

Veiviseren: In the Dark, All Cats are Gray

Proposed Project, Stavanger, Norway, 2008

Dave Ball, Dadalus, John Deller, Rupert Hartley

Discotheque Group Statement

The London-based art group Discotheque exists to provide a possible theoretical/practical framework for contemporary art practice. It provides a platform for the development of critically engaged artistic activity through an ongoing commitment to ideas-based art.

Steering clear of any rigid notion of "membership" the group aims to operate as a fluid gathering of committed individuals on a project-by-project basis.

By prising open a critical space between the poles of the social, the aesthetic, and the conceptual, Discotheque endeavour to put into action rigorous and dynamic working methodologies specific to given sites of investigation.

Project

Developing the idea of a touristic "fact finding" journey, our project employs a mobile research kit, a kind of heterotopic Duchampian Boîte-en-valise, sallying out from a temporary in-situ base-camp for a co-ordinated and collaborative series of performative "mappings" sited, developed and executed along the route.

Initial ideas include:

- a migrating construction site, perpetually being erected and dismantled;
- a participatory photo wall;
- a series of structured dispersals of tiny foodstuffs;
- a logistical performative sculpture, shifting a live mummified body from one end of the route to the other.

Our aim is to develop a rigorous and challenging package of "experiments" designed to tease out the social, aesthetic, and conceptual textures of the route.



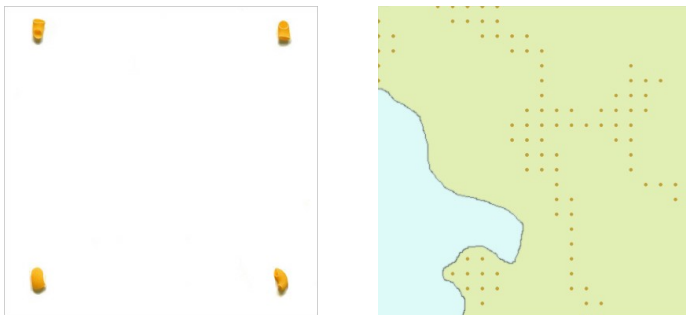
Mappings: Preliminary Ideas

Dave Ball

An attempt at overlaying order onto disorder utilising a very ordinary material – a small foodstuff sourced from a local shop, for example dried pasta – taking the form of a structured series of enacted dispersals.

Using the simple spatial parameter of a one yard (0.914m) square grid individual pieces of the foodstuff will be placed at intervals one metre apart along the route. Along certain “featureless” stretches little more than a straight line of deposits will be laid out, whilst in other more “significant” parts a more comprehensive horizontal grid will be marked out. Thus a mathematical rule becomes entangled with a subjective response to a shifting level of “interest” in the environment.

The outcome will comprise a fragmentary and incomplete grid of over-familiar objects traversing the site.



Dædalus

'Man is the measure of all things.' [Protagoras of Abdera (c. 480-410 BC) - Aristotle]

An absurdist endurance-based performative site/path marking gesture, in which a plaster-encased human “package” is manhandled by interested parties (artist participants and members of the public) in short steps along the designated route – a monumentalising memorial photograph being taken at each temporary “resting-place”.

Taking the pre-birth stage of the local Broken Column “individuals” as initial reference point, this funeral joint action, carried out with workmanlike solemnity, seeks to raise questions of space/place/directionality, time/effort, memory/identity, the body as marker/the body as object/the body as event.

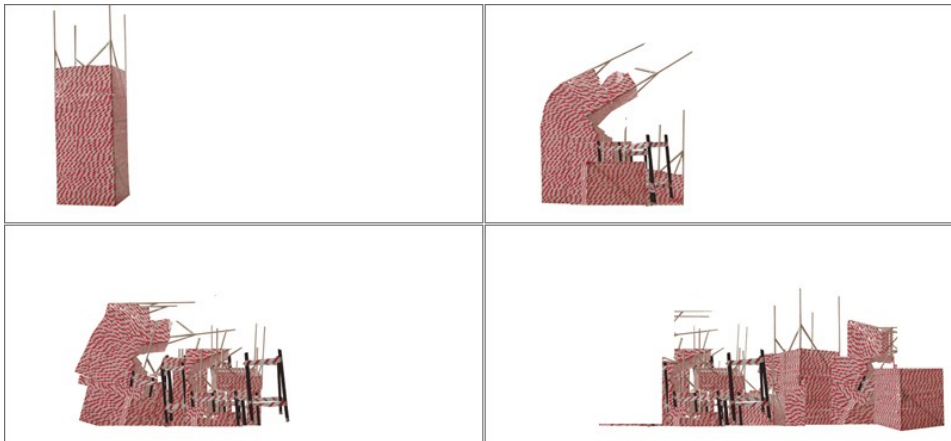


John Deller

From the starting point of Nytorget a structure will be built in the street comprising a wooden frame wrapped in hazard tape. Over the period of five days it will be systematically dismantled and rebuilt, gradually traversing the route from Nytorget to Tou Scene.

During its journey the structure will feed off the locality, absorbing detritus and artefacts found en-route. The structure is a manifestation of demolition and redevelopment, of renewal and disintegration: one feeding the other in a constant cycle of perpetual transformation.

The piece is partly performative and partly participatory, encouraging other artists as well as the local populace to become involved throughout the construction / destruction process.

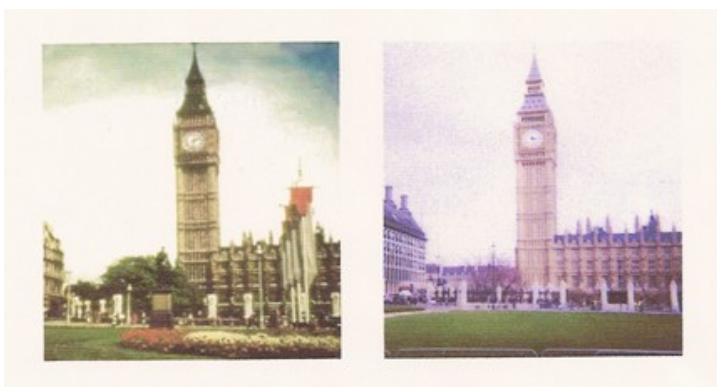


Rupert Hartley

'View-Finder' is a proposal to navigate and document Stavanger through found photographs.

Initially through internet research photographs will be downloaded of places along the route from Nytorget to Tou Scene. This material will be added to by additional research in Stavanger and used to develop a participatory tour and wall installation that invites people to, literally, take a photo from a wall and then go and find the exact spot from where it was taken. They will then be requested to create a duplicate photo and to return both pictures to the wall.

It is intended that the wall will develop into a public forum of exchange, inviting people to reflect upon, visit or re-visit the area through an economy of snapshots.



Past Project 1: Coryat's Crudities

NAN-NANA, Nottingham, UK, April 2006.

Bram Arnold, Dave Ball, Dædalus, Rupert Hartley, Chris Rountree, Eva Rudlinger, Emma Smith.

Coryat's Crudities was a tourism-themed geo-conceptual mapping project by Discotheque utilising the motif of the suitcase. The project engaged with historical notions of the Grand Tour, and formed an interrogation into the idea of "tourism" itself. A suitcase acted as a base for the project: a mobile "experiment kit" containing within it a series of interventions and dialogues from which the artists involved could engage with their temporary locale.



Background

Despite the ridicule he endured in his own lifetime, Thomas Coryat of Odcombe - an English traveller and mild eccentric, who in 1608 undertook the 1,975-mile walk to Venice and subsequently wrote an account 'Coryat's Crudities: Hastily gobled up in Five Moneth's Travels' in order to impress the court of Henry, Prince of Wales - set the model for a self-improving journey to view the arts and culture of Europe, and has been credited with beginning the craze for the Grand Tour.

From the 18th century onwards, the Grand Tour, notably to places of cultural and aesthetic interest and lasting anything between a few months to eight years, was regarded as a necessary part of the "completion" of education for wealthy British nobleman and cultured gentleman (and hence most major British artists). During the Tour, young men (and later chaperoned women) learned about the politics, culture, art and antiquities of neighbouring countries, and spent their time sightseeing, studying, and shopping.

Even though the term "Tourist" was only first used as an official term in 1937 by the League of Nations (defined as someone "travelling abroad for periods of over 24 hours", and later tellingly further defined by the World Tourism Organisation as "someone who travels at least fifty miles from home for the purpose of recreation"), nowadays the term when prefixed by the word "Art" is used pejoratively.

Project

A tourist's experience of a city will inevitably be of a completely different order to that of one of its residents. Whilst the city dweller is able to intuitively and instinctively gain a sense of the history and character of their home town from its smallest and most banal details, a tourist has to work harder, and to examine instead those more obviously symbolic features - the buildings, the traditions and the cultural signposts that betray the complex nature of a particular urban metropolis. [Dave Ball - 'Francis Alÿs Seven Walks', DogmaNet.org, October 2005]

As a symbol the suitcase is double-edged, ambivalent in the extreme: on the one hand, it evokes travel, displacement, emigration, exile and transience; on the other, it is that part of home that travels with us, a reminder of belonging and stability, the world of things we collect around us, the promise of continuity in the midst of change, of order restored. The suitcase is a portable heterotopia, an 'other space' that is always there and here at the same time, a home away from home,

but also offering the endless possibility of new departures, whether desired or forced. [Bridget Elliott & Anthony Purdy, 'Man in a Suitcase: Tulsa Luper at Compton Verney' Online Magazine of the Visual Narrative, August 2005]

Coryat's Crudities sought to extend Discotheque's travelogue treatise on tourism by using two heuristically packed, portable heterotopias* – suitcases – as sites for engagement. One, which looked back along the route thus far traversed, was to mirror Duchamp's travelling salesman archival swatch sample, Boîte-en-valise; the other more dynamic work in progress endeavoured to examine the intermedial possibilities at the intersection of the Hitman's rifle case, the Chinese puzzle box, the picnic hamper, and the souvenir fill-able spare capacity of the tourist's luggage – a Fluxus inspired empirical environment.

As part of 'NAN-NANA' – an artists' group networking event scheduled to coincide with Nottingham's hosting of the 'British Art Show 6' and the city's alternative art event 'Sideshow' – Discotheque embarked on a geo-conceptual mapping of Nottingham. The base for this part of the project was a suitcase containing the apparatus required for a series of city-wide experimental interventions and dialogues, which utilised both public space, Sideshow participating galleries and the numerous heterotopias in-between.

* Foucault has it that the nineteenth-century museum is a heterotopia which serves to accumulate everything, to establish a general archive, 'constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages . . . organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place.' [Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces' (1967), 'Heterotopias'.]

Mapping

The numerous mappings were carried out during Discotheque's participation in the NAN-NANA conference in Nottingham. The experiment-kit suitcase was carried throughout the event by the mappers, giving themselves the opportunity both to carry out experiments whenever possible, and – by stopping to display its contents – engaging the attention of an audience of other artists and artists' groups attending the conference.

Experiment 2: Dave Ball's experiment was to push along a scale model of a National Express coach at what appeared to be a realistic-looking average speed (i.e. if the model was 72 times smaller than a full-sized coach, then it would be driven 72 times slower than, say, 60mph). The model was to be pushed around the entire perimeter of Nottingham's Old Market Square, with the time taken being recorded. Using this figure, and that of the estimated average speed of travel, the total distance covered could then be calculated – thus providing a highly inaccurate and subjective measurement of the perimeter of the square.

Findings: The coach was pushed around the entire circuit - without stopping - in a time of 13 minutes 57 seconds (or 837 seconds). Given that the scale of the model was 1:76, and the average speed was judged by the artist to be the scaled-down equivalent of 80km/h, the true speed would thus be 1.053km/h (or 0.29 metres per second). So, knowing that distance is equal to speed multiplied by time (837×0.29), the perimeter of the Old Market Square can therefore be calculated to be 244m.



Experiment 3: Dædalus's experiment was to calculate the theoretical maximum distance attained by the firing of an arrow by the Robin Hood statue in the grounds of Nottingham Castle, and to locate the

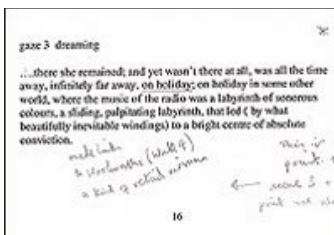
exact spot where it would land, measuring it with a length of string.

Findings: The maximum distance was estimated to be 300 yards, given the 80lb pull of the bow. The string was attached to the bow and the roll was then gradually unravelled in the direction of the arrow, with a marker being placed every 20 yards. Due to a number of buildings blocking its true path, the string had to be taken very slightly off course (but only by a matter of degrees), before following a road for the full distance up the hill.



Experiment 4: Rupert was to produce a guidebook entitled *Telltales* – a city guide, which would take the form of a collection of extracts from literary novels descriptive of places. The extracts would act as generic descriptions of place and would be categorized into scenes, gazes, walks and detours. The mappers would then be invited to select from these and through them construct their own strategy for touring Nottingham, negotiating one or a number of the fictions into the city. They would also be invited to document this process by making notes or drawings in the blank spaces and margins of the guidebook.

Findings: Though some of the descriptions were found to be simply not applicable to Nottingham (requiring too large a leap of imagination), the majority had correlates in the city, and could therefore be utilised in some form of navigation.



Experiment 6: Eva Rudlinger's experiment was to offer a kind of "mirror" or precursor to the use of the suitcase by the mappers themselves. She would spend time taking a found suitcase around the streets of London and photographing it in various unremarkable locations, empty and opened. The resulting series of photographs would then become the tools for a mapping of Nottingham. The mappers would be required to find matching locations in Nottingham, and deposit the photographs at these places (attached to posts, etc., in a manner similar to familiar "lost cat" notices), thus drawing parallels and highlighting differences between the two cities.

Findings: A set of twenty-four photographs were produced with the collective name 'Kofferraum: Interchangeable Landscapes'. Over the course of the weekend closely matching locations were found for most of the images, and the photographs were left in the appropriate places. Many of the them were still in place when the locations were revisited hours or days later, though some inevitably had a shorter lifespan.



Past Project 2: The Glorious Twelfth

Deptford X, Deptford, London, UK, October and November 2005.

Bram Arnold, Dave Ball, Dædalus, John Deller, Rupert Hartley, Birgit Medele.

The twelfth of August (the “glorious twelfth”) has been long established in the UK as the first day of the grouse hunting season (the “open season”). By revisiting this antiquated emblem of all things traditional in a contemporary urban context, Discotheque hoped to critically examine some of our unthinking assumptions about identity, class, and what exactly constitutes modern life in the ephemeral city. The project was a collaborative venture, with the artists involved taking on distinct roles in an urban “hunt”. Rather like in the traditional version, the hunt was to progress through a structured series of diverse yet interconnected stages. But there was a crucial difference: Discotheque's “game” would be of the soft-toy variety.

The tasks adopted by the artists involved were as follows:

Hunting; the collecting of the soft-toys – in shops, skips, or wherever they might live in the city.

Taxidermy; the stuffing and preserving of the animals.

Trophy display; the fruits of the hunt as seen hung ostentatiously on the walls of the wealthy.

Dispersal; the trophies displayed or hidden in the heart of Deptford.

Mapping; once the animals were in place they needed to be pointed out to the spectator.

Catalogue; a more or less truthful disclosure of the locations and identities of the trophies.

Tour; a series of rambles around the wilds of South East London, with a view to spotting some wildlife.



A number of stuffed toys were gathered from various sources. Fifteen of these were finally chosen based on their suitability for the “hunt”. The “game” was then catalogued with each animal being labelled using binomial nomenclature. The identified specimens then underwent taxidermical treatment. Skin or fur was inverted and a robust stuffing was added. The trophies were then displayed or hidden in and around the streets of Deptford. Finally a stage of mapping was undergone. Locations of the trophies would eventually be disclosed through the catalogue and the guided tours, but first it was up to the “pointers” to sniff them out.

An integral part of the project was a series of guided tours given at weekends during the Deptford X art festival by participating artists. The tours (or “hunts”) allowed the artists to draw out and expand upon particular themes explored by The Glorious Twelfth whilst giving an audience the chance to engage in a more directed way with an otherwise seemingly clandestine project.



Past Project 3: Strangers on a Train

London to Newcastle & Newcastle to London train routes, UK, September 2005.

Jonathan Allen, Bram Arnold, Dave Ball, Mandy Bray, Camilla Brueton, Chris Croft, Dædalus, Kate Donovan, Nisha Duggal, Kruse, Jacqueline Mantle, Phil Marsden, Anna Pharoah, Ray White.

A travel and exchange based project based on the Alfred Hitchcock film of the same name, *Strangers on a Train* began with the premise that three artists from London would travel north by train, each taking on board an artwork. These artists would exchange their works with those of three artists at the first stop, Peterborough. The newly received works would then be carried on the train until the next stop, Doncaster, where another three exchanges would take place. The process would then be repeated at York, and Newcastle.

Each artist would then have two days to add to or amend their “swapped” artwork before the process of exchange was repeated on the return journey, with the works ultimately being returned to their original owners in a newly altered state. This simple swapping procedure/structure was the only “rule” – the rest was up to the participants' imaginations. Most of the artists were previously unknown to each other.



Background

The 1951 Hitchcock film *'Strangers on a Train'* begins with a chance meeting on a train between a successful tennis player, Guy Haines, and his deranged fan, Bruce Anthony. Anthony, who already knows all about the fact that Haines's troublesome wife is refusing him a divorce, and that he would be glad to see the back of her, suggests they strike a bizarre deal. In return for Anthony murdering Haines's wife, Haines might also murder Anthony's own detested mother, and thus both parties would avoid suspicion. From this premise Hitchcock cleverly develops the story into a suspenseful thriller with a gripping climax.

If the film itself were a train continuing its journey from incident to intrigue to drama to resolution, then the cameo would be nothing more than an everyday onboard occurrence: a child glimpsing a lake as it whizzes past, a chance meeting of two friends in the gangway, a minor spillage of buffet-car tea. A tiny incident of no consequence to the journey as a whole. Despite the all-too-familiar threat of terrorist attacks, as railway users we are for the most part insignificant, anonymous individuals, with no power or ability to affect the unceasing progress of the train and its passengers from a to b to c, and back again. We are passive onlookers, temporarily locked in a curiously self-contained world, stopping occasionally at unfamiliar towns. In a curious inversion of the Lumière brothers' early moving image of a train pulling into a station, the outside world ceases to be real (the first screenings of their film caused confused cries of terror to be heard at an image which had ceased to be un-real). But as Hitchcock showed us in his film, the train is also a place for strangers to meet, to plot, to engage with people and things in a way that will either be forgotten within minutes, or that could resonate for years to come. The artists in this project took the opportunity to exploit this potential, by working with each other, with the passengers on the train, and with the rail travel environment itself.