR: ???

MB: It's not just that The Third Space resists description, that it's "elusive" and a thousand other perhaps vacuous adjectives. It's about FR's resistance to formalising the meaning/significance of this space. As FR self-organises through dialogue, we basically talk/write ourselves into existence. But these utterances aren't really about defining the group's bits and pieces. In fact, a tremendous amount of labour goes into constantly destabilising our stuff (assumptions, hunches, archives and so on) — undoing our work. Keeping things fluid is harder than you think.

KH: Yes, Luís Firmo referred to Miwon Kwon and the discursive space in his introductory talk at Detours III and we did too, in our presentation, "Future (Re)turn". It may be helpful to revisit Kwon now to clarify our notion of this discursive site, which enters into our Detours III presentation, in order to relate/relegate our activities as a group within The Third Space. What is this discursive site and how does it operate in relation to - as opposed to -
a third space? How can we engage with ourselves, the context and participants whilst tracing our engagement and mapping our encounters?

FR: It’s a good idea to try and start with a shared understanding.

KH: Yes that may be a goal - probably and existentially unattainable; however, here goes: Kwon outlines a genealogy of site-specific practices that artists operate within and across in her book “One Place After Another”. Phenomenological, institutional and discursive, the discursive is the one that we attempt to locate FR within. This term was first coined by James Meyer in “The Functional Site”. Kwon concurs with his description in her book but her interpretations lead to different questions and conclusions, which again, our interpretations do too.

FR: Hmm…

KH: Bear with me. According to Kwon, [ideas of the discursive] has produced liberating effects, replacing the strictures of place bound identities with the fluidity of a migratory model, introducing possibilities for the production of multiple identities, allegiances and meanings, based not on normative conformatives but on the nonrational convergences forged by chance encounters and circumstances.

KH: This is, perhaps, what we see FR as doing, but we have so far mostly tacitly acknowledged this rather than trying to understand what it actually means for our work (art/research/both) in terms of how FR interacts with participants, audiences and any outcomes that we produce.

---

MB: Is it a question of not trying to understand? Producing “multiple identities, allegiances…,” to use Kwon’s words, is about applying various approaches simultaneously to achieve a more complex and nuanced understanding, no?

FR: Umm… The migratory model is being described in several different ways… I’m not sure which one to follow. Where is this going?

CM: In varying forms, not only do our versions of the same -Third Space - migrate differently, but the discourse is reflected in different areas of the page, in this body of text, in the comments, with a double, treble etc. discourse being enacted here, so that the discursive space is in at once many/one site(s); we want to go beyond the sequential, the “chain of events”, to look beyond a linear framing of the dialogue - The Third Space.

FR: Ehhh…

MB: You’re looking worried. Try and re-

FR: I’m getting mixed up, frustrated, are we talking about the discursive space or The Third Space? Is this some kind of art trick?

MB: Iax. Relax, FR.

CM: No, it’s no trick. Clarification here is certainly necessary, but indeed tricky, so I will return to Kwon, to retouch on the issue of locating The Third Space in Future Reflections Research Group’s art/research practice,

Marsha Bradfield
Comment [17]: More complex exploration does not, however, necessarily produce common knowledge among group members — let alone shared understanding.

Catherine Maffioletti
Comment [18]: The migratory discursive space suggests that it goes back over, that it returns, rewinds, retraces cyclically generating crossovers in instances, unifying point instances in the discourse. Though these discursive flight paths cross at the same interval to wrought a mapping of the site of this discursive collaboration… The ground (re)covered serves up like a mirage of the trace instance, as the instances may cross the ground, the ground covered changes and moves, and is not the same as the previous ground. The flights leave some impressions on its under-ground, but not at the level of the ground.

Catherine Maffioletti
Comment [19]: Text in the margin, marginalised? Aside from notes these peddle the discussion between the ‘main body of text’ and the ‘text column’, in a subsidiary site?

Marsha Bradfield
Comment [20]: Once again the prefix “re” rears its relentless head. “Re-ing” in the form of researching, recycling, remaking and so on is a key method in FR’s work. Consider, for example, the group’s documentation. Works are reworked to destabilise their significance… Sure, these “performative documents” are things in their own right — things in and of themselves. But they also self-consciously refer to something(s) beyond themselves… their past/future iterations to name only one possibility. For a more complete discussion of this idea see Berredi, Sophie “Documentary and the Dialectical Document in Contemporary art” Right about Now. eds. Scharemaker, Margriet and Rakier, Mischa Amsterdam, Valiz 2007
...spatial experience, like the broken temporality of language, is discontinuous and creepily disembodied. The words do not reach deep, they collage fleeting fragmentary impressions, and vision does not (cannot) distinguish between what is seen and the mediation of that scene.⁶

FR: Could you please stop talking around/through/by or whatever else it is you say you do?! Just tell me what “discursive” means in the context of The Third Space.

MB: I appreciate this must sound esoteric. But in essence these figurations are just a kind of sonar. All this talking - the references, the reflections, the repetitions - is FR’s method of echolocation, our way of sounding out The Third Space.

KH: Yes, language figures both figuratively and literally in the formation of this space, so it may help to look at the etymology of discursive; which is from Latin, discursus – meaning: running around. In modern usage it means both covering a wide field of subjects and proceeding to a conclusion by way of logic rather than intuition. There seems to be an oxymoron residing within the word itself, as these usages seem to be in parts discordant. Perhaps, the word has passed on its legacy to us here, in that, whilst trying to reach a conclusion through reasoning, we find ourselves passing somewhat aimlessly from one subject to another, rambling.

FR: Well then, I’m wondering about words holding divergent meanings. Between meanings and readings of even just one word, a space opens up. Is this space the stuff The Third Space is made of?

⁶ Miwon Kwon, One Place After Another - Site Specific Practice and Locational Identity, MIT Press, 2004,162.
KH: Yes, we have tried to draw (out) *The Third Space* or, intuit it through enactment, performance and relational response. Thus, this “third space,” has another dimension – it is a potential site, it involves collaboration and interaction, it has moved from the realm of an academic proposition into a dynamic arena for doing and undoing.

FR: Alright… but how does this doing and undoing relate to the Future (Re)turn diagram? And how does it relate to Detours III?

MB: Returning to the script for Detours III:

…… The expanding /exploding triangle is an attempt at mapping the collaboration’s active engagement with other groups and contexts, as it crosses outside of the group itself seeking interaction and response. Here context can be interchanged with *desvios*, this diagram can thus also be read as a kind of journey schedule - following Miwon Kwon.

CM: What we are engaging with specifically here is the response to the site and the dialogue that emerges there in the site that we are working through, the Detours III conference. Though the Future (Re)turn diagram offers many readings and orientations, it does so in a problematic almost illegible code, wherein it necessitates its reading in situ, in a prior site, one which built this discourse towards where this collaborative writing now operates, the Detours III conference/publication. The Future (Re)turn diagram fails as it refers to that specific instance, the conference, and reflects on Future Reflections Research Group’s variety of agencies.

FR: So, how does Future Reflections Research Group activate *The Third Space*, with/out the Future (Re)turn diagram?

---

This text situates itself amongst other texts and we write towards that site within that context (this book), reflecting on the presentations of papers at the Detours III conference, we project what each part may constitute and situate ourselves in accordance with that, noting that this is not an autonomous text, but one which will be read with/through others. How it is read is also in part attributed to the way in which it is put together, curated, its relationship to the constitution of the whole. Its constitution is in part relational, not only within itself, FR, the collaboration, but also its site, the discourse that it lands itself in.

Was this there all along? I am (re)turning to the ending of Future (Re)turn:Now/Here, the performative paper for Detours III.

However the diagram also illustrates a problem with this model, which is the path of return. How does engagement re-enter the diagram – currently it is separated and pointing only outwards. The star configuration also acting as a blueprint for a fortress, deterring direct engagement. However, it may encourage a detour approach, which we simultaneously and symbiotically track as comprising both the long way round and the scenic route. The problem is that we may never get there, we are probably facing an indeterminate destination. Not following one route, one, map, or itinerary, rather, attempting multiple parallel in/out/of roads to now/here.