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SPATIAL TUNING: PERFORMANCE, THE PIANO AND THE SPATIAL POLITICS OF WASTE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Investigating how site specific performance can activate engagement with the spatial politics of urban processes, this paper explores the relations between the body, territory and the environmental impact of consumer culture. Centred on a performance event titled Spatial Tuning that took place on the boundary of a municipal rubbish dump in the city of Hobart, Tasmania in 2016, this research is framed within an existing field of practice in which a variety of creative practitioners engage pianos as performative devices to renegotiate situations, subjects and environments.

Keywords: Waste management, Tasmania, Performance, Photography

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Investigating how site specific performance can activate engagement with the spatial politics of urban processes, this paper explores the relations between the body, territory and the environmental impact of consumer culture. Centred on a performance titled Spatial Tuning that took place on the boundary¹ of a municipal rubbish dump in the city of Hobart, Tasmania in 2016, this research is framed within an existing field of practice in which a variety of creative practitioners engage pianos as performative devices to renegotiate situations, subjects and environments. Drawing on the semiotic potential of the piano as a cultural artefact of European origins, the research focuses on the staged juxtaposition of an outdoor piano tuning and a live audience on the contested boundary between a national park and a municipal rubbish dump in Hobart.

Spatial Tuning is part of a larger research project and was informed by three preceding studies that investigated the semiotic, spatial and performative potential of the piano as an instrument to renegotiate interactions between spatial conditions, cultural practices, communities, and their environments. Carried out through a series of iterative performances, this body of practice-based research² explores the cultural, ethical and political resonance of juxtaposing the piano with a variety of Australian sites.

Commencing with a focus on iconic architectural spaces in urban contexts, the research evolved through two phases of project investigations: firstly, through the spatial exploration of two XIX century urban landmark buildings, Melbourne's Flinders Street Station ballroom (Duration) and the Princess Street Theatre (The Princess Theatre Inversion). These early studies led to a methodological understanding that historical architecture can be mobilised as a reference point within site specific performance, with the potential to reveal insights into the interactions and entanglements between people and their environments³.

¹ The boundary between the national park and the McRobies Recycling Centre is contested due to Hobart City Council's plans to expand the centre into the national park to increase its capacity to deal with a growing population of Hobart. See , Development proposal and environmental management plan (DPEMP) Extension of Landfill Area – McRobies Gully Landfill 2015.

² Practice based research is understood as an evolving, reflective and responsive process, where the unpredictable outcomes, critical reflections, and limitations of one research project spark an idea that prompts the next research project. Within this sequential and cyclical research practice is a critical refinement and re-orientation of a specific research question that is used to interrogate a targeted aspect of the field under investigation.

³ Ray Lucas. *Research Methods for Architecture* (London: Laurence King Publishing 2016).



McRobies Gully Waste Management Centre, Hobart, 2016image courtesy of Alistair Bett

Extending from the urban context of research phase one, the research evolved to explore contested Australian landscapes within regional contexts of Tasmania and New South Wales. Two regional settings were selected: (1) a property acquired by the Indigenous Land Corporation as part of a land bank established for Aboriginal people (Instrumental); and (2) Hobart's municipal rubbish dump (Spatial Tuning). In outlining the methodology, it is important to foreground the non-linear trajectory from which the research methodology emerged. The two early projects of phase one carried out within the Flinders Street Station Ballroom (Duration) and The Princess Theatre (The Princess Theatre Inversion) were centred on formal piano recitals by professional pianists performing recognised minimalist compositions, including Simeon Ten Holt's Canto Ostinato and Steve Reich's Piano Phase. These early investigations gave rise to several questions that invited further exploration:

- (1) Does the cultural authority of the piano afford, enable and facilitate access to contested spaces considered off limits to the public?
- (2) What is the contemporary cultural role of historic architectural spaces within creative practice?
- (3) Does the notion of absence and presence applied to site specific performance collapse the distance between passive spectators and their immediate environments?
- (4) What are the effects of shifting normative relationships between spectators, performers and spatial contexts when spatial conventions are inverted?

The piano, a key to contested space

Emerging from the three preceding studies was an understanding that the piano had the capacity to enter contested spaces not usually accessible by the public. This ability of the piano to enter politically charged spaces, for example, the Flinders Street Ballroom that had not seen creative

programming in 29 years⁴, is tied to the perceived cultural authority of the instrument, which has emerged through a particular historical lineage. Within an Australian context, history records that the first piano arrived in Australia in 1788 with the first fleet.

Once considered 'the cultural heart and soul of the colonial home ... [the piano] occupied the parlour, a place for families and their guests to gather, entertain and socialize, as well as a place to retreat into private solace⁵. Historically an object of desire, status and 'civilisation'⁶, upright pianos, within an Australian context, have in recent times become redundant objects that are often discarded as heavy rubbish on nature strips, given away for free, or even tossed into local rubbish dumps.



Elizabeth Drake and Caroline Almonte perform Simeon Ten Holt's Canto Ostinato
Flinders Street Station Ballroom, Duration, Contemporary Site Investigations 2012



Elizabeth Drake and Vanessa Tomlinson perform Steve Reich's Piano Phase
The Princess Theatre Inversion by Campbell Drake, 2014

Whilst upright pianos no longer play a role in the modern home, having been replaced with space-saving keyboards and synthesisers, the piano, as part of a western cultural heritage, has retained a perceived identity that is associated with high culture.

⁴ See Drake, CJ, 'Contemporary Site Investigations', Reverse Projections, Expanded Architecture at the Rocks 2013, Dimanche Press, 2014.

⁵ Wolfe, Jocelyn. Pioneers, parlours and pianos: Making music, building a state in the Queensland bush. (in The Piano Mill Catalogue, 2016), 9-11.

⁶ See Douglas Gordon. The End of Civilisation: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/video/2012/jul/03/douglas-gordon-cultural-olympiad-video>.

The piano has symbolic potential as a cultural artefact that has emerged from a particular western historical lineage. Research phase two of my creative practice honed in on this semiotic potential in three later projects, marking a shift in the research methodology from negotiating architectural interiors in urban environments to situating performances outdoors within contested Australian landscapes. In parallel with the locational shift from the urban centre of Melbourne to regional settings in Tasmania and New South Wales, the types of pianos selected changed from grand pianos to salvaged uprights, and the mode of interaction with the piano shifted from formal recitals with professional pianists to less conventional interactions, including the staged tunings of *Instrumental*⁷ and *Spatial Tuning*.

Through the juxtaposition of the piano and Australian landscapes, the instrument is used to mediate between human and non-human interaction and is employed as a registration device in different contexts to provoke and register aesthetic, cultural, ethical, and political questions and concerns in resonant ways.

Site Specific (Piano) Performance

Illustrating the capacity of the piano to enter a variety of dominated spaces, two recent works, Markiyany Matsekh's *Piano for Berkut* and Ludovico Einaudi's *Elegy for the Arctic* provide further orientation and are suggestive of how the piano in conjunction with site specific performance can cross the boundaries of dominated spaces to renegotiate contested spatial contexts.

In November 2016, the Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich confirmed that he had decided to turn his back on a landmark pact with the EU and keep Ukraine closely aligned with Russia⁸. His announcement prompted a student gathering in Kiev's Independence Square to sing in peaceful protest at the president's resistance to greater integration with the EU. The government responded with a show of force, and on 30 November 2016, 300 students were beaten by riot police⁹. In an attempt to prevent a repeat of the rally, the Interior Ministry's special forces riot police, known as the Berkut, blocked public access to the square through the formation of a defensive human ring. Independence Square is the urban symbol of Ukrainian freedom, and blocking access to it provoked further public uprising; 10,000 people took to the streets, waving flags, singing songs, and demanding Yanukovich's resignation¹⁰.

⁷ See CJ Drake. *Instrumental: Performance and the Cumulative Potential of Distributed Sites*. (OAR: e Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform, Issue 1. 2017): 96–110.

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/30/ukraine-bloody-backlash-sanctions-eu>

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/05/thats-me-in-picture-ukraine-protest-piano-matsekh>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/30/ukraine>



The First Fleet | Piano in the Parlour

As tensions mounted, pianist Markiyany Matsekh sought to defuse the potential for further violent clashes through peaceful protest. He said, ‘The idea is this: to lift the mood, to reply with art and goodness to the violence that was here, and to carry out a cultural revolution’¹¹. He titled his performance protest Piano for Berkut, and purchased an upright piano for 500 Hryvnia (\$58.00 USD) through an advertisement posted in a local paper¹². Matsekh described the lead up to the performance:

“I knew that taking the piano to the site was risky, so I told journalists to be there. I figured: if I’m going to get beaten up over a piano, it should at least make the news. The police were strict on not letting cars through. I told the piano movers that if they were stopped they should tell the police they were delivering it to someone’s house. The police bought the story, and let them into the square, where I was waiting. We took the piano out and put it in front of the line of officers. I watched for a second, but they just looked confused. I said, “Move it five metres closer! Straight away, people gathered and started playing it, and it transformed the mood into something positive. I took off my coat and started playing Chopin’s Waltz in C-sharp minor. It was about -15C^o, and my fingers could barely move. I only managed to play for about a minute and a half. Not my best performance”¹³.

Irrespective of the quality of Matsekh’s performance, Piano for Berkut is suggestive of the ability of the piano, as a loaded cultural artefact, to cross boundaries within spaces of conflict. Crossing the boundary of the police line with the piano, the body and territory are also used as expressive matter capable of temporarily shifting the immaterial boundaries between the riot police and protesters.

Extending the notion of body and territory from the Maiden revolution in the Ukraine to an environmental protest at global warming, in June 2016, acclaimed Italian composer and pianist Ludovico Einaudi teamed up with environmental NGO Greenpeace to stage a solo piano

¹¹ Markiyany Matsekh. <https://maidantranslations.com/2014/02/12/protest-piano-revolutionary-art-against-violence-by-fascist-extremists-videosphotos/>

¹² Markiyany Matsekh quote; Erica Buist, ‘That’s me in the picture: Markiyany Matsekh plays the piano for riot police in Kiev, 7 December 2013’, The Guardian, 6 December 2014.

¹³ Markiyany Matsekh quote from article ‘That’s me in the picture,’ by Erica Buist, The Guardian

performance on a floating platform in the Arctic¹⁴. The timing of the concert was planned to correspond with a meeting of the Ospar Commission, which was to decide on a proposal to safeguard 10% of the Arctic Ocean. In an attempt to send a conservation message to world leaders, 'Einaudi played a composition written for the occasion, *Elegy for the Arctic*, on a grand piano off the coast of Svalbard in Norway¹⁵.



Instrumental by Campbell Drake
Station, 2015

Proclaiming the performance as 'the most northerly grand piano performance ever held¹⁶, video documentation shows Einaudi afloat with the towering ice cliffs of the Brede glacier behind him. As if the epic scale of the ice cap is not enough, halfway through the recital, huge sections of the polar shelf break off and crash into the sea. Einaudi, unperturbed, plays on. Harnessed to the piano stool and propped up at the shiny black piano afloat in the ocean, Einaudi's presence, set against the magnitude of the north pole, becomes an absurdist parody of the classical piano recital as a western cultural tradition. Both 'Piano for Berkut' and 'Elegy for the Arctic' engage deeply with their chosen sites, and as a result tend to be drawn into an 'engagement with the social and political issues that are inseparable from place'¹⁷. In association with Spatial Tuning, 'Piano for Berkut' and 'Elegy for the Arctic' signal the potential of site specific piano performance to activate engagement in spatial politics across a variety of contexts. Seeking to harness this discursive potential through an active engagement with the social, political and environmental issues of waste, landfill and environmental degradation, Spatial Tuning intersects the urban processes of waste collection with site specific performance. Emphasising the convergence of aesthetic and ethical practices, Spatial Tuning involved the staged tuning of a salvaged piano on the boundary between national park and rubbish dump, as a means to re-contextualise and question the contemporary role of the piano in juxtaposition with the environmental impact of contemporary throw-away culture.

The dynamics of deterritorialization: Performance, the body and territory

¹⁴ Nick Kilvert. Italian composer Einaudi gives historic Arctic iceberg performance. (ABC News 21 June 2016).

¹⁵ Nick Kilvert. Italian composer Einaudi. (ABC News 21 June 2016)

¹⁶ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-21/acclaimed-italian-composer-plays-floating-in-arctic-ice/7529974>

¹⁷ Gay McAuley. Site-Specific Performance: Place, Memory and the Creative Agency of the Spectator. (Arts Journal of the Sydney University Arts Association 27, 2005).

In the depths of the Tasmanian winter, I arrived in Hobart in June 2016. In sleet and rain and a chilly three degrees, I collected a hire car from the airport and headed straight for the McRobies rubbish dump. Arriving at the centre, I drove up to the entrance gate. Surrounded with cyclone fencing and barbed wire, the facility was plastered with signs stating NO UNAUTHORISED ACCESS. Gone are the childhood days when I would go with my father to the tip¹⁸ with a poorly laden trailer and scout around on the tip face for a treasure or two. I realised that there was no way I was going to be driving through the front gate of the facility with a piano strapped to a ute¹⁹ to stage a performance at the tip face.



Markiyay Matsekh, Piano for Berkut
2013

I backed away from the front gate and searched around for an unofficial entrance. Receiving a tip off, I located a fire trail leading to the dump from the southern boundary. Walking down over the southern escarpment, I could hear heavy machinery, and the cries of thousands of scavenging crows drawing me down towards the rubbish dump. I left the path and walked directly down the hillside until I came to a forest clearing that opened up to the McRobies Gully. Framed by the eucalypts of the national park boundary, the scale of the twenty-hectare landfill, gouged into the landscape was shocking. Under the shadow of Mount Wellington, an endless flow of rubbish trucks emptied the city's waste at the tip face as excavators picked and turned the rubbish into the mud. Measuring approximately two kilometres long and one wide, the clearing was etched into the valley floor, forming a natural amphitheatre of epic proportions, which presented as an opportunity to stage a performance that would provoke an embodied encounter with the Anthropocene.

¹⁸ In Australia and the UK, a rubbish dump is commonly known as a 'tip'; see <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tip>

¹⁹ Ute – an abbreviation for 'utility' – is a term used originally in Australia and New Zealand to describe, usually, a two-wheel-drive, traditionally passenger vehicle, with a cargo tray in the rear integrated with the passenger body. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ute_\(vehicle\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ute_(vehicle))

For those not familiar with the term, the Anthropocene denotes our current geological age or epoch, 'viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment'²⁰. It is a term coined by geologists and adopted by social scientists, and a consistent definition is hard to come by; however, what is understood is that we have now reached an impasse where man's environmental impact on the earth is both irreversible and influential over what was once considered the natural ecological order.

Wedged into the foothills of Mt Wellington and occupying approximately twenty hectares on the edge of South Hobart's city sprawl, the McRobies Gully Waste Management Centre presented as an opportune site to stage a performance that could provoke an embodied encounter with the environmental impact of waste management, and stimulate reflections on the implications of the Anthropocene.

When I reflect on the difficulties I faced in finding a vantage point over the rubbish dump, I see that the positioning of the waste management facility within the McRobies Gully had been carefully considered by local authorities. Allowing public access to a rubbish dump would provide a considerable health risk, and the tip, unsightly with its piles of rubbish, is screened from visual access on all sides. Adjacent public infrastructure such as roads and walking tracks are also positioned away from the site, as if shielding the public from realities of urban processes, consumption and waste. The deliberate opaqueness of the urban process of waste management is reminiscent of what Bruno Latour describes as the passive detachment of human impact on the world²¹.



Ludovico Einaudi, *Elegy for the Arctic*
2016

Gay McAuley points out that 'anyone setting out to make a site-based performance must of necessity enter into negotiations with the owners of the site, those who currently occupy it, and those who have control over it'²². From the outset, I had assumed that the selected performance site was located within Mount Wellington National Park. Using the contact details provided by a

²⁰ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/anthropocene>

²¹ Bruno Latour, Keynote Lecture, Performance Studies International (PSI) #22, Performing Climates, Melbourne University, June 2016.

²² McAuley. *Site-Specific Performance*. 30

group of mountain bike riders I spoke to in the park, I contacted the park ranger, who responded with a series of questions:

Exactly where you want to hold this event? What type of vehicle do you intend to use to transport the piano? Please also let me know the vehicle registration number. Whether you intend to erect any structures e.g. marquees, that would require disturbance of the ground, and your evidence of your public liability insurance to cover the event.

It wasn't until I followed up with a map that the park ranger informed me that while the road leading to the site was in Mount Wellington National Park, the proposed performance site was actually in the Hobart City Reserve, access to which required permission from the City of Hobart.

Issues of ownership, the policing of boundaries, and the rights of exclusion and inclusion are revealed in the extensive process of establishing and obtaining the necessary permits and permissions. What I had perceived to be the right of access to the Hobart City Reserve or the Mount Wellington National Park turned out to need the sanction of local authorities and community groups. The pre-performance negotiations and the permissions required to stage Spatial Tuning on the boundary of the McRobies Gully Waste Management Centre reveal some of the challenges that site specific performances face when engaging with the spatial politics and complexities of national parks jurisdiction, waste management, private property, and public events.

Through an engagement with Hobart City's urban processes of waste disposal and national park management, Spatial Tuning suggests how site specific performance can activate engagement in spatial politics. e move to stage a live event at the tip had to negotiate with the overlapping boundaries and jurisdictions of different authorities and by negotiating these material and immaterial boundaries brings to light many of the otherwise latent or hidden procedures by which waste is managed.



The McRobies Waste Recycling Centre, Hobart | Proposed Expansion, Hobart

Spatial Tuning — The event

Providing a theoretical framework for the Spatial Tuning event, the term ‘tuning’ is presented as a concept, a process and a framing device. While the common definition of tuning — ‘the action or process of tuning something and the extent to which a musical instrument, performance, or ensemble is in tune’²³ — is at the centre of the performance, a secondary definition of ‘tuning,’ to ‘adjust or adapt (something) to a particular purpose or situation’²⁴, is equally relevant to the conceptual framework of the Spatial Tuning performance. Taking this definition apart, the ‘something’ that is adjusted or adapted within the performance is both the piano and the spatial context; the ‘purpose’ is to bring an audience into close proximity with the adulterated landscape; and the ‘situation’ is the environmental impact of human consumption. So too, the notion of being ‘tuned in’ that is defined as being ‘sensitive to or able to understand something’ and ‘to tune into’ meaning ‘to become sensitive to’²⁵, resonates with the research aim of collapsing the distance between passive spectators and their immediate environments through an immersive sensory engagement with the spatio-temporalities of an anthropocentric landscape.

The insights that had emerged from the tuning that took place during the preceding performance of *Instrumental* in 2015 inspired further consideration of the types of piano tunings and corresponding tuning frequencies of the western cultural tradition. According to Lynda

²³ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/Tuning>

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Arnold, 'the Greek philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras (570–495 BC), is often credited with identifying musical harmonic ratios related to scientific pitch, and the birth of 432 Hz tuning with his instrument called the monochord'²⁶. Many centuries later, composers such as Mozart and Verdi are documented as having used 432 Hz tuning. By the end of the 1800s and early 1900s, Britain, the US and Germany challenged the 432 Hz tuning by experimenting and adopting alternate tuning frequencies. As the world became more economically and culturally interconnected in the early twentieth century, 'there was a need to set a universal pitch standard used by all, for the sake of instrument makers, composers and orchestras everywhere'; this resulted in the universal adoption of a tuning frequency of 440 Hz that is used today as the music industry standard²⁷.



Spatial Tuning
McRobbies Gully Waste Management Centre, Hobart, 2016

In the weeks leading up to the event, my collaborating piano tuner Ivo Thiemann and I had spent a lot of time discussing which tuning frequency we should use for Spatial Tuning. We settled upon a strategy of first tuning the piano up to 440 Hz (the frequency most commonly used for contemporary orchestras today) and then down to the historical frequency of 432 Hz. The conceptual agenda of this strategy was to effect a kind of turning back the clock. In situating the event between environmental extremes of waste and national park, the differential of the sonic and visual frequencies was combined with the intent of provoking an embodied encounter with the Anthropocene in which contemporary society is now both implicated and contained.

An audience of 18 people made up of members of the Performance Studies international (PSi) Performance + Design Working Group arrived at a predetermined meeting place at the top of the McRobbies Gully southern escarpment at three p.m. We set off down the road and up the fire break. I located the walking track and passed along the ridge and through a burnt-out patch of eucalyptus forest. Coming to a marker, we veered right, leaving the path and heading down the ridge. At this point, I realised the difficulties some audience members were having descending the hillside on an unmarked track; but we continued the descent, picking our way through broken branches and the litter of the forest floor. From the valley floor, the sound of heavy

²⁶ Lynda Arnold. Music Theory & Education. Feb 13, 2016 <https://ask.audio/articles/music-theory-exploring-the-432hz-tuning-debate>

²⁷ Ibid.

vehicles could be heard dropping off and working piles of rubbish. As we moved closer to the site, we heard the sound of crows and the single notes of the piano being tuned in the distance.

From an audience of eighteen people that set off from the car park, fifteen arrived on the access road that led down to the performance. Twenty chairs had been arranged in close proximity to the piano tuner, who sat with his back to the audience overlooking McRobies rubbish dump, framed by the forest of Mt Wellington National Park in the distance. The piano was perched against a gate next to a sign which read 'No Unauthorized Entry – Trespassing Prohibited' in bold red text. The audience were instructed to file into the seating without leaving a space. The ground was muddy and the legs of the chairs slowly sank into the ground. To the right of the piano, in the middle distance, was the tip face, where an excavator picked at the rubbish, next to a man unloading building waste from a truck. Their activity disturbed flocks of seagulls and crows eating at the tip face, who went to air in waves, like plumes of black and white smoke. For thirty minutes the audience sat, listened and observed the piano tuning, the machines of the tip, and the birds.

Giving the audience a visual cue, I led the fifteen people back up the hill in silence, assisting less able participants over steep and slippery sections of the climb. When we reached Golden Valley Road, I motioned for everyone to continue to the vehicles, and quietly slipped back into the forest and once again descended to the performance site. By this time it was getting dark. Ivo, the piano tuner, toiled on without adequate light to complete the desired 432 Hz tuning. Around 5:15 p.m., he packed up his tools, indicating Spatial Tuning was complete. He reassembled the piano, stood up, and walked out of the framed view, captured by one of three video camera positions.

In the weeks following Spatial Tuning, I sent out an online survey to audience members, focusing on their experience and reception of the performance. I first posed a question in relation to the dramaturgical sequence of descending the escarpment. With the exception of one respondent, who recalled being overwhelmed, all expressed 'intrigue'; as one respondent put it, 'the walk through the national park was great dramaturgically speaking, as it slowly revealed the site of performance'²⁸.

Reflecting on the title of Spatial Tuning, I asked the audience to consider if space was 'tuned' during the performance? If so, in what way? Answers to this question disclosed the audience's experience of being 'attuned'; one response was that the performance 'attuned us to that which was out of tune with the natural environment, but we were more attuned to a certain theatrics of an environment simultaneously in and out of tune'²⁹. Others stated 'the performance invited us, the audience, to collaborate in attuning ourselves to the contested location of the tip'³⁰, and, 'I think my interpretation was more of being the thing being tuned'³¹.

Seeking to explore the audience's reception of the perceived role of the landscape in the construction of meaning, I asked if they considered that the landscape performed. The answers

²⁸ Spatial Tuning. Post-performance Survey, August 2016.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

were a unanimous affirmation. However, the ways in which the landscape was perceived to perform were quite varied, with one audience member suggesting the landscape was ‘an immersive and troubled player’³², while another thought, ‘the (problematic) spatial and performative agency of the tip was amplified/ intensified through the piano tuning and collective witnessing’³³. Another audience response reframed the landscape as a fragmented, pluralistic and performative condition, stating ‘I think it (the landscape) exists on many levels. It is the naturally occurring landscape of the park, but it also contains the human interventions of the tip’³⁴.

In the moment, I sensed two landscapes: that of the tip and that of the forest surrounding it. The landscape as forest performed the wind and rustling. To me, the landscape under the tip was performed upon as though it was a body anesthetised and being cut into³⁵. In perceiving the status of the landscape as dynamic, the national park and the rubbish dump are reframed by the viewers’ gaze to temporarily collapse the distance between passive spectatorship and the immediate environment. In suggesting the distance between the audience and the landscape is collapsed, I mean that the performance facilitates a prolonged encounter with the rubbish dump at a proximity that is both uncommon and unfamiliar to contemporary society. In doing so, the site-specific performance provokes a temporal disorientation in which a sense of being present is intensified through a recalibration of normative modes of human and non-human interaction. In suggesting that normative modes of human and non-human interaction with urban processes of waste collection are recalibrated, it is assumed that a normative mode of engagement extends as far as discarding rubbish in a bin or putting the bins out for collection on a weekly basis.

In redefining these normative modes of interaction, the operation of Spatial Tuning has the potential to open up a transformative encounter between the tuning, the landscape and the audience, in which the perception of the situated audience may oscillate from the meditative drone of the piano tuning to a renewed sense of embodied presence with the surrounding landscape. As the attention of the audience was focused on the rubbish dump and the piano tuning, Spatial Tuning sought to provoke a temporal transformation in which spectators become aware of their own presence in relation to the performance, the audience and the landscape³⁶. Using the post-performance surveys to qualify such a claim, I asked the audience if ‘during the performance, whilst seated at the performance site, did you imagine or ‘project’ yourself into the tip or the forest beyond, looking back at yourself seated in the audience?’

While, on reflection, the question seems poorly phrased in that it was not open-ended, and the majority of the audience did not imagine or ‘project’ themselves into the tip or the forest beyond, one audience member did experience such an embodied phenomenon, stating ‘the forest was the backstage, the landscape of the tip was the *mise-en-scène*, my place of viewing suspended in between place of viewing and immersion in the performance’³⁷, is statement is echoed in Miwon Kwon’s assertion that ‘the critical capacity of intimacies are based on absence,

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Drake, CJ. The Princess Theatre Inversion, Conference Proceedings from Situation: situating practices and research Symposium & Exhibition RMIT Interior Design (Design Hub, Melbourne, Australia. July – August 2014).

³⁷ Spatial Tuning. Post-performance Survey. August 2016.

distance and ruptures of time and space'³⁸. Extending this operative potential of presence, Gabriella Giannachi writes:

Where the operation of presence should occur is where the listener is made to encounter what is in front or before them, so that they may become alert to what is around them, meaning their environment. This is also where the subject relocates, re-presents in space and time in order to re-encounter themselves in the other or as the other³⁹.



Audience descending to performance site, Spatial Tuning, Hobart, 2016

Giannachi's concept of operative presence and audience appraisals of the live Spatial Tuning event can yield insights into the agency of site specific performance that operates across geographic, experiential and subjective domains. In the final question of the post-performance survey, I asked the audience 'what politics of space were revealed (if any) during Spatial Tuning? And what is the agency of staging site-based performances in such a way?⁴⁰' One audience member responded:

"As an audience, or witness of the tip, I experienced my own presence and agency in the site sharply, because I was confronted with my own complicity and the politics in the making of such spaces — the landfill. What lies in the agency of making such site-responsive performance is how it can amplify/intensify the politics of a specific location, not that the performance is specifying the limits of the location/site, but rather making the site appear. Such a site-based performance also has the potential to mobilise a collective experience of witnessing — the tip became a shared location for participants to critically reflect on questions of environmental justice"⁴¹.

The ability of Spatial Tuning 'to critically reflect on questions of environmental justice' suggests noticeable similarities between Spatial Tuning and the staging of the *Elegy for the Arctic* in front of the Brede Glacier. Spatial Tuning and *Elegy for the Arctic* are both critical and spatial; a specific

³⁸ Kwon. *One Place after Another*. Page no. 9.

³⁹ Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye, and Michael Shanks. *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being* (London: New York: Routledge 2012, 56).

⁴⁰ Spatial Tuning. Post-performance Survey. August 2016.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

type of practice coined by Jane Rendell as 'critical spatial practice – work that intervenes into a site in order to critique that site'⁴². In both these projects, landscapes of epic proportions are assigned a dominant role in the construction of meaning. More spatially than musically oriented, both *Elegy for the Arctic* and *Spatial Tuning* are focused on the negotiation and juxtaposition of the body and the piano within formally uninhabited territories. By assigning the landscape a dominant role, the piano in both performances becomes more a symbolic mechanism than a musical device, and as such, the musicality of the performance is rendered subservient to the environmental surrounds.

This reorientation of performative relations between performer and context repositions the site to become the dominant signifier rather than simply being that which contains the performance⁴³. Whilst the similarities between the Ukrainian revolution, the melting of the North Pole, and McRobies rubbish dump are perhaps less than immediately tangible, what each of the projects evidences is the ability of the piano to enter and re-contextualise contested spaces of political significance and thus renegotiate the relations between social, political and environmental contexts.

Within the context of three unrelated site specific performances that use the piano as a device to engage in spatial politics, I have argued for the ability of the piano to cross material and immaterial borders of contested spaces of conflict, including police barricades during the revolution in Kiev, the Arctic, and the McRobies rubbish dump. Through this evaluation of aesthetic practices and politics in relation to the body and territory, *Spatial Tuning* highlights the potential of site specific performance to activate engagement in spatial politics through the temporal re-contextualisation of spaces of conflict.

In the summary of the negotiations with urban and architectural processes that were needed to obtain statutory permissions to access and stage *Spatial Tuning* on the boundary of Hobart's municipal tip, I have highlighted the intersecting regulatory systems of Hobart's waste management and e Mount Wellington national park. The move to stage a live event there had to negotiate with the intertangled margins and rules of different authorities, thus reflecting a greater complexity, and the porous boundaries between conservation of the environment (national parks) and the inexorable material spread of the Anthropocene. The negotiations that took place with local authorities and community groups decentre the primacy of the live event, opening up the effective potential of site specific performance to include pre-performance negotiations. In opening up the practice beyond the live event, *Spatial Tuning* unveils the capability of aesthetic processes to critically and poetically build thought about the body and territory in relation to landscape, bodily absence, and perception.

Through a material engagement with the performative, spatial and semiotic potential of the piano situated within the contested zone between landfill and national park, *Spatial Tuning* illuminates the potential for site specific performance to cross juridical, social and experiential boundaries to provoke a prolonged encounter with the urban processes of waste management. Reinforcing a critical standpoint, I propose that the agency of site specific performance is tied to its ability to collapse the distance between passive spectators and formally distanced environments, thus seeking not only to reflect and describe our relationship to the

⁴² Jane Rendell. *Constellations (or the Reassertion of Time into Critical Spatial Practice)*. Kerber Verlag One Day Sculpture, Bielefeld, Germany, 2009.

⁴³ McAuley. *Site-Specific Performance*.

environmental impact of societal consumption, but also as a way of talking about the Anthropocene so we might transform and imagine something different⁴⁴.



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Hobart, 2016

⁴⁴ Jane Rendell. *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (Tauris 2006).

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