

because it was semi-rural and rather peaceful. I stayed on after I got a job and went through grad school. Pascual went to jail for a year for drunken driving.

One day a fence was put across the path, separating us from the dirt lot lying between our houses and the paved street, where our mailboxes are. We could drive home through a long narrow dirt alley off 101. The family who came to build the fence, a pinched-looking Anglo woman, a Chicano man, and their three kids, told me that they'd just bought the lot and would probably put apartments on it soon, when they got financing. The fence stayed for awhile but finally one of the surfers ripped it down in the middle of the night. The fence was soon rebuilt; it stayed a few months and someone else ripped it down, maybe me. A chain-link fence was set in cement. My landlord said he was sorry he hadn't bought that lot. He was thinking of putting apartments on the whole plot and was worried about street access. He has regretfully raised my rent 45% in four years. He says houses are uneconomical and ecologically wasteful. He's just repainted the dead widow's house and rented it for triple the rent to a young couple with dogs and a lot of plants. The chain-link fence is still up, and occasionally I see people pacing out the long empty piece of land behind my house. Pascual is out of jail.

All kinds of people want to move ahead in Southern California.

Martha Rosler, 'Immigrating', *LAICA Journal* [Journal of the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art] (Spring 1975); reprinted in *Martha Rosler: Positions in the Life World* (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery/Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1999) 285-6.

Lucy R. Lippard Notes from a Recent Arrival//1995

[...] Much has been written beyond the art world in the last twenty years about 'a sense of place' or 'the spirit of place', which are symbiotically related to a sense of displacement, 'longing and belonging', or longing to belong. I am ambivalent about such phrases even as I am touched by them. The sense or spirit of place has become not just a cliché, but a kind of intellectual property, a way for nonbelongers to belong, or to appropriate a place, momentarily, as long as it is convenient. Ideally there should be no stigma attached to being adaptable, to feeling most at home in someone else's home. But given the history of this hemisphere, such an emotion becomes alarmingly proprietary. At the same time,

a sensitivity to place is a valuable social and cultural tool, providing much-needed connections to what we call 'nature' and, sometimes, to cultures not our own.

When people move to a place they've only visited before, with any hope or illusion of staying there, they often become interested in their predecessors. It's like marrying into a family. Having lost or been displaced from their own histories, they are ready to adopt those of others, or at the very least, to be a prime audience for their stories. This may or may not be appropriate or courteous behaviour; it's a delicate balance. If place is defined by memory, but no one with memories is left to bring them to the surface, does a place become no-place? What if there are people with memories but no one to transmit them to? Are their memories invalidated by being unspoken? Are they still valuable to others with a less personal connection?

In the case of a restless, multi-centred and multi-traditional people, even as power of place is diminished and often lost in modern life, it continues, as an absence, to define culture and identity. When history fails a community, memory takes up the task. If history comes from above and outside, from teachers and governments, stories are told from the inside at ground level. When governments and dominant cultures prove inadequate, grandmothers become the authorities. And the landscape triggers their memories, becomes symbolic, conveys different messages in different cultural languages.

Cultural reciprocity is crucial to an understanding of the vernacular landscape which, as J.B. Jackson (the pioneer writer on the subject, also a New Mexican) insists, is a place where people live and work. Such reciprocity is often ignored by those who prefer the abstractions of 'nature' to lived experience. As William deBuys has pointed out in his illuminating book on Northern New Mexico, *Enchantment and Exploitation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), we need to conserve traditional cultures in part because of 'the fresh new questions they pose about the relation of people to each other and to the land'.

The politics of place is layered with emotional and aesthetic resonance that is hard to analyse. Its reciprocal nature is better expressed within a circle than on (a) line. 'Around here' is a circular radiating notion/motion. 'Out there' is a line of sight, the view. Sitting at one's local centre, the pressing questions are about how to relate it to the peripheries. Or are the centre and the periphery indistinguishable, and if so, where does one stop and the other start? (Boundaries originally meant bonds rather than separations.) A multicentred society, understood as such (rather than as a dysfunctional society that will never find its home) might bring with it a new understanding of difference that comes from inside, and from lived experience of very different landscapes and histories. [...]

Where does an artist fit into this process? And how can people from the different cultures that formed this place and still live around here bring this

history to the surface again, without attracting the wrong kind of attention – eyesores of commerce and tourism? J.B. Jackson holds up the possibility of a landscape that would 'provide us with some symbols of permanent values ... landmarks to reassure us that we are not rootless individuals without identity or place, but are part of a larger scheme'. Isn't this something artists might tackle? The vernacular landscape in its ongoing formation has not often been the subject of innovative artforms, although human creativity is an integral part of the web formed by land, history, culture and place.

The reconstructive potential of an art practice that restores or reveals the meaning of a place to those who live within it cannot be underestimated. Few artists have gone beyond the reflective function of conventional artforms and beyond the reactive function of much activist art. As 'envisionaries', artists should be able to make connections visible: to be generous, to provide an alternative to the dominant culture's rapacious view of nature, to expose the social agendas that formed the land, to reinstate the mythical and cultural dimensions of 'public' experience and, at the same time, to become conscious of the ideological relationships and historical constructions of place. Artists from various backgrounds and foregrounds can bring out multiple readings of the places where they live – interpretations that mean different things to different people at different times rather than merely reflecting some of the places' beauty back into the marketplace or the living room.

The separation of art from context, art from place, art from audience, art from common ground and shared meanings has dominated the twentieth century. Nonetheless, context has been the key to much of the best art made in the past thirty years. Too often, however, it continues to be used in ways that are more rhetorical and theoretical than pragmatic or political. Social amnesia and a fear of art being swallowed up in 'real life' seem to infect even those artists who believe they want to reach new audiences. One reason for this is that art itself has lost its context in this society. It's no accident that *decontextualization* is the focus for many artists who do respect context. In this destabilized and multicentred society, for better or worse, a culture characterized by lack of grounding, lack of centre, determines what most of us think, do, and make. Displacement is as important as place, exile is as important as rootedness, and homelessness is as important as home.

These have become 'postmodern' insights, products of a trend that is itself the disturbed, overgifted child of a multicentred society. Postmodernism's pastiche anti-aesthetic, its acknowledgment of shifting focus and fragmented field of vision, are the products of an uprooted and alienated people who are often seeking new assurances in the ruins of the old, or in the back-turning embrace of the new. [...]

Site art and photography are the two artforms that seem at the moment to have the greatest potential as vehicles for a raised consciousness about where we 'find ourselves', and for collaboration with those who also live there: site art because it can augment, comment on, elucidate the place where it too is located, photography because, although it has a history of 'taking', it too can escape artificial exhibition spaces (into publications and other 'non-art' milieux) and can span time and space, offering multifaceted glimpses that at least suggest a place's 'reality'. But even in these forms there is not a great deal of work that directly communicates place – leads out, 'looks around', and either incorporates or carries its audience with it. Empathy and exchange are integral to what Wendell Berry calls a 'place ethic', which is (or should be) an essential component of all place-related art. [...]

Any place is diminished when it becomes a mere backdrop for mainstream art. Art that illuminates its location rather than just occupying it is place-specific rather than site-specific, incorporating people and economic and historical forces as well as topography. It usually 'takes place' outside of conventional venues that entice audiences through publicity and fashion. It is not closeted in 'white cubes', accessible only when admission is paid or boundaries are breached. It is not readable only to those in the know. It becomes at least temporarily part of or a criticism of the built and/or daily environment. It makes places mean more to those who live or spend time in them. [...]

Lucy R. Lippard, extracts from 'Notes From a Recent Arrival' in *Longing and Belonging: From the Faraway Nearby* (Santa Fe: SITE Santa Fe, 1995) 107–14

James Lingwood The Limits of Consensus//1996

[...] Rachel Whiteread's sculpture *House*, a concrete cast of the interior of the last remaining house in what had once been a long terrace, stood at the end of a rather tawdry park in London's East End. As the viewer moved around it, the sculpture presented its different sides. The front, unnervingly slim, featured blinded windows, an immovable door, two side elevations, one marked with six fireplaces, the other more bleak, punctuated only by the cuts of the stairs, and the rear, where the uneven forms of the back extension betrayed perhaps most acutely the vulnerability of domestic life.