

Essay for an artwork, destroyed - Karen Cunningham

'The Just Past' was realized as a temporary outdoor artwork, situated in a large triangular lawn, a common area for public use within Strombad Kritzendorf. Consisting of a 2.5 meter square of dehydrated grass; a viewing area from which to see the upright 2.5 meter square wooden frame, painted white with 4 lengths of rope strung between the top and bottom sides, each rope suspending a laserdisc ■; a 12inch double-sided aluminum disc encased in plastic, a piece of 'just past' technology made obsolete by the introduction of the inferior DVD. The work was intended to provide a phenomenological context in which to consider notions of time and transformation, the transformation of value from objects of use to objects of contemplation, from progression to regression.

The work was informed largely by a visit I made to Robertson Smithson's 1971 Earthwork 'Broken Circle, Spiral Hill' in Emmen, The Netherlands. Experiencing the work some 37 years after it's creation the effects of entropy are clear, especially on the 'Spiral Hill' whose corkscrew shaped pathway has been largely overgrown so that you have to fight your way through thick bushes to in order to reach the summit, the place from which to acquire full view of the 'Broken Circle'.

My aim for 'The Just Past' was that over the duration of the outdoor sculpture exhibition ■■ at Strombad Kritzendorf during the summer of 2012, the entropic forces of nature would return the square of dehydrated grass to a lush green state whilst the laserdiscs, exposed to the elements, deteriorated; warping and cracking in the sun ■■■. This outcome was to be expected because, although it does not operate within our control, nature is somewhat predictable, certainly more so than people. I was slightly surprised then when the 'constructed' part of the piece – the wooden frame – was broken, pushed to the ground, the laserdiscs ripped from their ropes and taken away.

As an artist I find myself trying to comprehend this occurrence in terms of a response or an event - something beyond an arbitrary incident - something to be conceptualized as opposed to something to be rationalized and I wonder was the destruction of the work a response not so much to the artworks itself but to the de-localization of the site ?

Destruction can be viewed as a form of critique and certainly intentional destruction is borne from culture rather than nature - in nature things do not cease to exist, their state merely transforms (entropy).

'The Just Past' was my first outdoor public artwork. As with many of my other sculptural works it suggested interaction or engagement. The other works - being viewed within the gallery environment - are experienced under the unspoken/unwritten rule that unless directly instructed the encounter with the sculpture is primarily visual ■■■■, but what has to be accepted is that the world (that place outside of the gallery) is not experienced solely by sight. Furthermore what I must accept is that although I had envisaged a 'measured' interaction; perhaps viewers would stand or sit in the square of dehydrated grass, walk around the square frame, look at themselves and the surroundings in the reflective surfaces of the discs, interaction is ultimately defined by the person undertaking the action.

Whereas the intent of the work was to ramify the physical and cerebral experience of the site by use of a certain configuration of objects, materials and treatments that were presented in readiness of nature's interaction, the result was in fact a de-mystification of this process and the return of the materials to being things in themselves. Thinking about the making of the work and it's destruction a quote from Alain Badiou comes to my mind; 'Art must augment in each individual the non-democratic means of liberty' ■■■■■. I'm not sure if I agree with Badiou's statement but, it is something that I must consider.

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■ Laserdiscs were a domestic home video format and the first commercial use of the – now ubiquitous - optical disc storage.

■■ SCULPTURE GARDEN Strombad Kritzendorf, Vienna, Austria curated by Veronika Hauer and Magda Tothova.

■■■ Today, whilst writing this text, I got an email from the seller that I bought the laserdiscs from offering me "some very rare titles" I didn't have the heart to tell him that far from being a consumer of this superior but out-of-date media technology I was in fact probably contributing to the obsolescence of laserdiscs by peeling the title labels off and doing the exact opposite of the product care instructions; exposing them to the sun and rain.

■■■■ My sculpture 'Valentina (Tereshkova)' exhibited in a group show at Transmission Gallery, Glasgow was vandalized during the opening. A group of youths came into the gallery and one of them tore the face (a unique print my profile in paint onto a piece of paper) from the sculpture. He ran out of the gallery with the segment of the sculpture in his hand – now just a piece of paper with some paint on it. The piece of paper was eventually retrieved but the work was never the same again.

■■■■■ Alain Badiou, *Polemics* pg 10. Published 2006