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Theron Schmidt, 'Unsettling Representation: Monuments, Theatre, and Relational Space', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20 (2010), 283–95

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the ways in which theatrical techniques might intervene in the representational operations of monuments. As illustrated by the controversy surrounding nearly every aspect of the memorial to the destroyed World Trade Center, monumentality implies a finality of meaning and an unavailability of monumental spaces to open and fluctuating meanings. Henri Lefebvre's distinction between 'representations of space' and 'representational space' suggests a method for unsettling or rewriting these meanings, which Joanne Tompkins develops as an analytical tool in her consideration of contemporary Australian theatre. However, Tinderbox Theatre Company's production of *convictions* in a decommissioned courthouse in Belfast demonstrates that theatrical representations may have the effect of displacing previous spatial practices, but they also have their own authorising norms and associated codes of meaning and behaviour.

Using Doreen Massey's concept of 'relational space' to augment Lefebvre's categories, a set of criteria can be articulated for counter-monumental theatre that is attentive to the politics of openness and closure. *And While London Burns*, a downloadable audio tour of the financial centre of London produced by John Jordan and PLATFORM, is used as an example of a theatrical event which creates relational spaces that intervene within the normative mechanisms both of corporate organisation of urban space and of dramatic narrative. Concluding by co-opting Wren's Monument, *And While London Burns* asks its participants to rethink identity in spatial terms, and I argue that this spatial awareness in turn necessitates an awareness of relationality which is relevant to both theatre and politics.

Monuments appear to fix meaning. Overtly designed to serve a particular representative function, monumental spaces seem to possess a finality of meaning. They might be understood as pure representation, manifesting a single idea or point of view in such a way that they prevent any other use or interpretation. Drawing on the writings of Henri Lefebvre, Joanne Tompkins, and Doreen Massey, this paper explores ways in which theatrical practice might intervene in the representational operations at work in these spaces; but, as theatre is itself a representational practice, to intervene into representationality might also require a theatre that unsettles itself.

Public debate around proposals for monumental projects frequently reveals widespread anxiety and disagreement over issues of authority, participation, space, and memory. In the prominent example of the still-unfinished memorial to New York's World Trade Center, controversy has surrounded the designs for both the new tower being built to fill the void in the skyline (designed by Daniel Libeskind and referred to as the *Freedom Tower*) and the new monument designed around the holes in the ground where the old towers stood (*Reflecting Absence*, designed by Michael Arad and Peter Walker). Every aspect of these projects has been hotly contested, from the extent of the security cordons of the new tower<sup>1</sup> to the arrangement of names on the memorial.<sup>2</sup> Public submissions were invited for ideas for the memorial,

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<sup>1</sup> Right-wing commentator Deroy Murdock labelled the new tower the 'Fear Tower': 'This veritable trembling "Fear Tower" concedes our enemies' claims that the WTC affronted Allah.' Deroy Murdock, 'What Are We Afraid Of?' *National Review Online*, 11 March 2005 <<http://www.nationalreview.com/murdock/murdock200503111045.asp>> [accessed 2 October 2009].

<sup>2</sup> Under the slogan 'A Memorial in Name Only, is No Memorial at all', an online petition objected to the plan to randomly distribute names of deceased with no additional information. 'Take Back the Memorial petition', <<http://www.takebackthememorial.org>> [accessed 2 October 2009]. In December 2006, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg conceded to the petition's request and overrode the designer's specification.

and the 5,201 responses ranged from those designed to evoke Greek ideas of memorialisation and sacrifice to the literal power of community to the triumphant persistence of the ideals of the USA.<sup>3</sup> For LukeConnell Vandeverre, who was reported to be spending 'real' money to build a virtual World Trade Center within Second Life, '[t]hese buildings represent the achievements of mankind, the world and their resolve and ability to recover from such tragedy.'<sup>4</sup> In the removal of debris from the ruined buildings, the last piece of steel was ceremoniously draped with a USA flag and subsequently recycled as part of the bow of the newly built *USS New York*, an amphibious assault vehicle<sup>5</sup> -- literalising the shift from mourning to reprisal. And so on: every detail, every aspect, every angle is a cause for interpretation and debate.

At stake in these arguments and proposals around the World Trade Center memorial is a contest over the meaning which is being represented -- and, indeed, a contest over meaning itself. These controversies reveal not only the extent to which parties are committed to this or that specific meaning, but also an overarching anxiety about the *finality* of meaning which will be concretised by the completed structures -- that is, about their very capacity to

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<[http://www.national911memorial.org/site/PageServer?pagename=mm\\_names](http://www.national911memorial.org/site/PageServer?pagename=mm_names)> [accessed 2 October 2009].

<sup>3</sup> The proposals referred to are *Memory Tholos* (proposed by Planetcast); *Converting Emotional Energy To Light Energy* (proposed by Seth Neubardt); and *New Glory...Transcend!* (proposed by Charles Gray, et al). 'World Trade Center Memorial Competition - Competitor Forum', <<http://web.archive.org/web/20061205062656/http://eternalwtc.org/>> [accessed 2 October 2009].

<sup>4</sup> 'Gambling on the Virtual World Trade Center', *Second Life Herald*, 15 April 2007 <[http://www.secondlifeherald.com/slh/2007/04/gambling\\_on\\_the.html](http://www.secondlifeherald.com/slh/2007/04/gambling_on_the.html)> [accessed 2 October 2009]. See also the virtual World Trade Center memorial built within Second Life, discussed in 'Remembering 9/11 in Second Life', *New World Notes*, 11 September 2007 <<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2007/09/911.html>> [accessed 2 October 2009].

<sup>5</sup> 'On September 2001, our nation's enemies brought their fight to New York... The USS New York will now bring the fight to our nation's enemies well into the future,' declares Governor George Pataki on the official website for the *USS New York*. <<http://www.ussnewyork.com>> [accessed 2 October 2009].

mean and the ongoing impact that this capacity will have in shaping the city and, ultimately, the world. Underlying these positions, proposals, and criticisms is the sense that there is only one chance to get it right -- once the meaning has been fixed, it is fixed forever. This fraught public discourse seems to reveal a commonly held apprehension of the ways in which, once established, these monumental objects' occupation and production space are autonomously productive of meaning.

In this paper, I will draw upon Henri Lefebvre's analysis of this capacity of spatial arrangements to fix and produce meaning in terms of what he calls 'representations of space'. Lefebvre outlines tactics for intervening within and destabilising these fixed meanings, and Joanne Tompkins has applied Lefebvre's analysis to contemporary Australian theatre practices that attempt to destabilise or 'unsettle' meaning. Like Tompkins, I am interested in the ways that theatrical interventions into monumentality might destabilise meaning, but whereas Tompkins focuses primarily on staged theatrical productions, I will consider two instances of theatrical performance that take place outside of conventional theatre buildings. Instead, these are productions that engage directly with monumental buildings: Tinderbox's production of *convictions* (2000) at the Crumlin Road Courthouse in Belfast, and *And While London Burns* (ongoing; originally released in 2006), a self-described 'operatic audio tour' of the financial heart of London which concludes by co-opting Christopher Wren's Monument to the great fire of London. What possibilities for acknowledging, destabilising, and rewriting the meaning of monumental buildings do these theatrical events reveal? And -- noting the way in which theatrical forms might inevitably yearn toward a similar fixing of meaning -- in

what ways might a politics of open space unsettle the power relations of theatre? Using Doreen Massey's concept of 'relational space' to augment Lefebvre's categories, I would like to articulate the potential for counter-monumental theatre that is attentive to the politics of openness and closure, and that explores not only the theatricality of monumental buildings but also the counter-monumental potential of the theatrical encounter.

### **From representations of space to representational space**

Monumental buildings such as memorials and courthouses are addressed by Lefebvre in his consideration of 'representations of space' in *The Production of Space* (1974). For Lefebvre, 'representations of space' are the means by which ideology and knowledge are combined in a social-spatial practice which locates and reinforces a culture's social power. Lefebvre contrasts these representations with 'spatial practice', the everyday phenomenological experience of space, and 'representational space', a symbolic overlay of physical space through which new and potentially subversive meanings can be produced.<sup>6</sup> I am turning to Lefebvre because of the usefulness of his theoretical distinctions, but also as a way of acknowledging and unpacking the implicit political assumptions underlying my questions around intervention within representation. Lefebvre's work was very much informed by the 1960s radical political context within which he was

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<sup>6</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 38-39, 45.

writing, and the influence of this time continues to be felt in the questions I am posing. I am presuming a positive value for the destabilisation of meaning and authority, and that such destabilisation would be desirable, but Lefebvre puts it much more forcefully and explicitly. There was a mutually influential relationship between Lefebvre's ideas and those of the Situationist International, and although there were internal disagreements, Lefebvre shares with the Situationists a militant opposition to existing organisations of society.<sup>7</sup> Referring to the ways in which ideological forces are rendered invisible by the appearance of space as unified, abstract, and fixed, Lefebvre writes, 'The aim of this book is to detonate this state of affairs'<sup>8</sup> -- a desire which finds some resonance in Guy Debord's 1992 introduction to *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967): 'This book should be read bearing in mind that it was written with the deliberate intention of doing harm to spectacular society.'<sup>9</sup> Given the shared political milieu of the two thinkers, it is little surprise that Lefebvre's writing retains Debord's hostility toward spectacle: Lefebvre explicitly associates the production of abstract space with the processes of spectacularisation,<sup>10</sup> and Debord's proclamation that spectacle is 'ideology in material form'<sup>11</sup> is paralleled by Lefebvre's critique of monumental space.

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<sup>7</sup> See Michael Sheringham, 'Henri Lefebvre: Alienation and Appropriation in Everyday Life', in *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 134-74.

<sup>8</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> 'That which is merely *seen* is reduced to an image -- and to an icy coldness.' Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 286, original emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, pp. 149-50.

The legacy of Situationism might inflect a project such as this one with an automatic hostility toward any form of representation: representationality itself might be the problem to be confronted and overcome. For Debord, the prevalence of the representational is symptomatic of the fallen state of his contemporary culture, as summed up by his opening proclamation in *The Society of the Spectacle*: 'All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.'<sup>12</sup> However, Lefebvre's position towards representation is more subtle than Debord's. Lefebvre's nuanced distinction between 'representations of space' and 'representational space' is based upon an interest in representation itself, not as something that must in every instance be destroyed or transcended, but as a system which can be redeployed as a practical tool for enquiry. Lefebvre writes, 'The area where ideology and knowledge are barely distinguishable is subsumed under the broader notion of *representation*, which thus supplants the concept of ideology and becomes a serviceable (operational) tool for the analysis of spaces [...].'<sup>13</sup> Intervening within the operations of representation (and within its spaces), Lefebvre argues, allows for an intervention within ideology.

Though Lefebvre might be more interested than Debord in the potential redeployment of representation, he makes almost no reference to that set of representational operations we call 'theatre'. The closest Lefebvre comes is a brief metaphor, using the image of the theatre to illustrate the demystification of abstract space he wants to achieve:

[Abstract] space is illusory and the secret of the illusion lies in the transparency itself. The apparatus of power and knowledge that is

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 45, original emphasis.

revealed once we have 'drawn the curtain' has therefore nothing of smoke and mirrors about it.<sup>14</sup>

Lefebvre's deployment of the idea of theatre is typical of a crude form of anti-theatricalism that equates theatre with imitation and representation, and his throwaway reference is not really intended to say much about the actual operations of the theatre. But even so, it leaves open an implied parallel between undoing spatial fetishisation and intervening within theatrical encounter -- as if getting 'back stage', as it were, would reveal the mechanisms of power and make them available for reconfiguration.

In *Unsettling Space* (2006), Joanne Tompkins directly applies Lefebvre's arguments to the theatre's particular configuration of space and representation, considering it as a space within which power might be analysed and reconfigured. Analysing spatial representations and monumentality in contemporary Australian theatre, Tompkins compares Lefebvre's categories with theatrical techniques for unsettling dominant ideologies, arguing that theatre can be an effective means of exposing the mechanisms behind representations of space. Tompkins deploys Lefebvre's categories as evaluative criteria, according to which theatrical events might be placed on a hierarchy of intervention. At the bottom of this hierarchy, theatre has the potential to mimetically reproduce external representations of space; but it is better, Tompkins argues, for theatre to expose these spaces' mechanisms of representation; and it is better still for theatre to create new representational spaces. Examples of the use of Lefebvre's categories as criteria recur throughout her book: discussing plays produced in relation to Australia's

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

bicentennial, for example, Tompkins writes, 'some successfully stage representational space, whereas most expose what is behind representations of space';<sup>15</sup> one particular production 'unsettles Lefebvre's representation of space, but it stops short of performing representational space';<sup>16</sup> and representations of 'real' monuments on stage 'frequently contribute to a performance of Lefebvrian representational space even though the concept of the monument is more closely allied with official (Lefebvrian) representations of space'.<sup>17</sup>

Tompkins applies Lefebvre's arguments to the theatrical stage as a particular space of representation, but I want to think here about the reverse movement, in which the operations of the stage are applied to existing spaces of representation. How might Tompkins's evaluative categories apply to theatre which does not stage monumentality, but which engages with actual monuments themselves? The first example I want to consider is Tinderbox Theatre Company's production of *convictions* (2000), which was staged within the then recently decommissioned Crumlin Road Courthouse in Belfast. The production consisted of seven short theatrical scenes written by different playwrights for specific locations within the building, as well as mixed media installations throughout the building. Audience members were guided between the scenes, with not all audience members being together as a group for the entire evening of the performance. In developing this production, Tinderbox deliberately engaged not only with the various histories associated with the

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<sup>15</sup> Joanne Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61. The production Tompkins refers to is *Barungin (Smell the Wind)* by Jack Davis.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

building (used as sources for the dramatic narratives) and the specific spatial properties of the rooms and areas within which each scene would take place, but also the overpowering meaning which the building in its entirety seemed to represent. Dawson Stelfox, architect for the project, writes, 'With its use of overscaled classical orders and the giant portico it was designed to impress all who entered with the power and status of law. Justice herself stands astride the central pediment with sword and scales ready to pass judgement and dispense the verdict.'<sup>18</sup>

As with the World Trade Center memorials discussed above, the building itself seems to autonomously produce its meaning: the Courthouse does not appear to *represent* Law, but to *be* Law. In Lefebvre's terms, we might qualify this to say that it represents *space* in a certain way, and the name by which we know that particular representation is Law. Stelfox acknowledges this conjunction of metaphorical and actual space, writing that the Courthouse 'is scaled to impress and dominate, reflecting the hierarchical court structure, with strict separation of the judiciary, the legal professionals, the public and especially the prisoners [...]'.<sup>19</sup> The judiciary are those who occupy the judge's bench; the prisoners are those imprisoned, and the relationship between 'the court' as 'the Law' and 'the court' as 'the Courthouse' is not metonymic but tautological -- they are one and the same. Lefebvre might argue that we only ever know the Law as a representation of space -- and we only ever know this particular space, the Crumlin Road Courthouse, as the manifestation of a Law

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<sup>18</sup> Tinderbox Theatre Company, *convictions* (Belfast: Tinderbox Theatre Company, 2000), p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

that remained deliberately secretive, hidden, unknowable except through its spatial manifestation. Michael McKinnie notes,

[T]he building is most famous (or infamous) for the function it served during the Troubles: as the site of many of Northern Ireland's paramilitary trials and the home of the secretive Diplock courts. These proceedings became one of the most controversial parts of the British judicial system in Northern Ireland because of their reliance on anonymous 'supergrass' testimony and their abandonment of trial by jury.<sup>20</sup>

Following Lefebvre's tack, the way to unsettle or shift the meaning of the Courthouse would be to shift the experience of space. In *convictions*, the different playwrights take various tactics toward effecting such a shift. Some directly confront the anxiety over representation, as in *Court No. 2*, by Marie Jones, in which a pair of heritage centre planners, and later a flamboyant musician, disagree wildly over the way in which the courtroom that they (and the audience) currently occupy might be converted into a diorama memorialising the history of the room. If each character presents an oversimplified version of good and evil -- sometimes it is the accused who is evil, and sometimes the accuser -- then the drama asks its audience to see the issue as more complex. Implicitly, the dramatic form is therefore presented as a mode of representation that is more capable of reflecting complexity than other forms. Other scenes give voice to perspectives that would not normally be heard within the courthouse, such as those of the guards and the families of those who were tried (in recordings used in the installations), a convict in the last five minutes before his execution (*Holding Room* by Gary Mitchell), those scrutinised before jury selection (*Jury Room* by Nicola McCartney), and even a

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<sup>20</sup> Michael McKinnie, 'The State of This Place: *Convictions*, the Courthouse, and the Geography of Performance in Belfast', *Modern Drama*, 46.4 (Winter 2003), 580-97 (p. 583).

murder victim, desperately longing for his case to remain open (*Court No. 1* by Owen McCafferty).

Evaluating *convictions* against Tompkins's criteria, Tinderbox might be said to have successfully effected a shift from a representation of space to a representational space. Through spatial practice -- 'drawing the curtain', as Lefebvre put it -- the banality of the building itself is revealed. Jen Harvie writes:

By entering, occupying, and installing work in the Courthouse, *convictions* challenged the site's dominant position in the social memory of Belfast [...]. It undermined the Courthouse's assumption of authority by challenging the obedience the building enforced in Belfast's citizens and it destabilised the extraordinary power assumed by the Courthouse by filling it with the ordinary and everyday and acknowledging its banal unpleasantness.<sup>21</sup>

In this way it becomes possible to achieve a symbolic overlay, necessarily transient and experiential, with which new stories and meanings are written. And yet, this transgression is nonetheless an authorised one -- in the name of Theatre, rather than Law. Watching video documentation of the performance, I am struck by how immediately theatre imposes its own structures of representations of space. The audience quickly learns to behave like a theatre audience, standing as a collective before the action, watching silently as the actors perform, and applauding after each scene. McKinnie writes that *convictions* 'employed its theatrical monopoly over the place to displace the statist monopoly over the courthouse',<sup>22</sup> and it is no surprise that his experience as an audience member was of having his movement through the space proscribed just as programmatically as it would have been under state regulation.<sup>23</sup> The norms may be different ones: '[o]ne is not supposed to clap

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<sup>21</sup> Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> McKinnie, 'The State of This Place', p. 587

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 592.

during a trial, but it is entirely acceptable during a play';<sup>24</sup> but they are no less normative, for it would be equally unacceptable *not* to clap. And it's not just the behaviour of audiences which is prescribed, but that of performers as well: their license to occupy the space is conditional on their behaviour as characters, and the whole transgression comes to an end with applause, at which point they stop being rightful residents of the space and again become interlopers. Among the ways in which Tompkins frames the idea of 'unsettlement' is a description of the way that theatrical representations of space can open those representations to new political interpretations. Something similar seems to be at stake in *convictions*: an emphasis on re-interpretation is clearly expressed at the level of its content. However, in this example which takes place outside the theatre, it is somewhat astonishing how quickly this unsettled space of the Courthouse is understood by those who are there to have been resettled by a new set of spatial politics, those of the theatre. To be sure, the political stakes have been shifted, but the actual Courthouse remains unavailable, curtained off behind the event of the theatre. How might this space be held open?

### **Relational space and counter-monuments**

The issue of representation is the core idea around which Lefebvre's categories of spatial politics circulate, but more recent work in political geography has attempted to theorise other conceptual frameworks for the experience of space. Doreen Massey's *for space* (2005) argues persuasively

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 588.

for a concept of 'relational space' in which heterogeneous trajectories intersect in a space which is always open, always in process.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to the politics of spaces of representation, in which space is the more or less neutral ground on which already-constituted subjectivities encounter each other and negotiate their rights or claims to equality, Massey emphasises the relational constructedness of (political) subjectivities -- with space being continually reproduced through these relations. She advocates 'a relational politics for a relational space'<sup>26</sup> in which meaning and space are open and unfinalised, drawing on Derrida's proposition that 'it is to the extent that stability is not natural, essential or substantial, that politics exists and ethics is possible'.<sup>27</sup>

The unfixed quality of this open, relational space is characterised by chance, coevalness and 'throwntogetherness'. Massey writes, 'Coevalness concerns a stance of recognition and respect in situations of mutual implication. It is an imaginative space of engagement [...]'.<sup>28</sup> It is with regard to this moment of encounter that Massey values chance, not as any voguish celebration of 'the glorious random mixity of it all',<sup>29</sup> but as the unique coming together of specific subjective trajectories: 'the throwntogetherness of place demands negotiation. [...] [Places] require that, in one way or another, we confront the challenge of the negotiation of multiplicity'.<sup>30</sup> She argues ultimately for a conception of 'space

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<sup>25</sup> Doreen Massey, *for space* (London: SAGE, 2005), pp. 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism', in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. by Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 77-88 (p. 84), cited in Massey, *for space*, p. 151.

<sup>28</sup> Massey, *for space*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

as coeval becoming'<sup>31</sup> and for a 'relational politics of place' that 'involves both the inevitable negotiations presented by throwntogetherness and a politics of the terms of openness and closure'.<sup>32</sup>

For the purposes of my argument, what is suggestive about Massey's formulation of relational space is its emphasis on an encounter which begins to approach theatricality, or at least certain forms of theatricality, as an 'imaginative space of engagement'. Let me come to consideration of this theatrical situation by way of the 'counter-monument', to which Tompkins refers in her discussion of theatrical representations of monuments. The idea of the counter-monument has been developed predominantly within the context of German monuments to the Holocaust, and in these discussions there is a similar apprehension about the fixation of meaning as is being considered in this essay. In his article on this subject, James Young writes that 'the didactic logic of monuments -- their demagogic rigidity and certainty about history -- continues to recall traits too closely associated with fascism itself'.<sup>33</sup> From this perspective, '[a] monument against fascism [...] would have to be a monument against itself'.<sup>34</sup> Young describes a number of German counter-monuments that attempt to undermine their own monumentality and to literally unsettle 'the monument's insistence that its meaning is as fixed as its place in the landscape'.<sup>35</sup> Two examples are Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's *Monument Against Fascism* (1993), a lead-covered column which gradually

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 189 (original emphasis).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>33</sup> James E. Young, 'Germany's Memorial Question: Memory, Counter-Memory, and the End of the Monument', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96.4 (Fall 1997), 853-80 (p. 857).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 857.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 855.

sank into the ground until it disappeared;<sup>36</sup> and Jochen Gerz's *Stones: A Monument Against Racism* (1993), in which some of the cobblestones in the courtyard leading to a former SS headquarters were replaced with identical cobblestones that had the names of destroyed Jewish cemeteries inscribed on their *undersides*.<sup>37</sup>

For Tompkins, theatre events can also function as counter-monuments. Drawing on Young's arguments, she describes the way that one recent performance 'productively counter-monumentalizes the cultural imaginary space of "Australia" as it stages an increasingly unsettled history'.<sup>38</sup> Tompkins is interested in transferring the idea of the counter-monument to representations of monuments on theatre stages; but I would like to work in the other direction, transferring the idea of theatricality to the situation of encounter with the monument. I'm thinking here of Michael Fried's famous dismissal of certain minimalist sculpture as theatrical; such works have 'a kind of *stage* presence,' Fried writes, because they force the spectator to consider as part of the work their own situatedness in relation to the work.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Young concludes about counter-monuments that '[t]he most important "space of memory" for these artists has not been in the ground or above it but between the memorial and its viewer, between the viewer and his [or her] own memory'.<sup>40</sup> The example of *convictions*, like the Australian examples cited by

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 859.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 860-61.

<sup>38</sup> Tompkins, *Unsettling Space*, p. 82. The work she is describing is Janis Balodis's *Ghosts Trilogy* (1985-96).

<sup>39</sup> Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), pp. 148-72 (p. 155), original emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> Young, 'Germany's Memorial Question', p. 878.

Tompkins, demonstrates one possible relation between theatre and monumentality in which theatre intervenes with the functioning of the monument. What I would like to consider here, through the concepts of relational space and counter-monuments, is the possibility of an interrelation between theatricality and monumentality which is not just the contest between two representational frameworks, or the superimposition of one framework over another, but instead reveals the ways in which the two might already be entangled. If theatre is already partly monumental, then a counter-monumental theatre might also need to be counter-theatrical.

### ***And While London Burns***

I want to turn now to the example of *And While London Burns*, written by John Jordan and James Marriott and produced by the social and ecological justice organisation PLATFORM. I think *And While London Burns* provides practical examples of the use of relational space to unsettle the representational authority of both theatre and the monumental buildings with which it engages. Subtitled 'An operatic audio tour across The City', it consists of three audio tracks which can be downloaded from the project's website.<sup>41</sup> The participant is instructed to load these onto a personal music player, go to a specified Starbucks outside the Bank Underground station, and start playing the tracks.

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<sup>41</sup> PLATFORM, John Jordan, James Marriott and Isa Suarez (composer), *And While London Burns: An Operatic Audio Tour across the City* (2006), <<http://www.andwhilelondonburns.com>> [accessed 2 October 2009]. As explanation for readers outside the UK, 'The City' refers to the historic heart of London, which remains a bounded region distinct from London's boroughs. Because of the high concentration of financial institutions in this small area, 'the City' is frequently used as shorthand for London's financial industry.

The audio is composed of three elements: an unemotive female voice who gives practical directions and factual information about the buildings, predominantly focusing on their connections with the British Petroleum corporation; a male voice, speaking in the first person, which refers to itself as the voice of a stockbroker working in the City; and an operatic soundscore of sung text and instrumentation. The male narrator -- evidently unfulfilled with his work and disheartened by the degradation of the environment with which he knows himself to be complicit -- leads the listener through the buildings with which he claims a daily familiarity, while reflecting on the departure of a similarly disillusioned lover from his life.

As with *convictions*, much of the piece relies on theatrical convention. For example, the male voice simulates an inner emotional life, acting out its weariness and its disgust with emotive shifts in register. This reliance on a fictitious character arguably helps make the experience 'readable' for its participants, who don't get to experience transitional signposts into what Ric Knowles calls 'the spaces of reception' as they would in a theatre building.<sup>42</sup> But *And While London Burns* lacks the other benefits of theatre buildings -- most obviously, the body of the actor, but also the darkened room and the focus of the audience. Perhaps this accounts for one difficulty I had with the piece, which was that the voice's persuasive efforts with regard to issues of global finance and climate responsibility were coupled with, and so dependent upon, its attempt to persuade me that it is the voice of a real person -- an attempt which was, for me, unsuccessful. Nevertheless, this artifice does enable the

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<sup>42</sup> Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 270-74.

same Lefebvrian manoeuvre as discussed above in relation to *convictions*: under the license of theatre, a new spatial practice is permitted in these otherwise imposing buildings, and a representational space (the site of the character's personal loss, and also the site of environmental disaster) is written over the dominant representation of space (the permanence of the corporation, the accumulation of wealth).

But then something surprising happens. I am circling the Swiss Re building, the futuristic London landmark designed by Lord Foster and more commonly referred to as the 'Gherkin'. Suddenly, the male voice brings me to a halt, crying 'STOP!' over the female voice (which has been discussing the relative demerits of carbon trading). 'So. You. In there,' the voice says. 'I'm here. In here. Between your ears. Inside you.' The voice asks me to look at the window of the building. 'Do you see me? There, look. The transparent me. The thin sliver of me on that glass. Right there. Look. Look at the reflection. Is it me? Or is it you?' In this moment, all the representational spaces occur simultaneously, without any one dominating over the others: the narrator acknowledges his fictiveness (and simultaneously his *real* reality as a disembodied voice); the semi-transparent skin of the building returns its gaze; and my own body -- which I had lent the drama in exchange for permission to explore these secretive buildings -- is returned to me, but in an uncanny form, with a voice not its own and in a space not its own. In Massey's terms, this experience might be described as 'the event of place', in which place occurs as 'a constellation of processes rather than a thing. This is place as open and as internally multiple.'<sup>43</sup> Not only does this unsettle the coherence of the Swiss Re

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<sup>43</sup> Massey, *for space*, pp. 140-41.

building, its monumental certainty; not only does the 'curtain' of the dramatic fiction reveal what is holding it up; but my own subjective agency is implicated as well. The representational space becomes *my* space in the sense that I have permission to use it, but this relational space is also *mine* in the further sense that I am responsible for it. My acceptance of my complicity, my recognition of myself *in this place*, is a profoundly doubled moment, overlapping representation and relation; and it is also a purely theatrical moment, in Fried's sense, in which the work addresses its spectator as its reason for existence. This moment of relational space undermines all the meaning-structures previously encountered in *And While London Burns*, but is also the most effective expression of the broader meaning of the piece: that every action impacts others, and that every action *creates* us.

This profoundly solitary moment, in which solitude itself is unsettled, has a more populated counterpart earlier in the piece. Standing before a window into a room filled with Deutsche Bank information workers, I am asked to come right up close to the window and observe the workers, while the narrative projects part of its story onto the occupants of the room (the owner of the male voice claims to have worked in this room). As before, the theatrical license grants me agency to do something I would not normally feel it was appropriate to do – namely, to stare at the workers. And yet, the soundtrack keeps me from moving on, holding me in this moment for long enough that I begin to question the appropriateness. This experience differs significantly from *convictions* because this space is populated, not with people *pretending* to be in a different world from the spectator, but people who *are* in a different world. This moment might exemplify the qualities of chance encounter, of 'throwntogetherness', that

for Massey characterises relational space. The quality that Massey values about space is the fact that one never knows who one is going to bump into -- which is pointedly not the case in conventional theatre: once the lights go down, one knows exactly who one is going to see.

## Conclusion

*And While London Burns* concludes at Christopher Wren's 1679 Monument to the Great Fire of London. Wren's Monument has so long been a part of London's landscape that its meaning does indeed, as Young describes, seem 'as fixed as its place in the landscape'.<sup>44</sup> It belongs to the past, and it also functions to consign the event it commemorates to the past. It represents History itself -- indeed, it *is* History, in the same way as the Crumlin Road Courthouse *is* Law. Its memorial function, paradoxically, is to allow forgetfulness, to define a category which is historical and is, by definition, not-present. Young describes the way that this particular function of memorials was a cause for concern for German counter-monumental artists: 'the initial impulse to memorialize such an event as the Holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget it'.<sup>45</sup> Given that 80 per cent of respondents to an online survey would prefer some form of the original Twin Towers to be rebuilt rather than the Freedom Tower,<sup>46</sup> a similar impulse might underlie the

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<sup>44</sup> Young, 'Germany's Memorial Question', p. 855.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 858.

<sup>46</sup> David Shuster, 'Rebuild the Twin Towers', *MSNBC.com*, 25 February 2005, <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7013421/#050225b>> [accessed 2 October 2009].

World Trade Center memorial project. But in *And While London Burns*, the topographical descent from the financial buildings of the City to the lower-lying land where the Monument sits is accompanied on the soundtrack with predictions of how the whole area will someday soon be underwater if, as is likely, the Thames River floods in a future catastrophe. In one sense, this experience unsettles the Monument by unsettling the landscape on which it rests. Climbing the Monument, with the music swelling to a climax, one might feel the ground sink into the river as one climbs, almost as if this monument, like Gerz/Shalev-Gerz's *Monument Against Fascism*, is forecasting its own disappearance and challenging the spectator to carry the task of remembering. It becomes a monument to the still-open future.

Tompkins's chapter on monumentality in Australian theatre opens with an epigraph from Paul Carter:

The monumentality of the places we create [...] is an attempt to arrest the ground, to prevent it slipping away from under our feet. We build in order to stabilize the ground, to provide ourselves with a secure place where we can stand and watch.<sup>47</sup>

Carter's image reverses the typical distinction between the representational and the real: rather than representation being an insubstantial illusion built on top of a solid reality, here the reality of space is that which is fluid, unstable, slipping away beneath our feet. Representation, in contrast, is the solid form to which we cling. For Massey, as for Carter, an awareness of relational space unsettles the mechanisms of representation. Space is always under production, and it is our participation which produces this space: we are constantly

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Carter, *The Lie of the Land* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 2, cited in Tompkins, *Unsettling Space*, p. 43.

producing space, not travelling through it.<sup>48</sup> This relational orientation seems to be fundamental to the theatrical, in which identity is always invented, both on stage and in the audience, in relation to the specific circumstances of the event. But it is also antithetical to other aspects of the theatrical, which would insist on the permanent life of the character, for example, or which rely on the separation of the performed body from the performing body -- else we would intervene when the performed body is in pain (and I think here not just of Live Art-style pain but ballet-style pain as well). To the extent that theatrical representations seek to fix their subjects, they mimic monuments and also satisfy our anxiety that we know what they mean -- or more precisely, that we know what their function is, which is *to mean something*. But to the extent that they create relational spaces, chance happenings, and throwntogetherness, they stop meaning for us / to us / upon us; and start being open spaces, where politics and ethics are not just represented but practised.

A persistent doubleness is, perhaps, the defining characteristic of theatricality. In order to proceed, as Bert O. States observed, the theatrical is always working on two levels, one semiological and one phenomenological;<sup>49</sup> or, as Marvin Carlson writes in the opening pages of his introduction to the discipline of performance studies, 'a consciousness of doubleness' is intrinsic to performance.<sup>50</sup> The interdependence between representationality and relationality that I have described here could be seen as another manifestation of this inherent logic of doubleness; and so, despite my focus here on examples

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<sup>48</sup> Massey, *for space*, pp. 118-19.

<sup>49</sup> Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 5.

of theatricality which take place outside theatre buildings, this dynamic might be cultivated wherever theatricality is at work. On the one hand, the event of theatre means a gathering together of bodies in an abstract *space* in order to represent politics, community, and ethics; but on the other, this throwing together of bodies and experiences always occurs in a specific *place*, and is itself embedded within networks of political and ethical relationships.<sup>51</sup> This 'consciousness of doubleness', the consciousness of the interdependence between fleeting moments of representation and an ever-fluctuating set of relational configurations, might have implications for thinking our social and political selves.

Tompkins hints at these implications in one of her concluding sentences: 'While a different order of spatiality may underpin the construction of national identity in different contexts, theatre is the place to begin looking for it because it is in the theatre that the opportunity arises to construct worlds that help interpret and reinterpret what happens outside the venue.'<sup>52</sup> I want to argue for a stronger statement than this: it is not only that the lessons of the theatre can be applied to the non-theatrical, but that we might, in any representational context, including but not limited to the theatre, be made aware of our relationality. Massey argues that the production of space is simultaneously productive of self, which is also fundamentally relational. 'We cannot "become", in other words, without others',<sup>53</sup> she writes -- a sentiment which finds parallels

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<sup>51</sup> My thinking about the overlapping of space and place is influenced by the work of theatre-maker Chris Goode, who creates performance both for people's private homes and for theatre buildings as part of the same set of questions about the political potential of theatre. See <<http://www.artsadmin.co.uk/opportunities/event.php?id=702>> [accessed 2 October 2009].

<sup>52</sup> Tompkins, *Unsettling Space*, pp. 166-67.

<sup>53</sup> Massey, *for space*, p. 56.

in recent theories of participatory art including Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998, translated into English in 2002), which theorises intersubjectivity via Guattari,<sup>54</sup> and Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces* (2004), which does the same via an updated reading of Bakhtin.<sup>55</sup> Massey's insistence on thinking spatially rather than temporally forces us to articulate these kinds of relational (as opposed to durational) constitutions of identity. This awareness of how our subjective agency is not solely restricted but is also created by the networks of relationality in which it finds itself is, I believe, a timely counterpart to an understanding of individual agency as self-authored and immanent. And, I would suggest, an everyday practical awareness of this relational and therefore unfixed sense of identity might underlie anxieties about the World Trade Center memorial, where what is at stake is one's identity as a citizen of New York, or indeed of the USA, after the 2001 attacks -- and might also spawn the impulse to fill the City with higher, more permanent reflections of our aspirations.<sup>56</sup> The 'relational politics' which Massey advocates, and the kind of relational awareness that *And While London Burns* seeks to evoke, are interventionist refusals of this inclination toward monumental theatrics.

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<sup>54</sup> 'Nothing is possible [...] without an awareness of the various forms of founding interdependence of subjectivity.' Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2002), p. 95.

<sup>55</sup> Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California, 2004), pp. 118-23.

<sup>56</sup> Created before the 2008 global economic crisis, there's a mournful sense of prescience about *And While London Burns*. At one moment in particular, the spoken text refers to the so-called 'skyscraper index': the theory, first jokingly proposed by Andrew Lawrence and later substantiated by Mark Thornton, that economic crises are preceded by a high rate of skyscraper construction. 'Look around you,' the text of *And While London Burns* instructs, and a post-2008 participant would all too easily see herself surrounded by monuments to frailty rather than stability. See Mark Thornton, 'Skyscrapers and Business Cycles', *The Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics*, 8.1 (2006), 51-74.