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Question 2. Explore the work of two contemporary artists, makers or designers and analyse the relationship they have developed between their art or design practice and environment, place and space.

Introduction

It is a delight of language that we can all too readily assume we know what we mean. Place and space are two such words, that we take for granted but which in fact populate vast areas of thought; intersecting many disciplines, that seemingly work both in tandem and alone and are open to a myriad of interpretations. To assist scrutiny, this paper will utilise the works of two contrasting mediums of work, that of site specific installation and photography, in order to illustrate the breadth of understanding that place and space can hold. Explorations will follow of Chiharu Shiota's embodied installations and artist duo, Tina Carr and Annmarie Schöne's socially engaged photography practice. Though the mechanisms of dialogue are quite different; these artists have an inherent commonality running through their subject matter; that of a presence in absence. This paper will therefore investigate whether it is possible to explore something that is located through its very absence. In order to elicit a deeper understanding of the ideas posed here, we will delve into the disciplines of cultural geography and phenomenology, locating the experiences of body and mind to elucidate an explication of place and space.

Initially then, what do we mean here by place and space? Place in the most literal terms is 'a position or point in space' (Penguin Books, 2000, p. 1062); it is fixed; located; with this definition expanding further, leading us to understand that it is not only located but also relational. Space has multiple uses in language but what concerns us here is the "continuous, unoccupied, unimpeded distance, area or volume... in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction." (Penguin Books, 2000) From these definitions we can read that space is

the more abstract of the two and where place would be located. By extension located *place* is then “made meaningful by social relations...emotional investments” (Barker, 2004) and space is the manifest of these productions. We read from this that place exists because of how and who populates it; their influence and investment in that place are inseparable. So, it follows, that space here is understood to be a place of “spatial organis[ation]” and composed of “dynamic processes embroiled in “questions of power and symbolism”. (Barker, 2004)



Fig 1. Co-op, Croeserw. Tina Carr and Annmarie Schöne.

Taking these ideas of the dynamic forces of social relations into photography, 'Coalfaces' is a series of film and photography work that was produced by collaborative artists Tina Carr and Annmarie Schöne in the early 1990s. cursory examination of their images capture three things. Firstly, that of a specific geographical space; that of the former South Wales Coalfield in the Upper Afan Valley, in particular the rural villages of Glyncoirwg, Cymmer, Dyffryn, Abergwnfi and Bleangwynfi. Secondly, the selected works also show us a time in space; two decades after the last mine had closed. Thirdly, they examine what place now means to the community in the absence of that industry. However, what Carr and Schöne also do so eloquently with these images, is draw us into a more complex dialogue about the meaning of place and space through ethnographical, socio-economic and political history.

Wales, once a mighty industry base, was at the centre of the coal mining industry from the early nineteenth century, reaching boom time after nationalisation in 1947. It was however quickly under threat from the 1960s until its final collapse during Prime Minister Thatcher's leadership in the 1980s. With this in mind, we can see that this place, *the Afan Valley place*, is more than a mere position, it is a place that has taken up permanence; that this place has been constructed and then deconstructed by economic forces; "capitalism is necessarily growth-orientated...dynamic and crisis prone." (Harvey, n.d.) The evidence born from the Upper Afan Valley, the so called "rapid deindustrialisation" of the mining industry at the hands of capitalist "accumulation dispossession" resulted in a "difference and otherness [to be] produced in space". (Harvey, n.d.) Motivated by commercial growth, The National Coalboard Board (NCB) historically invested heavily in the infrastructure of the Afan Valley; it's population and inherent cultural identity grew exponentially. Following their exit, NCB closed crucial transport links, social halls and other vital amenities. The rural communities were effectively cut off without any support. The Afan valley was 'disproportionally' affected more than anywhere in the United Kingdom due to its status as "a single industry region." (Benoy, 2018) This "spatial reorganisation", Harvey states, is an intense process of capitalism which completely destabilises places, leaving them extremely vulnerable. 'Coalfaces' is a deeply evocative exploration of a unique community forgotten, left to fend for themselves and how their sense of place has been altered.

Carr and Schöne are very much part of a thriving photographic community of artists who choose to work closely with their subjects. Their work follows Martin Parr who identifies our sense of place through close observations of us in our leisure

pursuits. His beach studies “Last Resort”, (1983-1985) are both explicit and compassionate and explore the “tension between the idealistic and the grimy”. (Royal Museums Greenwich, 2020) Parr draws the viewer in to observe these performed spaces, which are pulled out of context and placed in a framed space, revealing the normality of the absurd.



Fig 2. “The Last Resort” Martin Parr



Fig 3. Martin Parr

Carr and Schöne's practice formulates in a similar way but they go further in working with their subject's explicit permission. By adopting this approach, they do more than just bear witness to the current disposition of the community. Carr and Schöne steep further, nurturing relationships between themselves and their subject. They travel to and spend time in the communities, involving individuals; enabling autonomous voices and stories; informing the process and creative decisions. At times they share communal living, as they did living alongside Roma Gypsies in their 'Once They Were Birds' and 'From the Horse's Mouth' series. By creating work in this way, they develop a dynamism which interacts between viewer, image and the frame. This integrity and authenticity is central to their practice; both in their chosen field of study of marginalised disaffected people and that of using analogue

photography over digital photography. They have politicalised their photography; alerting us not just to the injustices, devastation and power dynamics left in the wake of decisions made by external forces; but to the intrinsic beauty of our cultural differences and the discourse this offers in how we read and engage in a sense of place. Through studying people and communities in this way, Carr and Schöne demand us not only to challenge our stereotypes, but to question what place and space can mean in any time. They urge us to manoeuvre away from the over romanticised mindset of the 'good old days' and to sharply witness the repeated patterns of community displacement that has traversed through history in the wake of industrialisation and capitalism.

Doreen Massey observes it is not enough to put a simple line around an area and call it place, but that a community can be read from infinite viewpoints, all as unique and as valid as each other and that how you interpret that place is as much about who you are as viewer as participant. Massey comments on our experience of "time-space compression" (1991) in an evolving understanding of what place and space is about. She asserts that place is "a constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (1991). Massey sites that capitalism, race and gender, social, and power geometry all feed into this constellation, each with their own myriad of hierarchical relations. Massey makes the case that place is made up of a series of "interrelations... interact[ing]... that there is a "contemporaneous plurality" with "coexisting homogeneity"...and that place is also in constant ..."under construction...in process" (2008). What Massey is saying here, is that place deserves the recognition as a complex organism, open ended, in flux, with multiple transactions of diverse characteristics happening all at the same time.



Fig 4. Cucumbers. Tina Carr and Annmarie Schöne. Fig 5. The Tunnel.

Carr and Schönes 'Coalfaces' photographs perfectly illustrate these ideas throughout; the occupants directly look at us; their backdrops carefully selected; the deafening absence of the industry constructed in the Afan Valley has touched every area of life. Osi Rhys Osmond introducing the 'Coalfaces' book describes "...the intensity and rapid acceleration of change ... the abrupt and traumatic catastrophe of its sudden collapse are all held within the encompassing grasp of these powerful words and images" and asserts they are an "accusatory and celebratory documentation" (Tina Carr, 2008). These people embody this place; the place becoming, in Lucy Lippard's words "the external world mediated through human subjective experience." (Kwon, 2002) They are the powerless mute witnesses to the havoc that was wreaked on the space and place they call home. A place once defined by manufacturing, the speed of expansion and then removal, reveals a power dynamic; a force of spatial politics that is out of control. Carr and Schöne's work hold us in these moments, as the community transitions, through their grit and

determination, evolving their place into a new lived space. This type of socially engaged practice is vital to documenting our social history. It is unapologetic and demands of the viewer to take personal responsibility, as without this our relationship with place and space is lost.



Fig 6. A Key in the Hand. Chiharu Shiota.

In complete contrast, the work of Chiharu Shiota operates in physical space through vast site specific installations of woven thread. Place here is still relational, but Shiota is taking possession, interrupting and reconfiguring the internal white gallery space and creating a new place. As Tuan suggests “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.” (1977) Shiota entraps pre-owned objects, imbued with history and provenance, some known, some imaginary and at times weaving herself and others into the installations, literally embodying the space. Her work is both intricate,

enigmatic and dynamic, with great vaulted cocoon structures, wrapped in individual threads that are densely woven to build up thickenings that diminish light; creating illusions of infinite spaces. Humanist geographer, Tuan, speaks of place and space as inextricable, that once place is endowed with meaning, it becomes secure and stable, that this then reveals a “threat of space” (1977) that is open and free.

Shiota’s installations create a discourse in this way, through the arrangements of threads, she tames the space, showering it with possible narratives that ground it in place. Tuan makes the claim that, “space [which] allows for movement...

[means]...place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.” (1977) Shiota’s work ‘A Key in the Hand’, could be the embodiment of that pause in movement; the keys almost look like they have been ejected out of the boat and we see them mid-air as they shower down to land; the physical transference of place “creat[ing] coherent passageways and gathering spaces for the viewers”. (Dormer, 2018) The sheer production of scale, the technicality of production and the resultant emotional response the installations evoke elude to an experience of the sublime. Eliciting both swaddle of womb and muffled arachnid trap, Shiota is literally performing the space through infinitesimal movements, building up free flowing points of connections in space, full of potency.

Just like Carr and Schöne, Shiota is making present that which is absent, though these ideas direct and alert us in very different ways. She works with scale, colour, light, tactility; an “agglomeration of the actual physical” (Kwon, 2002) , using objects as symbolism, engaging us in a phenomenological dialogue about who we are and our place in the world; “I want them to dig deep into their souls so they can question our sense of belonging.” (We Present, 2017). Shiota works, at times, with

red thread, as in 'A Key in the Hand', from each thread hangs a key, some 50,000 she had donated. Their history is obliterated from view, the owners anonymous, yet this is shared object which in turn enables a shared experience. Keys are for our homes, for security, for treasured items, private space; we give them to people we trust. The meaning permeating through this is complex and multi-layered; "I can see the trace of a human life in that object, I can see the existence in the absence". (Corboy, 2017) The boats, Shiota tells us, are the cupped hands holding the keys, though we can also read boats as journeys, destinations and possibilities. The objects are imbued with memory, symbolising the people with the red thread symbolising the life paths as Shiota describes "all your life is red string... to follow your destiny." (Bloomberg , 2017) Inceptive ideas soon give way to the potency of implicit meaning; Shiota engenders a personal responsibility to traverse to deeper psychological understanding.

The importance of the site is key, often dictating the materiality, scale and interpretation of her response, described during 'Trace of Memory' at the Mattress Factory, "as a unidirectional relationship where a space supplies raw material for artistic interpretation...". (Sanader, 2014) The black threads involved in this installation, interacted with the dilapidated building and the materiality of the peeling paint and creaking floorboards, establishing a dialogue about decaying blackness; it was a mutual exchange, a fluid dialogue "with the material archaeologies of place" (Sanader, 2014).



Fig 7. Beyond Time. Chiharu Shiota.

Similarly, Shiota's installation 'Beyond Time' in The Chapel in Yorkshire Sculpture Park, drew directly from The Chapels known history. The remembrance of the organ, here reconstructed, that once played and hosted countless weddings, births, deaths of previous occupants. Shiota was struck by this stating "I believe the silence is often stronger and more beautiful than any sound can be. The absence of something makes it stronger." (Simpson, 2018) From the organ spring dense infinite white threads morphing into cocoon like structures, wholly altering the space; enveloping, surrounding, forcing the viewer to question their relationship between body and space. One can immediately revert back to Massey's earlier statements here, with her interchangeable, multi directional plurality. That these threads could be the literal illustrative embodiment of those coexisting pathways "always in process" (2008) that make up place. Shiota refers to this as "drawing in the air on a

limitless space... an accumulation of... thread [that] forms a surface" (Corboy, 2017); her '*surface*' shaping the physical space. Nestled within those threads were copies of the hymn and music sheets of the services held there, rendering a cacophony of voices described by Shiota as "the accumulated collective memory." (Simpson, 2018) Tuan explains that our experiences construct our reality, then filter it through a series of sensory, visual and conceptual perceptions. He does not invite an idea of "passivity" here to experience, but more that the "experience thus implies the ability to learn from what has undergone." (1977) This opens us up to place and space as a continuum; in process and multiple subjective interpretations which fits well with Shiota's work. Dormer (2018) also states Shiota "uses the concept of entrapment and mass communicating, inserting...notions... to initiate public possibility, to consider the body's relationship with a place, to...transform...sensitise that place...drawing them together as a community."

Why does Shiota's believe this level of connection is needed and why does her work resonate so deeply with us? Living in an increasingly homogenised environment being driven by the onward march of capitalism, our towns and the inherent branding look exactly the same. The continuous use of these non-places; "a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé, 1995, p. 77) leaves us with a feeling of disconnection. Mark Augé describes these non-places as transient and explains that with only fleeting relations "that subject the individual consciousness to entirely new experiences and ordeals of solitude," (1995, p. 93) mean we cannot imbue them with the same meaning. Disenfranchisement with place, "exasperate the sense of placelessness in contemporary life" (Kwon, 2002). Kwon also cite's Lippard as surmising "that space

is not a... void... but... an instrument in itself" and that our own identity is intrinsically linked to place. Shiota demands that we engage with our sense of memory and deep rooted feelings, that through this process she reunites us with our identity and in turn our understanding of place and space. From the site, Shiota scoops together absent collective memories imbricating with her own and that of the viewer's in a sequence; consolidating evocation these intricate threads are woven together, constructed into one consciousness. Shiota's installations appear to resonate so fully with people because they communicate on an instinctual sub-conscious level creating attachments that give meaning to their lives.

Conclusion

This essay looked to explore the work of two contemporary artists and analyse how they explore place and space. So where does this leave us in deciphering the meanings of place and space? Carr, Schöne and Shiota have constructed for us dynamic examples which have included embodied installations intricately laden with symbolism and through socially engaged photography practice. Their work have helped us to understand the world and to explore and create meaning, though they have relied on us as individuals and groups to inject and decipher that meaning. Massey and Tuan have offered up a lively discourse, with multiple layers of connections, constructions and processes in which to understand place and space. Tuan's humanist perspective ultimately states that we *experience* place and space; with ideas around spatial interactions between humans and the environment. That it is in this perception, that we can make a conscious choice how to interpret and receive space. He also asserts that emotions guide everything and puts at the centre of his argument that "every knowledge is constrained by the knower itself." (Mahoudeau, 2016) Place and space therefore is rooted with identity and attachment. Places are separated by areas of space and Tuan reads this as space being that of movement and place as that of pause. This is an eloquent way to give meaning to these ideas and certainly, the act of constructing temporary installations gives this idea life. Massey however takes a more pragmatic view as a cultural geographer, in developing conceptual ideas around the spatial political and socio-economics in the landscape of space. She still explores connections between people but sees them as more mobile; and develops ideas that place is less rooted

and more transitory; in a constant flow. Massey, along with Harvey, are arguing for the significance of place due to its increased threat from outside forces, leading to place also being unstable and disenfranchised. However, whilst Harvey's view is dominated by rising anxiety around the faults of capitalism; Massey contests that it is more complex than mere capital. Massey is more interested in the idea that the mobility of people and place are more governed by the intricacies of social interplay, as she phrases of 'power geometries'; (Massey, 1991) that of gender and race. These three people alone have therefore shifted our understanding of place as more than a fixed point, but one that also encompasses that of human experience which is full of social constructions and movement.

Both Shiota and Carr and Schöne's work have provided us with some contrasting discussions on place and space. As mediums they are very different; one operating on the realm of two dimensions, the other occupying three. All the works, however, have an obvious performance element in their production. Carr and Schöne invite the occupants of the place to perform to us as the audience, they utilise and inhabit the frame looking directly out at us, engaging us in a dialogue. Their real stories and voices are an integral part of the work and for Carr and Schöne authenticity is crucial. They bear witness to the ideas of socially constructed space and place, a place that has been shifted by outside forces and compounded by the inherent power geometries. Shiota, in contrast, carries out a physical performance through the act of weaving within the space, utilising used objects, mostly origin unknown, to act as sirens and signifiers. Unlike Carr and Schöne, Shiota likes the anonymity of the owners, she actively seeks out used objects, as this means that she, as the maker and in turn the audience, can fully

participate in the exchange, projecting their own experiences onto those objects and in turn to the place. Both artists are mobilising us, Carr & Schöne are projecting the voices of the active participants of the place, asking that we listen, learn and educate ourselves. Their work develops ideas around place being intrinsically linked to the socio-economic and political forces of others rendering the disenfranchisement of people and place. Shiota in contrast, is pulling us in, though, into a multi-sensory encounter, inviting us to utilise the breadth of our human experience in an exchange with each other, to rely on the unspoken, the haptic and the intuit.

In investigating place and space this paper particularly set out to explore whether place can be located through absences. This presence of absence has been communicated by Shiota through the use of symbolic objects, in contrast, Carr and Schöne, by way of the evidence based act of photography. But to the question, that if something is absent, who is to say what is present? The absent cannot be explicit for it cannot be seen, witnessed or touched. It is not necessarily physical, it is only remembered, imagined, honoured or mourned and ultimately is experienced uniquely by each person. Yet as we have demonstrated in 'Coalfaces' and 'A Key in the Hand', there is a commonality between these contrasting artists who are utilising absence as a vehicle to explore and prove the existence of each particular place. Neither artist, it can be argued is doing this more effectively than the other, but they both assert the value of absence as central to that of place. When we believe we can no longer identify with place, when non-places, homogenised environments are constructed, or external forces decimate our communities; this absolute absence will itself demand a definition of meaning.

Human cognitive experience is such that we will always search for this meaning; unique and empirical and inevitably, this initiates interactions, for as conscious beings we constantly strive to justify our very existence. This existentialist dynamic self-perpetuates attachment. If present, we assimilate, create or divert meaning. We do not allow absence to actually be absent, its very absence is still an existence, for “even as the power of place is diminished and often lost, it continues - as an absence - to define culture and identity. It also continues - as a presence - to change the way we live.” (Lippard, 1997)

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Figures

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http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_pictures/7479033.stm

Fig 2. New Brighton, Merseyside from 'The Last Resort', 1983-85 © Martin

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Fig 3. Martin Parr <https://www.martinparr.com/>

Fig 4. Cucumbers. Tina Carr and Annmarie Schöne. <http://www.simply-solar.co.uk/>

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Fig 7. Beyond Time. The Chapel. Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Chiharu Shiota.
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