

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 Answer*¹. Consider the following:

¹ Future Reflections, “Future Response: Is the Question the Answer”, Paper given at The Art of Research Conference, The University of Art and Design, Helsinki, 1-3 October 2007; available from http://www.designresearch.uiah.fi/the_art_of_research/presentations.html; accessed 19 August 2007

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)

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [2]: The quote, is clearly not a description as such, we seem to be doing our utmost 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 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.

³ Turkka Keinonen, “Fields and Acts of Art and Research”, in *The Art of Research*, ed. Maarit Mäkelä & Sara Routarinne (University of Art and Design, Helsinki 2006), 55.

⁴ Ibid., 43.

Marsha Bradfield

Comment [4]: See Biggs, Michael. “Learning from Experience: Approaches to the Experimental Component of Practice-based Research”. *Forskning, Reflektion, Utveckling*. (2004) Stockholm: Vetenskapsradet pp. 2-6. Available from: <<http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes/research/tvad/biggs1.html>>Internet; accessed July 18, 2007. And Scrivener, Stephen. “The Art Object does not Embody a Form of Knowledge”. *Working Papers in Art and Design*, vol. 2. (2002) Available from: <http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes/research/papers/wpades/vol2/scrivenerfull.html>; Internet; accessed July 18, 2007.

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [5]: Self creation - absolution of all responsibility as method and practice? Can we argue this as a privileging of an artistic sensibility?

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [6]: Which again, goes back to how Future Reflections Research Group was institutionally formed. We emerged in reaction to an actual institution, Chelsea College of Art and Design, more specifically, the institutional demands of a Research Degree (PhD), at University of the Arts London.

FR RG

Comment [7]: *The Third Space* seems like an example of something hastily named and only a minor part suddenly taking on a life of its own, like an understudy thrust up on the stage, in some kind of starring role, but with an incomplete grasp of the script.

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.

Marsha Bradfield

Comment [8]: No, renaming *The Third Space* won't make the referent any more clear because it's not the name that's hard to grasp so much as the thing to which the name gestures, the so-called 'space.'

Marsha Bradfield

Comment [9]: Negotiating FR's heterogeneous organisation creates jargon. This begins with identifying an interest (an idea, a method, a practice, a phrase and so on) and renovating it to fit FR's needs. Enrolment of this renovated interest culminates in its naming and/or renaming, after which it becomes part of FR's working vocabulary. So Keinonen's "third field" is nipped, tucked, massaged and stretched into *The Third Space*.

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.

Marsha Bradfield

Comment [10]: This relates to something Gabriela Vaz-Pinheiro says to Roger Meinjes in the *Detours I* publication: "There is an anxiety there — I don't know if you have it, at least I have it — of wanting to, somehow communicate the process and at the same time resist as well, much in the same way that you did not want to show the photographs in the exhibition, as people will look at them as the final object." FR also feels this anxiety and we also resist closure—which is why, I suppose, we're constantly unworking our work. It's a way of denying our collaboration a final output/object. (For Vaz-Pinheiro and Meinjes' exchange, see *Curating the Local*, Vaz-Pinheiro, Gabriella, ed. Torres Vedras: ArtInSite, 2005: 120)

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.

Marsha Bradfield

Comment [11]: This resistance to formalisation exemplifies FR's interest in challenging normative models of art research [read: models based on social science research practices]. How, for example, might research findings be disseminated as artworks in their own right instead of exegeses in the form of written reports like these? This is the kind of question we're considering in FR—questions that relate to our individual PhD projects, our collaborative research and the theory and practice of art research more generally.

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*"⁵. 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.

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [12]: Goal = too result orientated and much too much a word that indicates that we/one need goals. How can we talk of attempts at shared endeavours, that is not a goal – what/where are the words?

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [13]:
Architectural and experiential.

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [14]:
Laying the foundations of institutional critique.

FR RG

Comment [15]:

Magpie-like in approach, picking up shiny tempting theories, hiding them in the nest where they may become part of the construction, - or a purely ornamental addition - entirely out of place.

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [16]: The "old chestnut" of art R/research is indeed holding a constant grip on our activities – but, rather than trying to break free, maybe we need to get in even deeper. And be more transparent about this too.

⁵ James Meyer, "The Functional Site" in *Platzwechsel*, exh. cat. (Zürich: Kunstahalle Zürich 1995). 27.

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, Misha 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?

FR RG

Comment [21]: Can the discursive towards *The Third Space* have any kind of critical scope if it/you/we are just meandering a/way.

Marsha Bradfield

Comment [22]: This analogy reminds me of Blanchot’s gloss of the Orpheus myth. Instead of revealing Eurydice (the work) by the light of day, Orpheus (the artist) yearns to perceive her in darkness. So, for Blanchot, Orpheus’ desire isn’t so much about making the invisible visible (i.e. revealing the art in the artwork)... It’s about *seeing the invisible as invisible*—which is precisely what I think we’re trying to do with *The Third Space*. See Blachot, Maurice. “Orpheus’s Gaze” in *The Space of Literature* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992.

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [23]: The whole notion of sound, discord, sonar, signal etc., has some potential for a radar like exploration, as well as expansion of *The Third Space*.

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.

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [24]: This is to move far from Kwon’s understanding. As her notion of the ‘discursive site’ is to be found in the chain of one thing after another. But, maybe, this is one difference between the ‘discursive site’ and The Third Space. The Third Space resists definitions to the point of disappearing into itself, into the very words we try and use to clarify the area.

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

Katrine Hjelde

Comment [25]:

Multiple strategies may not get us any closer to neatly defining the area, but as the activities themselves will form a boundary around, they also provide the possibility of entry.

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.⁷

FR RG

Comment [26]: What does this “it” refer to? It is not clear in this context. Is it the group or the triangle or is there a slippage being insinuated between the two?

Marsha Bradfield

Comment [27]: The rest of this quote goes like this: By understanding the diagram in a discursive context it can be read as an itinerary rather than as a map. As the kind of site specific practice most pertinent for locating site within this project is temporary, transitory and layered, it is a narrative path articulated through the journey, collapsing process and outcome.

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*.

Catherine Maffioletti

Comment [28]: The Third Space constitutes meetings, exchanges with one another, between Future Reflections Research Group and the audience; principally it is about exchange.

Catherine Maffioletti

Comment [29]: The Future (Re)turn diagram itself is the same one which we presented at Detours III, the difference, here, being that the discussion which surrounds it, the reading of it has shifted, it comprises an other meaning in this site and becomes another diagram.

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

Catherine Maffioletti

Comment [30]: We are not only faced with the problem of mapping out the itinerary, *The Third Space*, laying down the trace of how we got here, through our differing perspectives between the individual and the collaborative, but, also, what this means in terms of defining where the work is in Future Reflections Research Group in relation to art and research.

⁷ Future Reflections, “Future Return”, Paper performed for Desvios/Detours III 2007.

CM: 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.

Catherine Maffioletti

Comment [31]: "The work of the mason, who assembles, is the one that matters. Thus the adjoining bricks, in a book, should not be less visible than the new brick, which is the book." Bataille, George, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, The University Minnesota Press, 2004. Pre-preface.

FR: Was this there all along? I am (re)turning to the ending of *Future (Re)turn:Now/Here*,⁸ the performative paper for Detours III.

Catherine Maffioletti

Comment [32]: *Sonoric* distances echo back differently, shifting with the site the discourse goes over that which builds/collapses with each (re)visit. One place after/in/before/whilst in an/other; a discursive space which is not one but speaks from a multiplicity of the non/directional trajectories.

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.

FR RG

Comment [33]: Drawing on the Future (Re)turn diagram, we have oriented through this collaborative writing, as another pictorial map/itinerary, the text as both form and content. Not necessarily presenting the route toward our destination, but, rather, projecting a shifting terrain, *The Third Space* comprises different zones, different entry points/routes for the reader, both on the page and in the varied discursive structures employed in this paper. We have focussed on different forms of discussion, positing the 'question/answer' through diverse dynamics specific to each part (the radio play, the interview and the dialogue) in an attempt to produce discursive site(s) in action.

⁸ Future Reflections, "Future Return", Paper performed for Desvios/Detours III 2007.