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ENTRANCE

PLACE – THE FIRST OF ALL THINGS

'The question, what is place? presents many difficulties. An examination of all the relevant facts seems to lead to different conclusions. Moreover, we have inherited nothing from previous thinkers, whether in the way of a statement of difficulties or of a solution.'

Aristotle, *Book IV, The Physics*

Place can be difficult to locate. One might think that one can spot it somewhere, some way off in the distance, perhaps, and yet as one approaches it seems to disappear, only to reconfigure at some farther point, or back from whence one came. Place itself can seem a confusing place in which to find oneself, an uncertain place to explore, even with someone to guide us. We might be reminded of the words of the Stalker in Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film of the same name, the man who leads people carefully through the apocalyptic, and ever-changing, environment known as the Zone:

Our moods, our thoughts, our emotions, our feelings can bring about change here. And we are in no condition to comprehend them. Old traps vanish, new ones take their place; the old safe places become impassable, and the route can either be plain and easy, or impossibly confusing. That's how the Zone is. It may even seem capricious. But in fact, at any moment it is exactly as we

devise it, in our consciousness...everything that happens here depends on us, not on the Zone.

The same is true if we begin to consider what place might be, as Aristotle observes above, although we may be more fortunate in being able to consider as guides the many thinkers who have considered the question since his time, even though they have read the intellectual terrain in many different ways. Indeed, following Aristotle (following Plato) it would seem to be difficult to find a major philosopher who has not attempted to answer the question 'what is place?', and it is a question that has been asked with increasing frequency in recent decades, as its importance is recognized in anthropology, architecture, ecology, feminism, globalism, literature, mathematics, music, psychology, urbanism – indeed, almost any area of human activity. And of course art. In this book we shall explore the theme of place in contemporary art

**The People's Choice:
Kenya's Most Wanted**

Komar and Melamid, 1996



**The People's Choice:
Iceland's Most Wanted**

Komar and Melamid, 1995



and, to help us do so, this essay will provide a brief introduction to a subject that has engaged a great many people for centuries. There is much to consider here, and we will be led in many different directions, yet we must always remember that while we might easily be lost in place, we would certainly be lost without it.

Sometimes it is assumed that we all know what 'place' means, perhaps that it even means just one thing. But as authors we would suggest that there are more concepts of place than actual geographic ones, and so certain difficulties are bound to arise. Alternately, the word might be used as a synonym for 'space' or 'location', 'site' or 'territory', as has been the case in the past, although, as we shall see, this has been for very specific reasons. One might say that 'place' is to landscape as 'identity' is to portraiture, a useful (but perhaps misused) critical term that can add distinction. It is certainly a word that is used to describe our relationship to the world around us and because, within art, this perhaps occurs most often within the genre of landscape, it is here that we should begin.

In 1993 the Russian artists Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid began a project entitled *The People's Choice*, in which they engaged professional polling companies, compiled questionnaires and organized public meetings as a means of establishing the aesthetic judgment of 'the public', and thereby producing the 'most wanted' and the 'most unwanted' work of art. The project started in America, before expanding and considering the national 'taste' of other countries such as China and Finland, Iceland and Kenya. Interestingly, of the fifteen countries in which the project was eventually undertaken, eleven of them produced a landscape – and remarkably similar ones at that – as their 'most wanted' painting. It is interesting that landscape is not only the most popular of the major genres within the visual arts, but also the most recent, at least within the Western tradition. In much Renaissance painting, for example, the landscape is most often only glimpsed through the arches or windows of a securely interior world, or provides an exterior backdrop against which is set the main subject of the painting, often a scene taken from the Bible or the Classics. Indeed if landscape art, as we might now generally understand it, did not exist during this period, we might say that

this was because landscape, as we might now generally understand it, did not exist either. Of course, this is not to say that those elements with which we are familiar within the landscape – mountains, valleys, rivers, forests – were absent from the earth, but rather that they were not considered, collectively, as landscape, and so could hardly be represented as such.

In the Dark and Middle Ages, *Landschaft*, the first form of the word, meant a collection of dwellings built within an area of cultivated land that, in turn, is surrounded by an unknown – and unknowable – wilderness. Towards the end of the Middle Ages the word was adopted by the Dutch, who transliterated it as *landschap*, although this new adaptation brought about more than a slight shift in spelling. As a small, and to a great extent man-made, country, Holland was both widely cultivated and inhabited and so such a distinction between settlements and the surrounding wilds was not only unnecessary but also, in a real sense, inconceivable. Instead, its meaning began to feel the influence of two of the most important cultural activities within Dutch cultural life and, by the seventeenth century, *landschap* came to refer to an area of land that could be represented by either surveyor or artist, as map or painting. It was at around this time that in England *landschap* became *landskip*, and it was not long before its meaning became something that we might more easily recognize: broad, often elevated, views of rural scenes in which one can see villages and fields, woods and roads. As such, it is not a natural feature of the land but rather something man-made – its organization. Indeed, this is even true when one considers those artists who later painted in the wilderness, outside the familiar areas of human modification, as the very fact of their observation –

and subsequent act of representation – transforms that which is before them into landscape. (One might even argue that a landscape ceases to exist if there is no one to look upon it.) A landscape, then, is the land transformed, whether through the physical act of inhabitation or enclosure, clearance or cultivation, or the rather more conceptual transfiguration of human perception, regardless of whether this then becomes the basis for a map, a painting, or a written account.

A landscape is the land transformed, whether through the physical act of inhabitation or enclosure, clearance or cultivation, or through human perception

Like the landscapes themselves, our understanding of landscape has changed over time, and this is true also of place. Certainly our altered understanding of place has been far more radical, and has occurred over a far greater period, and while it is beyond the scope of this short introduction to chart such momentous shifts in their full complexity, it is important that we become aware of some developments if we are to appreciate our current understanding of place and the response of contemporary artists to it.

It has become almost a commonplace, when writing upon the nature of time, to quote Saint Augustine's remark: 'What, then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know.' In considering place, one might respond similarly. Like time, place is something with which we engage in our everyday lives; we can use it to describe the relative 'rightness' of a situation – 'A place for

everything and everything in its place', as the English social reformer Samuel Smiles wrote – or a characteristic that we might appreciate, such as a 'sense of place'. Certainly, place is something more often sensed than understood, an indistinct region of awareness rather than something clearly defined. 'Place' has no fixed identity, as places themselves do not, and has similarly been subject to numerous demands, whether theological or philosophical, political or aesthetic. Indeed, the term has often been vigorously contested, as have those areas to which it refers, subject both to intellectual attack and defence, in attempts either to wrest control of it or, conversely, to despoil it, to render it of little use or value.

But how would one now enter this discussion, if asked the placial equivalent of Saint Augustine's temporal enquiry? Many of us would agree with geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's remark in 1976 that 'When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place'. Place is something known to us, somewhere that belongs to us in a spiritual, if not possessive, sense and to which we too belong. As Thomas Hardy wrote in *The Woodlanders* (1887), to belong in a place is to

know all about those invisible ones of the days gone by, whose feet have traversed the fields; ...what bygone domestic dramas of love, jealousy, revenge, or disappointment have been enacted in the cottages, the mansion, the street or on the green. The spot may have beauty, grandeur, salubrity, convenience; but if it lacks memories it will ultimately pall upon him who settles there without opportunity of intercourse with his kind.

Place is thus space in which the process of remembrance continues to activate the past as

something which, to quote the philosopher Henri Bergson, is 'lived and acted, rather than represented'.

Hardy well understood the important influence of environment upon character, indeed environment *as* character, and, although a different writer in many ways, the same might also be said of James Joyce. In a preparatory note to *Ulysses*, Joyce wrote 'places remember events', and in this we can recognize how deeply time has become embedded within place, and might be said to have become one of its dominant characteristics. It is interesting to consider, for example, how many important historical events are now known simply by the name of the place in which they occurred – Hiroshima, Auschwitz, Chernobyl – although despite this, the place does not assume a dominance over the event but seems, instead, to give itself over to it wholly, as though the place can now mean little else. But place has not always been so dominated and indeed, the earliest thinkers were unequivocal in its superiority. In the fourth century BC, Archytas of Tarentum wrote a treatise on place, only fragments of which now survive:

Since everything that is in motion is moved in some place, it is obvious that one has to grant priority to place, in which that which causes motion or is acted upon will be. Perhaps thus it is the first of all things, since all existing things are in place or not without place.

For Archytas, place must take priority because it is indispensable to everything that exists, something with which Aristotle concurs, remarking in his *Physics* that 'everything is somewhere and in place'. Place is all-important because, to adapt a more recent philosophic phrase, *there is nothing outside of place*. Place is all that there is, the limit of all things and in

this it might be considered as a divine being. Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that the Hebrew name for God, *Makom*, means place, or that the first important thinker to attempt to reconcile Christianity with Greek philosophy, Philo of Alexandria, could write: 'God Himself is called place, for He encompasses all things, but is not encompassed by anything.'

It is a cruel historical irony that the very omnipresence of place could not prevent its subsequent domination by the notion of 'space', and may very well have contributed towards it. Following on from the work of Philo, another Alexandrian philosopher and theologian Johannes Philoponus worked tirelessly throughout the sixth century to challenge Aristotle on the many points where his teachings conflicted with Christian doctrine, including the definition of place. In doing so, he developed the notion of a pure dimensionality that was essentially limitless – once more, a characteristic of God alone – yet he was unwilling to develop this further into a concept of infinite space. By the late thirteenth century, however, Thomas Aquinas had demonstrated the need for such a concept and, even if he did not endorse it himself, by the time of his death in 1274, the concept of the infinite had become an imperative necessity.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, 'space' considered in its most expansive sense gradually gained precedence over what was considered the more bounded notion of place. Whereas discussions on the nature of place had initiated a consideration of limitless extension, it was 'space' that was considered most suitable for its continued exploration. In pointing towards the increased importance of infinity, place had contributed to its demise twice over: not only was

space seen as the more useful concept with which to explore the infinite, but the very things to which place seemed best suited – a sense of belonging, for example – were now considered intellectually irrelevant. The particular had been eclipsed by the universal; space had triumphed over place.

There are many places within place, many regions, each with their own identities, dialects and dialectics

Maybe this is a good place to dwell upon such matters. The first question that might be asked is do such things indeed matter? Of what relevance are the somewhat abstruse deliberations within late Hellenistic and medieval philosophy to our contemporary understanding of place in general and aspects of contemporary artistic practice in particular? It is certainly possible to consider the concept of place within contemporary art without recourse to such discussions, and many have done so, yet there are certain risks in taking such an approach. As we have already seen, place is an aggregate, the coming together of many disparate elements that can be used for many different purposes, whether it be the establishing of new intellectual foundations, or the undermining of those already extant. As such, we must recognize not only that there are fundamental differences between place and space, and between place and site, its modern replacement, but also that there are many places within place, many regions, each with their own identities, dialects and dialectics. It is a complex, ever-changing terrain – we might even consider it as a form of volcanic intellectual landscape

– one in which familiar landmarks or points of reference might shift position, become obscured by the cultural weather, or simply disappear altogether. It is important that we not only identify such things, but also remain aware of their shifts through time, as those that were once contiguous with one other another are rent apart, leaving crevices of misunderstanding into which we might otherwise fall.

The infinite space of the early modern period must have seemed overwhelming – Pascal remarked that ‘The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me’ – yet there were some for whom it must have offered immense possibilities rather than existential anxiety. Space offered infinite extension, and was better suited to exploring the immensities of a universe that was beginning to be revealed by Copernicus and Galileo; indeed, if the world were simply another planet orbiting the sun, then there was no reason why it should be subject to different physical laws, a shift that encouraged a greater ‘universalism’ in speculative thought, unbound from the particularities of place.

That is not to say that there were not fundamental differences of opinion amongst philosophers during this period over the nature of infinite space, and their disagreements continued throughout the sixteenth century, and into the seventeenth and eighteenth. Yet despite the arguments between John Locke and Isaac Newton on the one hand, both of whom supported the notion of infinite space and the void, and René Descartes and Gottfried Leibniz, who fiercely opposed it, on the other, there was a general sense of the diminishing importance of place, or rather, the importance of a diminished place. Place was absorbed within space in a distinctly subordinate role, ‘a part of

space’ in Newton’s phrase, something of ‘particular limited consideration’ (Locke) in contrast to the seeming unboundedness of space. Distance – and its dependency upon measurement – also contributed to the diminishing of place. This was a period of the ‘mathematization of nature’ whereby the world was engaged with only insofar as it could be mathematically determined. Galileo, Descartes and Locke removed what were seen as the ‘secondary qualities’ of place – such as colour, temperature, and texture – from their enquiries, as none of these could be converted to calculable distances and so were irrelevant to the matter in hand. As Descartes proclaimed, ‘When we say that a thing is in a given place, all we mean is that it occupies such a position relative to other things.’ When Leibniz makes this relationship more abstract still – the situation of things to one another, or indeed any other possible location, now becoming determinant rather than the measured distance between them – then not only does place become identical to space, but both become reduced to position or site, a ‘simple location’ upon the axes of analytical space. Now defined as nothing more than a position, place is unable to preserve any of the properties that were seen as inherent to it from the ancient philosophers onwards.

The fact that we are able, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, not only to conceive of a contemporary sense of place but also to testify to its cultural importance suggests that although the philosophical achievements of Descartes and Leibniz, and later Immanuel Kant, were immense, and continue to exert their influence, they were unable to raze place completely. For this we should be thankful. We retain a strong sense of place, even if we find it hard to define

with any satisfaction, and this in itself demonstrates a refusal to accept the mathematical model of place-as-location proposed by such seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers. As twentieth-century philosopher of science A. N. Whitehead characterized the world after Leibniz, 'nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless, merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly'. This is not a form of nature that we would even recognize, much less desire, and the same is true for the artists and writers of the past three centuries or so, for whom the concept of place has been an all-important part of their work.

**We retain a strong sense of place,
even if we find it hard to define
with any satisfaction**

What is striking is that such contrasting attitudes should be at work at the very same time: while Descartes was undertaking a reclusive residence in Holland, confining himself to the warmth of his stove and a theory of mind as the self-confinement of representations, Jacob van Ruisdael was taking himself out walking in the hills and mountains of Germany, which were later presented in what have been considered by some as the first landscape paintings in oil in the West. Similarly, the poet and painter William Blake forcefully rejected the mechanistic universe of Newton, whom he portrayed as a cold monster measuring out the world, and vilified in verse: 'May God us keep / From single vision and Newton's sleep.' Another Romantic painter, Caspar David Friedrich, at work shortly after the publication of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in 1790, demonstrated a strong conviction as to the enduring identity of place, even



Chasseur in the Forest
Caspar David Friedrich, 1813-14

to the extent that some of the people portrayed within his landscapes, such as the horseless French cavalry officer all alone in a brooding German landscape in *Chasseur in the Forest*, find themselves clearly *out of place*. The work of these artists, and many more besides, not only marks a refusal to accept the impoverishment of nature, and place, proposed by the rationalist philosophers of the period, but also puts forward a different, more generous, approach to engaging with the world. As the great English

landscape painter John Constable asked in a lecture of 1836, 'Why, then, may not landscape painting be considered a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but experiments?'

Little Sparta not only opens up onto the vistas of the hills beyond, but also onto vistas of memory, contemplation and understanding

Arguably the most important such artistic experiment of recent times is that established by Ian Hamilton Finlay at Stonypath, just south west of Edinburgh. Finlay moved into what was an abandoned hillside croft on an exposed desolate spot with his young family in 1966 and began work on a sunken garden and pond the following year; in doing so, he initiated the creation of one of the most celebrated gardens of the twentieth century, in which a neoclassical statue stands at rest on a tiled pathway, while a quotation from the eighteenth-century French revolutionary Saint-Just is inscribed upon large pieces of stone that act as a provocative subtitle to the Pentlands beyond. A cultivated place, the garden acts as a form of threshold, and encourages us to dwell, whether that be in the form of static contemplation, a wandering, or both. The artist Alec Finlay deftly evokes the density of the place:

To the phenomenal reality of place is added a collage of remembrances; the philosophy of Rousseau and Heraclitus, the Revolutionary ideology of Robespierre and Saint-Just, the painterly visions of Claude and Poussin, the poetry of Hölderlin and Virgil, the metamorphosis of Philemon and Baucis: all are called

to bear witness. These many levels of culture and experience evoked in the garden – time, the fleeting or transitory effects of the natural world, the drama of history, the woven pattern of mythology, and the eternal verities – all are embodied in place.

In his book on Chinese gardens, Edwin T. Morris remarks that: 'A great emotional charge could be wrung from a garden that was only a few acres in physical space, but expansive in poetical space.' This is undoubtedly true of the four acres of Little Sparta, as it not only opens up onto the vistas of the hills beyond, but also onto vistas of memory, contemplation and understanding. The importance of Little Sparta to us here, then, is that as both place and art it can lead us to a greater understanding of both of these things, what we might mean by them and why they might be considered so important. Although we have become aware of how place has been perceived as in some sense 'bounded', particularly in relation to the seemingly endless extension of space, we must reconsider what

Place is perceived as in some sense 'bounded', particularly in relation to the seemingly endless extension of space

it is we mean by this, particularly as it might have some bearing on our understanding of art also. Indeed, what becomes apparent is the permeability of both concepts, as Little Sparta opens up onto its surroundings as both place and art, and so perhaps this is an important mutual characteristic. Indeed, to speak of physical limits – boundaries – in such matters is meaningless, and mistakes 'place' for 'site' and 'art' for 'art object'. It is certainly true that it is in the site, or the art object,



above and below right

**Little Sparta:
'The Present Order'**

Ian Hamilton Finlay with
Nicholas Sloane, 1983



above right

**Little Sparta: 'A Cottage, a
Field, a Plough'**

Ian Hamilton Finlay with
Nicholas Sloane, undated



that monetary value is invested, yet its greater value – spiritual, philosophical, emotional, intellectual – must be dispersed elsewhere, which is why a place or a work of art can retain a profound importance for us regardless of whether we own it or not or, indeed, whether we have seen it or not. Both place and art might be said not to contain – and be contained by – boundaries, then, but rather an innumerable series of thresholds, which extend far beyond the physical limits of either the site or the art object, and across time also, remaining even when the particular place or work of art may no longer exist. It is not that these thresholds act as points of permeability in a boundary that clearly demarcates separate elements, however, but rather as things that bring these elements together, perhaps in the manner of the bridge – itself a type of threshold – which Martin Heidegger describes as drawing the surrounding landscape together.

A place or a work of art can retain a profound importance for us regardless of whether we own it or not or, indeed, whether we have seen it or not

Writing on social spaces, the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre remarked that they ‘interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another’, and I think that here we can substitute one term for another, and say that this is true – to some extent – for places also. We might even suggest that any single place is a process of such interpenetrations and superimpositions, whose scale, force and rhythm are engaged in an ongoing movement of shifts, rolls and waves, all of which generate new senses of place,

or new senses of the same place. ‘The real voyage of discovery consists in not seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes’, Proust wrote, and perhaps these are what are required if we are to see the complexities of the places that surround us. In doing so, we would see that these different senses of place are often in conflict with one another, with those holding a particular understanding of a place feeling it necessary to eliminate a competing claim. Lefebvre is perhaps more optimistic here, remarking that ‘the local...does not disappear, for it is never absorbed by the regional, national or even worldwide level. The national and regional levels take in innumerable “places”; national space embraces the regions; and world space does not merely subsume national spaces, but even (for the time being at least) precipitates the formation of new national spaces through a remarkable process of fission.’ While we would not suggest that the direction of power and influence is always exerted from the larger to the smaller, from the national to the local – the very sense of a nation is often a creation of its accumulated local parts – it is certainly true that it is the local which is most often sacrificed for the ‘national good’, a concept that is most often defined in relation to other nation states and the ‘necessities’ of the ‘global market’. It is within the local that international airports are built, for example, or rivers dammed, or oil fields drilled (place becomes simply a resource, a ‘standing-reserve’ in Heidegger’s phrase). If place is viewed simply as site, its ‘secondary qualities’ denied, then it becomes easier to destroy it; one cannot mourn what one denied ever being in existence. There are many people who value, and fight to protect, the particularities of place, however, although within a society which often operates on a principle of economic utility, the

calculable 'benefits' presented by developers, investors or corporations are often more easily grasped than the more intangible 'sense of place', with its related notions of authenticity, character and identity. Perhaps what is required is a new sense of necessity; as the early Taoist philosopher Chuang-Tse remarked, 'Everybody knows that the useful is useful, but nobody knows that the useless is useful too.' Here, too, we may have discovered something else that both place and art have in common.

Artists are not bound in the same way that property developers are, and so have no need to build upon what is already in place

Art, like place, is a process of accumulation and seldom calls for the active destruction of that which came before. It is often said that artists 'build upon' the art that came before them, but it is an unfortunate phrase. Artists are not bound in the same way that property developers are, and so have no need to build upon what is already in place. The art they create may open up onto the art created by others – as Finlay's opens up onto Claude and Poussin, for example – but it has no need to take its place, or to deny it. Even art that adopts a critical position in relation to the art or thinking of the past acknowledges the existence of that which came before (indeed, its own position is dependent upon it). In the late 1960s the American conceptual artist Douglas Huebler created a number of works as part of his *Duration* and *Location* series that, with a certain dry humour, explored how we perceive, and represent,

time and place. A work he made as a multiple is typical of his practice:

Location Piece #2

New York City – Seattle, Washington

In New York and Seattle an area was arbitrarily selected within which a person in each city photographed places that he, or she, felt could be characterized as being (1) "frightening" (2) "erotic" (3) "transcendent" (4) "passive" (5) "fevered" (6) "muffled".

Within each area each person made two entirely different sets of six photographs after which all four sets were sent to a third person (the artist) with no information that would make it possible to key any one of the photographs with any one of the words originally specified. The four sets (24 photographs) were then scrambled altogether and 12 of these arbitrarily selected for this piece; to those were added 4 photographs that had not been made to characterize any kind of place.

16 photographs, a Xerox map of New York and another of Seattle join with this statement to constitute the form of this piece.

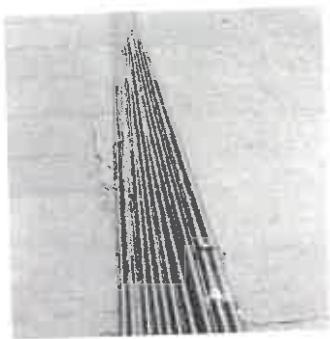
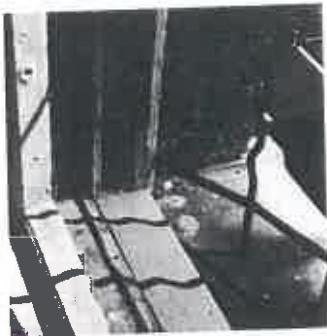
Douglas Huebler

July, 1969

Huebler's statement may be a simple description of the process of making the work, yet it tells us also about artists' changing relationship to the landscape. The first thing that we notice is that the title, *Location Piece #2*, sits above two different locations, separated by the vast width of the American continent; the arbitrary selection of the sites, and the fact that it is two anonymous people – one in each city – rather than Huebler himself, who will be taking the photographs, further diminishes

Location Piece #2

Douglas Huebler, 1969



any sense of profound engagement between artist and place. The instruction given to each person to photograph a place that they felt could be characterized in a certain way relates clearly to a Romantic notion that the critic John Ruskin called the 'pathetic fallacy', the belief that the landscape might be made to mirror the emotional state of the person found within it. Usually, these states were ones of great turmoil, melancholy or despair, depicted by violent storms, deep chasms or overhanging rocks, the great motifs of the natural sublime, and Huebler's list begins in the same Romantic vein, requesting that photographs be taken of places 'frightening', 'erotic' and 'transcendent'.

But what of 'passive', and then his final term, 'muffled'? Our expectations are here being undermined, something that becomes even clearer when we read, in the second paragraph of Heubler's statement, of the arbitrary process of selection – and addition – that he then undertook in order to arrive at the complete set of sixteen photographs. However, the artist's activities do not prevent us from attempting to reconnect mentally the pictures – and places – with the characteristics described. And yet do we feel frightened, transcendent, or erotic? Not in the least. But despite expectations, we do actually feel rather passive when faced with these small and rather banal black-and-white photographs, and our emotional response is somewhat muffled. With great simplicity, Huebler has created a rich and delicate work that asks us to consider the difference between what we believe to be our relationship to a landscape, and what we would like to believe that relationship to be. Such a difference characterizes another quality that Huebler might have chosen – integrity – a quality that has a profound impact upon any understanding of place.

In Huebler's work, the commonplace is utterly transformed, the most banal view afforded the potential for immense significance. Perhaps it is no coincidence that it was made during the period of the first lunar landing, a period in which the most barren view was given the most poetic name and photographs of footsteps in strange colourless dust became symbolic of manifest destiny and the greatest of human achievements. Huebler's contemporary, Robert Smithson, made photographs that possessed a similar sense of detachment. His photo-text work *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* (1967), which was published in the American magazine *Artforum*, consists of photographs of various 'monuments' on the bank of the Passaic River, along which a new highway was being built, and a narrative commentary that describes this return to his birthplace a few months before his thirtieth birthday. Yet there is no attempt here to reconstruct the places of his childhood, but rather to make them seem even more strange, more dislocated temporally – in either the distant past or future – or as simply unreal, like a picture already, as when he describes his activities as 'like photographing a photograph'. In this extraordinary work, as in so many others, Smithson photographed the earth as though it were an alien environment, his birth town as if it were another planet, an environment that he was placing under a series of experiments, testing its physical and conceptual parameters, one against the other: testing it as place. In the twelfth century, Hugo of St Victor wrote: 'The man who finds his country sweet is only a raw beginner; the man for whom each country is as his own is already strong; but only the man for whom the whole world is like a foreign country is perfect.' This is not to deny the possibility or importance of a connection to a particular place, but



Ariana
Malline Hugonnier, 2002



rather to maintain a sense of active engagement with it, rather than succumb to the complacency of familiarity. This was one of Smithson's great achievements, and the achievement also of any number of other contemporary artists, some of whom we have been able to include in this book, such as Dan Graham or Joachim Koester, Doug Aitken, or Jane and Louise Wilson, Roni Horn or Alexander and Susan Maris, Graham Gussin or Mette Tronvoll. What is it that these (often very different) artists share in their relationship both to art and to place? Perhaps an answer might be found within, or suggested by,

A more profound engagement must depend upon more than the visual, upon those things that remain invisible

another recent work, by the French artist Marine Hugonnier. In her film *Ariana*, we hear the voice of the filmmaker (who may or may not be the artist) describe a visit made to Afghanistan with a small crew ('the anthropologist, the geographer, the cameraman, the sound engineer and the local guide') in order to film a panoramic view of the Afghan landscape. Denied access to the mountain ranges that would provide the vantage point for such a shot – these are strategic points, more often used to gain military, rather than representational, mastery over the surrounding area – the film becomes an exploration into the problematic nature of this form of representation. By this we do not mean the problems of access or permission, which are eventually resolved, but rather those of representation itself, which it is far more difficult to overcome. When the crew are finally allowed to gain a

vantage point above the city, from the appropriately named 'Television Hill', we see a view over the city towards the distant mountains and are told that: 'The entire landscape was like a still image, a painting./ This spectacle made us euphoric and gave us a feeling of totality.' The crew could not claim mastery of what they saw, however, and remained invisible; instead we see the Afghan soldier who accompanied them and 'stood proudly in front of the view'. The filmmaker recognized the failings of what they were doing. 'We gave up filming', she says, and the screen goes black.

We would suggest that the filmmaker comes to recognize something that many of the artists included in this book have recognized too, and that is the profound limitation of the visual. This might seem a perverse thing to write in the introduction of a book on visual art, and yet why should it be so? Surely nobody is more aware of the limitations of the visual than visual artists, just as poets are most sensitive to the inadequacies of language. That such considerations have emerged during an enquiry into 'place' is perhaps not surprising, as here too the visual attains a certain prominence without ever being able to engage fully with the subject. Just as we may derive visual pleasure from looking at a particular picture, or a particular landscape, a more profound engagement must depend upon more than the visual, upon those things that remain invisible. How would one make visible the extraordinary history and mythic status of the Bialowieza Forest in eastern Europe? Perhaps we cannot, which may be why such places are often so threatened; they look just like many other places if we cannot see 'the invisible ones of the days gone by', in Hardy's phrase. And yet this does not deny its importance nor, by extension, the importance of

Wittgenstein's Cottage

Guy Moreton, 2002–4



the photographs made by Joachim Koester of this place (see pages 90–93). Or consider the photograph by Guy Moreton of all that remains of Ludwig Wittgenstein's house overlooking Lake Eidsvatnet in Norway, part of an ongoing collaborative project with Alec Finlay that considers the relationship between the great Austrian philosopher and his frequent self-imposed exiles in such places. ('I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundation of possible buildings.' – Wittgenstein.) They are both beautiful works of art, certainly, as the forest is, as the fjord is, and they invite our attention, yet they are both so much more than what we can see. Perhaps this is why

art, like place, needs a little time, a little patience, and no little sensitivity, in order that we might then become aware of what else it is, beyond that of which we are first aware. Not that every place that is made is art, however; but to make art (which is also to think about it) is to make place. There are many types of place, as there are many types of art, and in looking at them now, thinking about them, many more will be made. 'Everything is somewhere and in place', Aristotle said, and while our means are necessarily too modest to be quite so all-inclusive, we hope that what we have gathered here will encourage you to dwell a little upon this rich, enduring, bewildering subject. At the very least, it is a good place to start.

'The difficulties that we run into are like those we would have with the geography of a country for which we have no map, or only a map of isolated places.... We may freely wander about within the country, but when we are compelled to make up a map, we get lost. The map will show different roads which lead through the same country and of which we could take any one at all, but not two.'

Ludwig Wittgenstein