

glimmers in limbo: Tramway

Comments from invited respondents

Invited visitors were asked to give their general responses to the interventions, and to consider the following questions:

- Did the work encourage you to think about space as a 'simultaneity of stories-so-far' i?
- Did any of the work persuade you to consider issues of access to and ownership of the space?
- How did the idea of 'performing' or 'practicing' space function in the work?

The work at Tramway was incredibly affecting – understated, gentle, subtle and yet hugely successful in alerting the visitor to previous and current uses of the building and its physical form.

Overall the interventions animated the whole ground floor, offering access to both public and more private areas, so the work gave permission to explore spaces normally denied access. Given most 'open doors' access to buildings normally closed is by guided tour, a success of this work was as a self-guided exploration which made it feel quite privileged, with more personal impact and even at times a little mischievous.

The historical references were not overplayed and perhaps current usage came through with a little more emphasis. The whole intervention was however very light touch and its impact came from not overpopulating each space with work. The minimalism of the installation heightened its force.

Entrance: an excellent introduction to the building, although I have to say I thought a little close to the door – a bit too immediate to give an opportunity for due consideration of the plan and the place of the animation.

Tramway 1: astonishing – so life-like – the projection truly subverted the building fabric and made me look afresh at the space, requiring me to go back stage. Made visitors participants – interacting with the work, but 'on stage' too. I didn't find the sound piece so successful, but altogether a hugely effective presentation.

Tramway 2: the participation was engaging, but the focus was out of the building, rather than on the building itself. The installation was hugely successful and a very effective form of presentation: multiple frames, different sizes, overlapping images, movement, physicality, effort etc.

Throughout the Ground Floor: as noted above, a very effective way of exploring the building, tracing the lines and thinking of the journeys and history of the building – probably a little more emphasis on its current use. (Ben Spencer, February 2008)

Looking back on it now, one of the things I liked most about the work was the way it seemed to offer secrets through different ways of looking; many of these ways of looking felt like theatrical tricks and I enjoyed seeing the tricks animated and made visible. So, for example, entering the building, I immediately loved the tidy fastidiousness of the silver architectural drawing of the Tramway's layout and I loved that this was almost missable if you weren't looking, like a doormat; but if you were looking, it was such a treat. So elegant. So accurate. A kind of mathematical equation of simple accuracy. And then gradually it became apparent that the stage space was a different material, or, indeed, had a projection on it. I knew what this was because you'd told me before, but at first it was just beguiling because it was a set of morphing, almost abstract images. And then gradually, some images became recognisable, such as *Aalst*. I saw it in London so recognised its very formal choreography. It was a pleasure, then, to watch people trying to recognise certain shows or times of year in these shifting images. And immediately we were invited into several different spatial relations with the building. It was miniaturised by its drawing, but we were miniaturised too, invited to stoop down to feel the floor and to examine the morphing images at close range. It also produced a nice grouping at the door of excited observers all comparing their impressions of the images. And I enjoyed being able to see the projector above, so I could see where the images were coming from. I liked the secrets of the theatre space too. I liked that we didn't know what we'd hear on the headphones and then when I had them on it was still hard to tell what it was. And then to recognise that it was the backstage cue calling – the old language of theatre I haven't really spoken myself in about 20 years – so familiar and so calm and so subterranean (architectural even...) to the audience's theatre experience in the auditorium. It was a pleasant insider feeling to me. I've already told you that I loved the feeling in that space, partly because of the lighting, which was warm and cosy and quieting and special in the way theatre can feel – kind of in a moment of suspension and anticipation before the show starts, when anything can happen, but in a quiet, comfortable way. I loved the warmth of the image on the wall and genuinely didn't know what I was looking at precisely. There was something about the lighting or the projection that made the wall seem like a bit of an optical illusion – and yet it was so material and factual in its 'content' – the electric box, the cabling, the brick. I had to go behind the wall to see what you'd photographed to compare. And then I had to feel the front of the wall to figure out what its surface actually *looked* like – I couldn't see it properly underneath the projection until I felt it and then I could see it. That was a great theatrical trick and I enjoyed being compelled to investigate the space and its properties and to appreciate all its different properties. I loved the installation in the exhibition space. I found the film footage really beautiful – the light was great, the surprise of seeing the van occasionally reflected in plate glass was fun, the repeated trips across bridges were exhilarating. It was a pleasure to compose with the trolleys; to find amongst the moving images a still I wanted to capture and to stop there, to see what it looked like to overlap images, to move faster or slower, to arrange the three images on the way in a variety of spatial relations to each other. Really

– I thought the film footage was beautiful, a kind of love letter to Glasgow, though I know that sounds corny (and maybe it was partly because I spent more time in Glasgow that day than I had for maybe a decade). But I also loved the trolleys and the fun we had moving them, but also the fun of watching others move them, especially the children, with their red-sparking trainers. I loved the sound of them trundling. And I liked the composition in space here – so that, standing at the door, I saw the projections on the wall, but also the trolleys in their different depths, the columns in the room and the silhouettes of people. This room, too, was hard to ‘read’ at first, but it was a delight to then engage in and make sense of. And then it was another delight to find in the far corner of the room, on the wall most of us had our backs to, the lovely photographs of street signs and the carefully Letrasetted names run underneath. This was literally a poem and it was lovely and moving.

What I liked about [the coloured lines] was their colour and the way they made a colourful intervention in this quite self-consciously cool space. They seemed playful and renegade and like they didn’t care what the rules of the Tramway were.

I loved the way the work showed the very material, literal spaces of Tramway and Glasgow through means that then converted its images to a kind of poetic landscape, without erasing or appropriating the material. I loved that there were so many different secrets to discover in so many different spaces, like a kind of treasure hunt. I enjoyed and admired the care and precision with which everything was clearly executed.

You ask if the work encouraged me to ‘think about space as a “simultaneity of stories so far”’. Yes, I guess. So we had the multiple stories on the Tramway stage at the door, and then backstage in the theatre. I confess, with the film, I didn’t see old tram routes on new Glasgow – I just saw Glasgow now. But of course in Glasgow now there is a deep layering of its histories, visible in its architectures, street signage, street furniture, its traffic even. And I suppose my feeling of secrets resonates with this idea too.

In relation to access, I hope the piece helps people explore all the spaces of the building, as it did for me.

In relation to ‘practising’ the space, yes, I felt this was going on. I wasn’t the only one exploring the space and using it in ways it isn’t usually used – for example, sitting to chat just inside the entrance to the theatre. This use was particularly visible in the exhibition space, with people running and moving the vitrines in ways we of course don’t usually do at exhibitions.

I loved the work. It was moving, beautiful, poetic. It slowed me down. It speeded me up. It took me back. It welcomed me back. It was impressive. It was subtle.

(Jen Harvie, February 2008)

Performances in your head

Performance is virtual. *glimmers in limbo* allowed me to make performances and invent histories; I can imagine the performance of a tram journey made in the creation of the films, the performance of pushing the trolley in turn leads to the performance of my imagining a Glasgow, and Tramway as a working tramshed before I knew it.

Beginnings and Endings

The end of the line - simultaneously the beginning of the journey, the journey that can only take you back to the beginning again. The journey back and forward from North to South across the city. I spoke to my friend about this project and specifically the series of photographs of street signs with absent streets marked by spaces - he described having visited Glasgow after a long absence and looking for streets that have disappeared, areas of the city that are just not there anymore. So, yes, the project is about memory, presence and absence, about accessing a past, but also it is an account of the process of the city both erasing itself and regenerating itself so it then becomes about the possible futures and interestingly in a year when Tramway has erased and regenerated spaces again.

What we think of as permanent - the built environment - is revealed as having other potentials, ephemeral - my friend's account of the disappeared streets is a trace in time - somehow as ephemeral as a performance.

Performances in space

Performance features as traces in *glimmers in limbo* in the topography of shows on the overhead documents or in the recordings of the backstage crews - the show created in the mind - I don't know what the shows are - I might imagine all the shows I have ever seen and indeed try to remember what I know I have forgotten - more performances created in my head.
(Marisa Zanotti, March 2008)

The interactive part of the exhibition of the projections on the tram lines gave me a sense of not only a movement through the space itself, but also through time, by means of them running on the original tramway lines themselves. This spatial and temporal movement was also performed by the spectator pushing the trolleys, by moving into the outside world of Glasgow from within the dark and atmospheric space of Tramway 2, following the forgotten routes of a Glasgow old. I found myself, slightly hypnotised by the sound of the tram-wheels, trying to imagine what Glasgow would have been like when the trams were in use, while reflecting upon modern culture and the various layers of narrative embodied by the development and urbanisation of Glasgow itself. I found myself stopping at random points, and looking, scrutinizing, even laughing at the simple image of a street corner, a man with a plastic bag, or an old street poster that needed replacing, projected as a piece of art in this prestigious place that is the Tramway of today. I thought that the speed at which people pushed the trolleys was interesting as well. Although the walk was slow and methodical, the images whizzed past us, reminding me of the speed at which we live today, barely catching breath for reflection. I loved the way at moments, if

you concentrated, you could see the white van (am I right?) that the video was being taken from, and the subsequent transparency of the process. I thought this was quite comical and gave a nice honesty to the piece, as well as a wink towards how silly it is that we must experience our city through the mediated image in an art gallery instead of getting on a bus somewhere random, or simply sitting on the street and seeing it/experiencing it for ourselves. I also really liked the way that when one person moved the image, we all joined them on the same route – everyone who watches with the person moving the trolley having the same yet very different experiences, emotions and thought processes. We join in a certain focused communal meditation that is not present on a bus or train in everyday life.

As the places I recognised passed by me, a rush of memories and feelings also passed through me, and at the same time I sensed a connection with others around me, wondering what they were thinking-remembering-feeling, as well as feeling a little like we had shared not only an artistic space, but also a journey of another kind. Maybe it would be interesting to ask spectators to give various aural histories of these places, putting an emphasis on place as a process, continually constructed through 'embodied practices that shape identities' in part through resistance to 'strategies of power' (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997) and pointing to how the immediate experience of place and identity are inevitably constituted within larger sets of spatial relations.

(Poppy Kohner, February 2008)

I was very interested in the subtle use of technology. I thought the film running at the entry was very interesting and provocative. I did not get to spend a lot of time looking at it, because there was always a crowd around it. I thought the use of the floor as the place where people confronted the moving image was a nice inversion of expectations. We are used to having images and animations around us in numerous ways, but not usually a moving 'floor'. I would have liked to spend more time with it, but...

The projection and sound installation in the big theatre space [Tramway 1] intrigued me, but I was not quite sure how to position myself to it. I was left wondering about the relationships between the various visual and auditory cues. I was very interested in the lines on the floors and the pieces of historical maps, but could not build a narrative for these pieces. I think it is a natural tendency to try and build 'sense' and I found myself feeling like I had missed something. On a purely provocative level and visual level, I was intrigued, but I don't think I really understood.

My favourite part was the carts and the moving film strips. I pretty much loved everything about this. I loved the simplicity and the straightforward aspect of the whole room. The tram tracks and the rolling carts, the way the film started and stopped with the movement of the cart. The overlapping of the films when two carts crossed. I loved the way that people engaged the carts as well. The way in which different age groups played with them, trying to make the film speed up and slow down, 'testing' the work of art to see how it worked. I loved the way that people standing in the path of the

projection cast shadows on the wall or the film as it passed them. I had a very nice moment when some children with those shoes with impact triggered lights were running up to the wall with the films projected onto it and chasing the moving film. It was both very dynamic and beautiful in that messy way that city streets are. I loved the pace of the films, their very considered quality. The way the city was both projected and revealed. The sense of moving through a living thing and then that being projected into a space and that space and the projection being interacted with. I thought that people were genuinely re-oriented to this place they see all the time and that it made them ask questions about it. I am not sure about the questions you ask below, but I do think it provoked questions/reflections about the 'place' they live in. People don't really see the 'built environment' they just move through it, so anything that makes them interrogate their relationship too it or makes them see it in a new way is really potent. I think this is especially the case when they can manipulate and interact with the making of the beauty and theirs and other's experience of such things. I really feel that the carts worked on all these levels, some of which take some time to reveal themselves to you.

(Robert Mantho, March 2008)

There definitely seemed to be some fascinating play or give in the usual boundaries of control - which I guess is the demarcation of access and ownership of space you mentioned - in the sense that the works were granting participants new freedoms, which were not always recognized or acted upon instantly (eg. as people gingerly made their way round the back of the Tramway 1 wall, or cautiously experimented with moving the trolleys ...before, often, eventually relaxing and literally running with the experience).

That tentative testing of new and unexpected liberties/opportunities definitely stood out amidst people's various reactions. It was true of the projector-trolleys in Tramway 2 in the sense that people would enter the room guided by the familiar 'do not touch' authority assumed to govern such spaces, and so at first would very delicately experiment with moving the trolleys. Often, though, it took surprisingly little time for the influence of this imagined authority to be shaken off and forgotten completely; many visitors were soon immersed in the project of pushing, pulling, stopping, starting, tracing familiar routes and/or spotting landmarks they knew along routes they didn't, typically with a degree of abandon and almost always with an energetic interest in the work which you felt they hadn't expected to feel or find when first entering 'the gallery' space.

(Tristan Partridge, March 2008)

ⁱ Massey, D. (2005) *For Space*. London, Thousand Oaks, California, New Delhi: Sage. p. 9.