

THE USES OF DECORATION

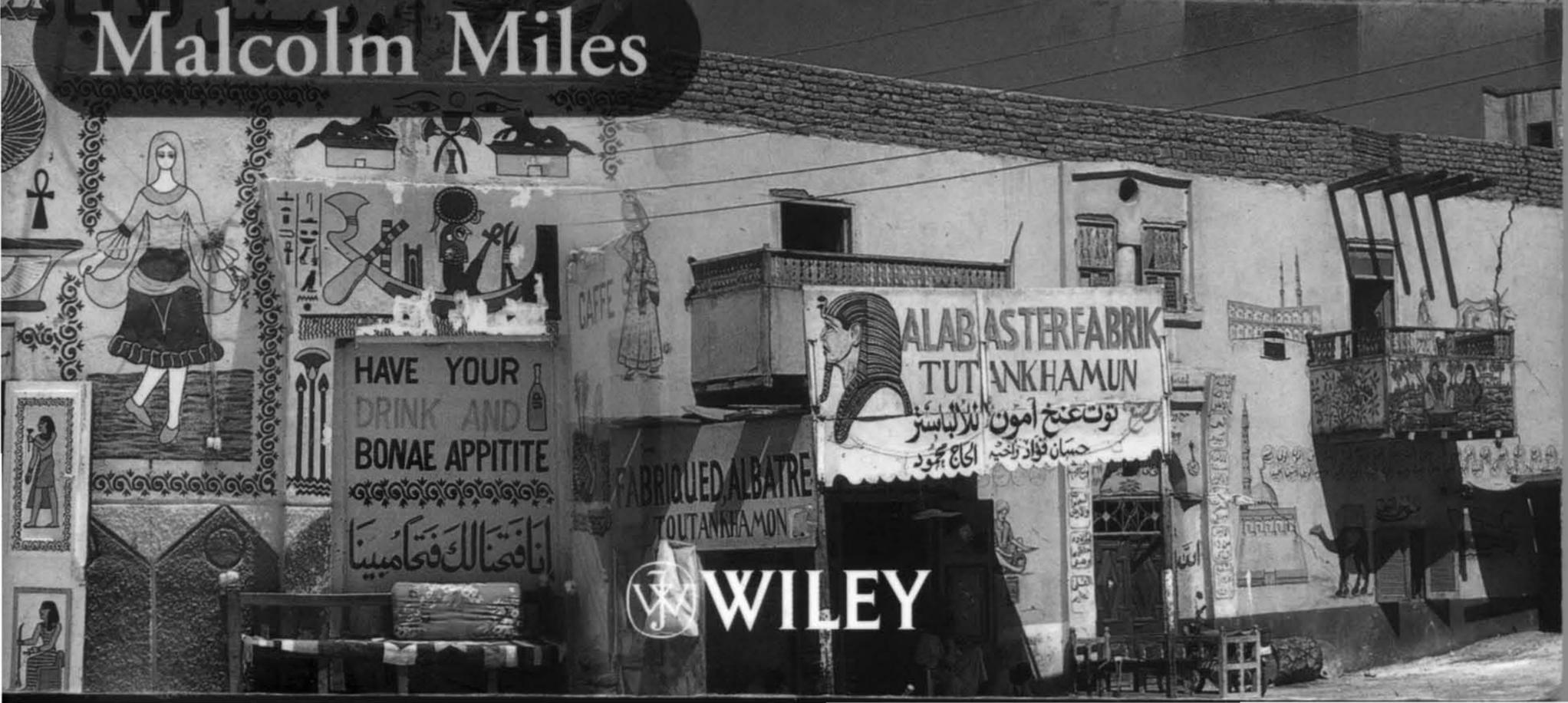
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ESSAYS IN THE ARCHITECTURAL EVERYDAY



تصنع

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CHAPTER 6

RECLAMATION: NINE MILE RUN GREENWAY

INTRODUCTION

The two previous chapters considered *hajj* painting and vernacular architecture in Egypt. This chapter describes a project to reclaim part of Nine Mile Run in Pittsburgh – a 238 acre wasteland produced by the dumping of slag by the steel industry – as green public space¹. The contrasts are obvious: from a non-affluent to an affluent country, a rural to an urban environment, and from the built environment to an adjacent open space. But the three cases taken as the bases for Chapters 4, 5 and 6 compose a trilogy of decoration, building and reclamation. The case of *hajj* painting showed one way in which identities are stated within the built environment; and Fathy's intention at New Gournia was to translate the social identity of a village into buildings using traditional materials and technologies. Reclamation recodes existing sites, lending them new meanings in context of uncertain urban identities. Whilst house decoration and mud-brick architecture are cases from a pre-industrial society, reclamation denotes a post-industrial landscape and a post-modern set of contentions. The Nine Mile Run Greenway project is also an interface between the processes of urban planning and development, community organisation and art.

Acts of decoration take place in the industrialised world as well as the non-industrialised, but are marginal; stone cladding on terraced houses, for instance, signifies poor taste (or the taste of the recently poor), and graffiti is the mark of a mythicised underclass, a threatening presence of transgression (Sennett, 1990:205–7; Cresswell, 1996:31–61). These decorative forms are discussed in the following chapter in context of the architectural everyday; enough to say here that house painting, stone cladding and graffiti each have specific vocabularies, and that, in industrial (or affluent) societies, acts which state individual identities are more often confined to the decoration of domestic interiors. The vernacular is marginalised in a different way as an officially sanctioned historical or heritage category; in the UK this takes the form of model villages and half-timbered suburban cul-de-sacs, and stick-on Tudorbethan facades for supermarkets². Reclamation of buildings and sites, on the other hand, is an increasing necessity in the cities of the industrialised countries, as rising populations and wealth put pressure on land for housing, consumption and leisure uses, while encroachment by development on to greenfield sites becomes politically and socially unacceptable. Even the Millennium Dome

occupies a brownfield site, and it will be interesting to see how it is reclaimed 20 or 30 years ahead when its fabric disintegrates. So, two of the cases on which the middle section of this book is based are derived from a non-industrial society (and non-affluent country), and this third case involves the creation of a post-industrial landscape; none of the three belong to the world of industrial modernity itself in which the metropolitan cities of the twentieth century were produced. But while dominant concepts are normalised through the growth of such cities, it is sites such as Nine Mile Run which, as much as inner city dereliction, denote the destructive effects of the modern Utopia.

The chapter contextualises the project within the growth of environmental art; and in relation to the issues raised by other reclamation projects, such as the Earth Centre (on a disused colliery site near Doncaster, in Yorkshire) within a discourse of post-industrial cities³. The project's planning process is then investigated through the evidence of community workshops⁴; and the problem, raised by the artists themselves, as to whether reclamation work of this kind remains art, is taken as a form of the wider problem of the relation of art's aesthetic and social dimensions.

ENVIRONMENTAL ART SINCE THE 1970s

The end of modernity is a background of declining certainty, and it was against the increasingly evident and culturally represented contradictions of modernity and its market operations that environmental art emerged as an avant-garde category within mainstream art practice in North America and Europe in the 1970s. That mainstream itself, since the late 1960s, had widened to include art which no longer took the form of objects, but was conceptual. In the USA, in particular, sculptors began to reconstruct the landscape itself rather than put objects in it, for example by digging holes in the ground. Rosalind Krauss writes of a work by Mary Miss made in 1978:

Toward the center of the field there is a slight mound, a swelling in the earth, which is the only warning given for the presence of the work. Closer to it, the large square face of the pit can be seen, as can the ends of the ladder that is needed to descend into the excavation. The work itself is thus entirely below grade: half atrium, half tunnel, the boundary between outside and in, a delicate structure of wooden posts and beams. (Krauss, 1983:31)

Beginning with description, Krauss then seeks a way to discuss holes in the ground within art criticism. She argues that critical operations engage with the unknown aspects of work which redefines art, but do so through known categories such as sculpture. Part of the problem is that sculpture, associated with monuments – for instance, Michelangelo's statue of Marcus Aurelius in the Campidoglio – breaks down with Rodin's *Gates of Hell* of 1880, which no longer claims a place in the

public domain⁵. Krauss adopts a strategy of redefining categories by negation, plotting their shifting boundaries with other categories on which they border. Rodin's sculpture, then, negates the category of sculpture as monument by being siteless – by exhibiting 'an absolute loss of place' (Krauss, 1983:35). Miss, for Krauss, negates the kind of modernist category opened up by Rodin, which depended on the context of an aesthetic space in which art could claim autonomy. Looking at works by Robert Morris, Alice Aycock and Robert Smithson, Krauss goes on to declare a new critical territory for sculpture by mapping it in a series of diagrams as not-landscape and not-architecture (two categories still in a public domain). Hence an expanded field '... generated by problematizing the set of oppositions between which the modernist category *sculpture* is suspended' (Krauss, 1983:38). It is intriguing to speculate how other categories of professional work, such as urban planning or engineering, might be redefined using a similar model.

Digging holes was only one means to expand the field for sculpture. Others included, from the late 1960s, happenings, community art, auto-destructive art and conceptual art using the juxtaposition of image and text. One force behind much new art was a desire on the part of artists to free themselves from the operations of the art market, and the commodification of their work, as well as from the prevailing reductionist critique of art advanced by Clement Greenberg⁶. This move to non-art forms (in the sense of non-object art) was partly the voice of an avant-garde looking to a post-capitalist society and resisting the seductions of the gallery system – if artists ceased to make objects, then the art market would have nothing new to sell, nor critics objects of taste to interpret. Within this broad direction, some artists were directly motivated by political events, or the radical perceptions of class, gender and cultural difference introduced by the new discipline of cultural studies. Martha Rosler, for instance, produced collages from magazine pictures, protesting at the American war in Vietnam in a language of everyday imagery and using materials which lacked the privileged status of paint or bronze. In the UK, Victor Burgin made a series of poster-size photographic works on class differences; these, however, were sold by a London dealer at sums equivalent to a week's professional salary. The art market, like that of popular music, proved adept at colonising whatever set itself apart from it, including graffiti⁷. At the same time, art made in the desert, or which was ephemeral, could be represented in the gallery only by photographs and remained a challenge to the culture of the object. If the market was able to deal in it, and artists accepted complicity on the grounds of needing to earn a living, new art forms were able still to make visible some of the contradictions of late capitalist society, even if only for an art-world public.

But another factor in the new art of the late 1960s was a desire to reach new publics by using non-gallery settings, and this, too, conditions the growth of environmental art. Whilst the tradition of sculpture produced public monuments, these had, by the mid-twentieth century, lost their currency, and the world of the modern art gallery with its characteristic white walls denoting a so-called value-free space had become a preserve of the possessors of money or cultural knowledge⁸.

Siting art in the street seemed to some artists an escape from the limitations of a critical discourse based on gallery experiences, just as happenings were a way out of commodification. For commissioning bodies, on the other hand, mainly city authorities supported by grants⁹, and large corporations, public art was a means to imprint an identity of their own making on the built environment, a kind of logo¹⁰. Suzanne Lacy sees the move to public art as, in cynical terms, an expansion of the market for sculpture; but also identifies a new activism informed by Marxism and feminism, particularly the latter, leading to what she terms new genre public art (Lacy, 1995:26–7)¹¹. Within this category, artists such as Dominique Mazeaud and Mierle Ukeles (Lacy, 1995:262–3 and 201–2) have engaged with environmental issues, Ukeles working with the waste disposal systems of New York and Mazeaud carrying out a ritualised and reflective cleaning of a river bed in Santa Fe. For Ukeles, walking the five boroughs of New York to shake the hands of garbage collectors in a work titled *Touch Sanitation* (1978–79), art activism integrated a refusal of commodification with a democratisation of the audience, and an invitation to that audience to become participants. Writing on this area of new art practice, Suzi Gablik, in 1991, asserted that the criteria by which art should be evaluated included its capacity to overturn the (Cartesian) way of thinking about the world which had produced environmental destructiveness (Gablik, 1991:26).

Land art, as in the work of Mary Miss, Nancy Holt, Robert Morris, Alan Sonfist, Walter de Maria, Robert Smithson and others in the USA for whom the land itself is their material, is a specific strand of art's wider dematerialisation¹² and quest for new audiences and contexts. Its response to a desire for alternative settings is mediated, perhaps, by an attraction to the open spaces of a vast land mass. This attraction is linked to the North American tradition of the log cabin and the pioneer, and to the self-sufficiency of Thoreau's *Walden Pond*. Wilderness landscape, and its juxtaposition with or absorption by landscapes of civilisation, is a persistent theme in north American nineteenth-century painting, and has been identified as a background element in the Nine Mile Run Greenway project's philosophy¹³. Just, then, as holes in the ground can be mapped as not-landscape and not-architecture, so land art can be thought of as not-wilderness. At the time land art became known, from the 1970s, other artists, mainly British and more in the area of conceptual than environmental art, walked the land and recorded their reveries in photographs and texts, or made slight interventions unlikely to disrupt an ecosystem (in the days before chaos theory's mythicisation of the butterfly's wing-beat) – Hamish Fulton, for example, and Richard Long. Their walks were often in remote places, from Peru to Tibet, and their interventions restricted to replacing a few stones or taking a photograph. Andy Goldsworthy's work is an extension of this reuse of materials found on site, producing striking rereadings of landscape, though at the point where journeys to the North Pole become involved, the level of intervention becomes unsympathetic, and a critique (by two geographers) of Goldsworthy's identification with place in his project for 100 sheepfolds links his likely place in future cultural history to the possibility of a Goldsworthy trail¹⁴.

From its beginnings, however, land art had a practical aspect, and involved for some artists the reclamation of industrially pillaged landscapes¹⁵; projects were not always successful – Robert Morris, for instance, contributed to the further erosion of an abandoned gravel pit near Seattle in 1979–80, by removing trees in a gesture designed to foreground the industrialisation of the site. Perhaps, too, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* of 1970 in Utah, and his later (unrealised) proposals for sculpting mining wastes in Colorado, could be seen as colonising the land for art-space¹⁶. Here, land art becomes not-mining and not-playing with earth-moving equipment. Fulton argues that art which reconstructs the land in this way lacks respect for it, though it could equally be argued that there is, in Europe at least and perhaps over most of North America outside the desert, very little nature which remains unreconstructed by agriculture. Land art is not, in any case, confined to remote or rural areas. Alan Sonfist planted native species of tree to recreate the original landscape of a vacant lot on the north edge of SoHo (1965–78); more recently, playing on readings of nature and culture within urban streetscapes and the artificial landscape of parks, Eve Andrée Laramée constructed a series of three installations of flora on the back of trucks. Made for the Natural Reality exhibition in Aachen (1999), these were driven through the city, texts on the truck sides stating, for instance, the volume of greenery required to counteract the atmospheric pollution produced by driving such a truck. Another states: 'Reality must take precedence over public relations for Nature cannot be fooled' (Figure 6.1)¹⁷.

RECLAMATIONS

Reclamation art, dealing specifically with sites of dereliction in cities or surrounding areas, has the same potential range of relations to site as other forms of non-gallery art, from aesthetic statements to projects which link land use to democracy, but has increasingly moved towards social concern, if not activism. One instance is the work in Boston of a group called Reclamation Artists, co-ordinated by Joan Brigham; between 1990 and 1995, the group organised five temporary installations of work in the sites of a neglected and polluted inner city landscape when the demolition of a raised freeway system opened access to the margins of land beneath the freeway. Some of the work had a specifically ecological theme, creating access to bodies of water or referencing the diversity of plant and bird life which survived almost secretly on the sites, whilst, more generally, the presence of art drew public and press attention to issues of site, ownership and access in relation to the Central Artery Project. Brigham writes 'We are dedicated to attempting to ensure that the adverse impact of CAP's plans can be mitigated by the adoption of some of our proposals to preserve the land for common use. Meanwhile, we "reclaim" land for increased public awareness and for public debate . . .' (Brigham, 1995:385).

Figure 6.1 Eve Andrée, Laramée, Parks on Truck (detail), 1999, Natural Reality exhibition, Ludwig Forum, Aachen (photo M Miles)



Reclamation art, then, takes place in the context of the reclamation of ex-industrial urban sites for new uses, and seeks to influence the determination and character of future use. Its range of possible responses is conditioned by the scope and status of reclamation itself, whether of land or redundant buildings. But the reclamation of buildings has both condoned and transgressive forms associated with differing levels of abundance and official sanction. A disused factory transformed into high-rent lofts is not perceived in the same way as an empty house squatted by homeless people, though both are reuses of empty space for domestic purposes. The difference is less in the legality than in the coding: either as urban development denoting the spread of the affluent society, or regeneration associated with the efforts of the non-affluent to help themselves. For the interests of capital, self-help of this kind poses two threats: it draws attention to the uneven distribution of the benefits of development, and it indicates that social groups marginalised by development may help themselves to more than empty buildings; they may take back their right to the city¹⁸. Reclamation art, too, recodes spaces and lends them new associations and meanings, most often with official agreement, which will be perceived according to the same structures of difference as the reuse of buildings. Artists, as a social category, are in a borderland position; on one hand the concentrations of artists in redundant warehouses and factories in east London, Birmingham's Custard Factory or the dockside in Bristol, do not represent wealth – most rent studios there because the rents are low (and for the company of other artists); on the other, some specific artworks, and more often the culture of resistance, as in road protest, do seek radical social change. But the recoding of districts for art is part of a wider redetermination of the city and its symbolic economy in which, as Sharon Zukin demonstrates in relation to New York (Zukin, 1995, 1996), cultural value, as in the delineation of cultural quarters, plays a central and affirmative role¹⁹.

The possibilities for reclamation differ, then, according to the agendas of which they are part. These agendas may be commercially driven or involve dwellers in the regeneration of local economies and patterns of sociation. The Nine Mile Run Greenway project involves local people in the regeneration of open space, and the non-productive (in capitalist terms) use of a site for the conservation of biodiversity. Most urban development, however, responds to agendas in the private sector, not confined to the circumstances of individual cities but linked to transnational networks of capital. This kind of development has little use for regeneration²⁰, but increasingly involves the recoding of commercial and industrial buildings and sites as cultural zones; examples include the Tate at Bankside in London, and Tate of the North at Albert Dock in Liverpool, the wholesale redevelopment of Cardiff Bay as a set of waterside vistas, the zoning of Temple Bar in Dublin as a cultural quarter, and proliferation of cafes, bars and clubs in Castlefield, Manchester. Other cases, such as South Street Seaport in New York, the harbour area of Baltimore and gas-light district in San Diego, Pioneer Square in Seattle, or Wigan Pier and Ironbridge in England, are zones of heritage and tourism. For developers, these two, overlapping

kinds of reclamation – for culture and for tourism – are a pioneering element in urban renewal which rescues sites from dereliction and invites consumption. From another perspective, cultural zones aestheticise the city and increase its polarisation into areas of affluence and deprivation, whilst the narratives carried by heritage and tourism are seldom critical and frequently part of a homogenisation of culture in keeping with the dreams of world domination conveyed by companies such as Disney.

In contrast, experiments in social organisation and economic self-sufficiency, such as Tinker's Bubble in Somerset, Crystal Waters in Australia (based on permaculture), and the occupation of a disused brewery site in south London renamed Pure Genius²¹, suggest that reclamation, as occupation of land, can also take the form of very local solutions which by virtue of that specificity go against the grain of globalisation. Perhaps one of the more interesting roles for reclamation art is, then, to give form to ideas for alternatives to development on the global pattern, reclaiming sites and cities for dwellers and for the fragile but sustainable ecologies which are incompatible with fantasies of an ever-expanding economy. This is a more specific definition for reclamation art, and it is in this context that artists have increasingly turned, since the 1980s, to work in spaces of industrial waste, such as Nine Mile Run, or have taken the issues of environmentalism and ecology as subject-matter. Reclamation, in this sense, means reclaiming more than space, taking back the power to shape a possible future, and realising that, perhaps, the planet's human population does not have exclusive rights to that future.

But models of future worlds require, to be credible, evidence of possibility. In this respect, some artists have collaborated with other professionals to develop practical ways in which to heal damaged and polluted landscapes. Mel Chin's Revival Field, for instance, is a three-year pilot project begun in Minneapolis in 1989 (Lacy, 1995:210–11). Working on a poisoned waste site, Chin worked with an agronomist, identifying plants (called collectively 'hyperaccumulators') which take up toxins such as cadmium or zinc from the soil. The site was given a simple geometry of a circle within a square, divided into four quarters, each with different planting, bounded by a wire fence. Corn, bladder campion and pennythrift, amongst other species, were planted and duly harvested, and the pollutants removed by incineration; this was seen as a possible strategy for funding such projects when sufficiently valuable minerals are extracted. Chin has now proved the effectiveness of the technology, and at this point is prepared to hand over the idea, as science, for wider application²². European artists and arts organisations, too, have developed reclamation projects, including Hermann Prigann's projects for brownfield sites in Germany and Belgium (Prigann, n.d.). In 1999, nine artists from Europe and the USA were invited by the Mondriaan Foundation to design billboard works for the periphery of a landfill site near Breda, in a project titled Tales of the Tip. And in 1997 in Quaking Houses, a mining village in the north of England, a group of local people formed an environmental trust to create, in

*Figure 6.2 Earth Centre, near Doncaster:
natural treatment of waste in reed-beds (photo M
Miles)*



collaboration with scientists from Newcastle University, artist Helen Smith and the Artists Agency in Sunderland, a wetland to naturally cleanse local water sources of pollution from mining wastes²³.

Most artists' initiatives are independent of, though usually permitted and sometimes funded by, official bodies. This allows them to be more closely linked to local publics than is possible for top-down schemes such as the Dome. Most large-scale reclamation of brownfield sites, however, is within state or municipal control and operation. But the Earth Centre, an ecological exhibition and demonstration site in a disused colliery near Doncaster in Yorkshire, funded through the national lottery as a millennium project, is an unusual case. Opened in 1999, the site has been presented as an ecological theme park. But there are no rides or entertainments; it has a museum-style shop selling organic chocolate, natural cotton clothing and books on ecology, and a restaurant in which most food is organic and locally sourced. In its main gallery, Planet Earth Experience, images of earth, air, fire and water are projected through a series of moving panels representing, through semi-abstract forms, animals, fish, birds and people. The effects change according to people's movement through the room, shifting from states of purity to intimations of disaster. Outside, demonstration organic and dry-climate gardens, solar energy and growing willow shelters and fences are part of what might be described as a public education programme. The Earth Centre's publicity material states that it '... exists to provide inspiration and access to people and organisations that can help individuals make decisions ... that will make a significant and positive impact on our future ...' (Earth Centre, 1999). And it seeks to be a model of the good practices it promotes, minimising energy consumption, encouraging visitors to use public transport and operating open management. It remains to be seen whether the concept of a theme park can be subverted from within²⁴, but its use and treatment of water stands for its environmental policy – all water on the site, from rain, drainage and sewage, is reprocessed for re-use on the land. Visitors can see sewage cleaned by natural methods in Waterworks (Figure 6.2), where it flows through beds of reeds, willow and papyrus. A jug of the output is exhibited daily and, though not pure enough to drink, is colourless and odourless – in fact, the whole interior of Waterworks is free of odours other than those of the reed-beds. The Earth Centre, then, presents a series of alternative solutions, which it tries to practise as well as preach, for the reclamation of brownfield sites, though it has no interface with art.

NINE MILE RUN AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The Nine Mile Run Greenway project, which aims to reclaim parts of a 238 acre site of steel industry slag dumping for public space and biodiversity (Figure 6.3), is located in the genre of reclamation art, with its associated histories of land art and art for environmental conservation. It was initiated by five members – Bob

*Figure 6.3 Pittsburgh, Nine Mile Run
Greenway: view from upper slope of slag heaps
(photo M Miles)*



Bingham, Tim Collins, Reiko Goto, Richard Pell and John Stephen – from the Studio for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, and its philosophy owes something to that cultural history in which issues of wilderness and civilisation are represented; but equally to the ideas of practical experiment, inter-disciplinarity, negotiation and contingency which characterise Chin's work. Pittsburgh is today a post-industrial city, with redevelopment schemes for its redundant industrial buildings and open spaces. The Greenway is located in the web of shifting perceptions of the city and contestations of who has a right to the city, or to its reconfiguration in a post-industrial future.

Part of the Nine Mile Run site has been designated for new housing by a coalition of the city authorities and private-sector developers; some groups of local people would like to see it incorporated into a network of old parks and new waterfront trails, others to see it left to wildness (and wild turkeys); and the project, which aims to see a third of the site set aside as public space and a zone of biodiversity, is led by a team of environmental artists for whom it is an opportunity to create a post-industrial landscape. The Studio for Creative Inquiry is a research centre supporting cross-disciplinary work attached to the College of Fine Arts at Carnegie Mellon University, which began work on the project in 1996. Acting to bridge the agendas of competing interests, such as those noted above, through workshops using methods similar to those of action planning, and an education programme in local schools co-ordinated by Reiko Goto, the Studio is producing a detailed conceptualisation for the site which attempts to reconcile the needs and perceptions of dwellers, developers and city authorities, with scientific research on the requirements for sustaining wildlife and aesthetic sensibilities. Once a detailed proposal has been agreed, documented and given appropriate textual and visual forms (using digital imaging), the ideas will be handed over for others to put into practice. Like Chin, the artists seek no continuing authorship²⁵. The team of artists do not propose to site conventional art in Nine Mile Run, nor to recode the site as art-space. In seeing their role as facilitators and intermediaries, they follow the methods of conceptual art, dealing with ideas rather than material; but they also depart from these methods, not only by participating in practical experiments for greening the site and monitoring biodiversity, but also in not privileging the artist's viewpoint within a critical discourse. A comparison could be made here with the work of Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, who, since the 1970s, have combined conceptual art with research in areas such as science and ecology. In 1998, the Harrisons produced a series of large-scale maps of the area between the estuaries of the Humber and the Mersey, plotting the likely outcomes of free market development, and alternative futures including the re-creation of forests and introduction of protected zones of biodiversity. The Harrisons, although using an open studio technique, confer mainly with other professionals and maintain a top-down approach (epitomised by the viewpoint of the map), whilst the Studio generates proposals from more structured workshops with local people and professionals; and the Harrisons produce schemes for which

they then seek political support, whilst the Studio begin with the kind of negotiation which implies support at a later stage, since they claim no ownership of the proposals.

The site Nine Mile Run takes its name from its distance from the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers which join to form the Ohio. It consists of a stream valley bordered by mounds of slag, much of it dumped illegally but ignored by the city authorities – Pittsburgh was a steel town – and as high as a 10-storey building²⁶. Steel slag is hard, grey and porous, and although it contains fewer toxins than some industrial effluents, it has no nutrients either and cannot hold water²⁷. Where pockets of trees and undergrowth appear, it is in places where other kinds of material have been added to the dump, principally waste from building and demolition sites. This provides a soil in which roots can take hold and water be retained. Along the stream bed, vegetation is quite lush (Figure 6.4), and the valley was identified in 1910 by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr (son of Olmsted the planner of Central Park) as ‘the most striking opportunity’ to create a public park. Olmsted wrote:

Its long meadows of varying width would make ideal playfields; the stream, when it is freed from sewage, will be an attractive and interesting element in the landscape; the wooded slopes on either side give ample opportunity for enjoyment of the forest, for shaded walks and cool resting places (Olmsted, 1910, cited in Simony, Brodt and Pryor, 1998:14).

Nine Mile Run is bordered to the north by Frick Park, a reminder of the philanthropy of the city’s wealthy families in the nineteenth century. The park is a little run down, but efforts are being made to raise funds for its restoration, and the Greenway would create a green open space from Frick Park to the Monongahela River shore.

Green areas are seen as part of the city’s future image, and the city authority has worked with the private sector to regain public access to several miles of waterfront. A trail for walkers and joggers (known as the Jail Trail because it begins near the city jail) now runs along the downtown (north) shore of the Monongahela River; another trail is planned to link Pittsburgh with Washington, DC. A nineteenth-century railway bridge no longer used for trains has been converted, with addition of access ramps, to pedestrian use as part of a waterside trail. On the downtown shore of the Allegheny River, landscape architects Susan Child and Stanton Eckstut have designed a strip of trees, grasses and cornflowers – very much the kind of constructed nature to which Laramée’s trucks in Aachen drew attention²⁸. But these are fairly conventional kinds of urban public space, with the usual provision of landscaping and seating. The Nine Mile Run Greenway project aims to go beyond such conventions, to ‘identify, experiment and model the application of sustainable alternative approaches to urban open space . . .’²⁹. In doing so it engages with three questions. Firstly, what are the strategies and

Figure 6.4 Pittsburgh, Nine Mile Run: lush vegetation by the stream bed (photo M Miles)



Figure 6.5 Pittsburgh, Nine Mile Run: Tim Collins collecting old tyres from the site (photo M Miles)



constituencies for defining and progressing the agenda? Secondly, given the complexities of a post-industrial city, what constitutes an identified public for the project? And, thirdly, given that the Studio for Creative Inquiry is part of a College of Fine Arts, is the work of the artists still art? The last question may seem the least important, or part of art's self-referential dialogue, but it links to wider questions as to the relation of the social and aesthetic dimensions of culture, and the intervention of artists in changing ways of thinking about the world which have led to the damage to the land which the Nine Mile Run Greenway project seeks to heal.

The project's stated philosophy describes it as 'an experiment in public discourse', and affirms a 'unifying theory' for reclamation 'as an integrated ecosystem restoration that embraces the complex goal of "nature" in the context of contemporary urban culture' (Simony, Brodt and Pryor, 1998:4). This is interpreted as retaining the needs of ecosystems, as in the stream bed, for survival, whilst equally recognising the ecosystems of people in housing areas, and accepting that what for non-human creatures is nature, for humans can also be culture in the form of recreational space. The statement continues: '... integration of the reclamation into the social fabric of the community is essential'; the rationale is that when a reclamation project arises from local support, and meets the needs of local people as well as those of natural systems, then it is more sustainable. A previous case at Sudbury, Canada, is cited in support, where 3000 people were employed in landscape restoration over a 15-year period³⁰.

This integration discounts any attempt to restore the site to its original condition, which would involve removal of the slag – a vast undertaking in itself, raising the question of where it could be put without causing another destruction of the landscape; and allows for selective import of plant species likely to prosper in the conditions of the site. The vegetation of Frick Park is taken as an indicator of what these might be. The grey slopes of the mounds, however, are not easy to green, and are steep, and in 1999 were sprayed with a mulch containing a mix of nutrients and grass seeds, to establish a thin surface green layer, to begin the process and help other life to survive. This will also make the site more aesthetically pleasing. Where material has collected on level surfaces, small trees representing 10 to 15 years' growth are found. A further aspect of the integration of the project with the social dynamics of adjacent urban and suburban areas is the creation of a sense of ownership of the site. As steel slag, it was legally owned by Duquesne Steel, and emotionally by no one. The evidence of litter, such as old tyres and televisions, indicates that for some local people it remains a dump. The artists seek to counteract this through participation, but also regularly remove litter to improve the visual aesthetics of the site (Figure 6.5). Aesthetic perception affects the site's public image, and the experience of Sudbury is again cited to support a strategy of using appropriate scientific methods within a cultural context³¹. Amongst the scientific methods are restoring soil-chemical balance, establishing initial stability for vegetation and enabling longer term biodiversity.

There are also specific methodologies in relation to the stream, the water of which is partly contaminated by the effluent from storm drains, whilst supporting some life and being visually quite clear. Part of the solution is to divert the sewage, open up culverted areas and protect the water quality; but equally important within the project's philosophy is to talk with people in the areas where pollution is produced, spreading awareness of how the stream becomes polluted and, in a wider ecological context, how urban settlements can use less water and put less poison in the drain. Similarly, an education programme in schools is intended to encourage interest in, and care for, biodiversity. The Studio has set up a trailer near the stream bed as an information point. It is also used as a base for meetings and keeping tools, and for making links to other local groups. The Studio, in addition, conducts walking tours along the stream bed.

One of the main roles for the team of artists is to mediate between the structures and languages of professionals and non-professionals, and those whose interests are vested in differing needs – such as citizens' groups, city health authorities, planners and developers. The upper reaches of the slag are zoned for new housing, which will involve levelling some stretches and further loss of vegetation. The developer's first plan was to cover the stream and impose an entirely cultured landscape on the site, replicating the generalised aesthetics of other sites and cities and importing both the plants and the surface layer of soil. Previous proposals for development had met with local opposition, as in 1982, when a proposal for a mall was successfully blocked, but in 1995 the city authorities reacquired the site and appointed a developer to work in partnership through an Urban Redevelopment Authority. The main strategy for enabling participation by local people, through 1997–99, was a series of meetings, workshops and round-table discussions. In July 1999, an exhibition was presented, articulating ideas through art and digital image technologies. Four specific themes were investigated by professionals from science, art and planning, local people and city officials. These were history, context and public policy; stream remediation; community and ecology – slag, soil, plants and wildlife; and sustainable open spaces. Local people were able, through this structure, to interact with city officials and developers, having added status as members of a workshop³². They also became informed, enabling a more focused approach and selectivity, as the ambience of the project became increasingly one of negotiation rather than confrontation. Some gains were made, from the Planning Commission's imposition of controls on the development after public consultation in 1997, to changes in zoning in keeping with the Greenway strategy in 1998. Much in the situation remains, at the time of writing, fluid. Fluidity, of course, is potential, though some things may yet be more potential than others.

A topic like stream reclamation might seem a specialist area, but this discussion group was an important step in communicating the diversity already in the site, and began with walking tours. Heavy rain the previous day conveniently produced storm drain outflows and a breakdown of the sewage system. An afternoon session began with 10-minute reports from specialist advisers, and an overview of

precedents elsewhere in the USA. A total of 50 people participated, and were reminded of Article I, section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution:

The People have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural scenic, historic and aesthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. (Simony, Brodt and Pryor, 1998:69)

What the people who inherit this statement of Enlightenment values actually get is (according to the Allegheny Health Department) 'high concentrations of Fecal Coliform bacteria . . . potential for infection by viruses . . .' and so on (Simony, Brodt and Pryor, 1998:69). Comments in a following workshop included, to give a random and edited sample:

An inherent conflict exists if political officials (who are elected for two-year terms) have authority over sewer maintenance . . .

No one wants to make a commitment which costs money . . .

By the report released by the URA themselves, that is a lie, a misrepresentation. There are additional hazards . . .

I don't care about a greenway project. What we have to talk about here has to go forward with or without a greenway project . . .

If we don't address the problems upstream, we are dealing with the symptoms rather than the cause. If you do that the cause continues to decay. I am not a fan of wetlands; it avoids the real problem, the sewers . . .

(Simony, Brodt and Pryor, 1998:86-95 [remarks in original text are attributed])

What emerged from the workshop was an understanding that the causes of stream pollution were from outside the valley, that there was uncertainty as to responsibility for repairs and that perhaps fines were cheaper than repairs anyway, that some citizens' groups were familiar with and willing to use legal processes, and that the relation of the greenway project to the housing project was implicit rather than explicit in the discussion, but a reality.

Such findings are not in themselves an action plan, but establish a solidarity amongst (at least some of) those taking part. Collins calls this 'empowerment through discourse', in a society which has fragmented its processes of decision making into specialist areas, privileging quantitative analysis over lay experience. Collins continues:

We have learned to leave our decisions in the hands of experts, yet at the same time we have learned to mistrust those experts depending on who is paying for their opinion. . . . brownfield sites provide an ideal environment to 'reclaim' the individual's role in the discursive public sphere. We need to reclaim our relationship to complex public issues. (Simony, Brodt and Pryor, 1998:6)³³

The workshops, then, did not seek to mask complexity, including that of conflicting propositions and outcomes, nor to affirm a single identity for the site, but

allowed diversity, aiming only to provide a common space for its expression. A key question is the extent to which the voices heard can be said to represent the total diversity of voices of local neighbourhoods. The answer to that kind of question is usually at least in part negative, in that no form of representation translates all voices into one voice. Realisation that all representation distorts is part of the reconstruction of values in post-modern thought, but it presents particular problems for a project of this kind, which is obliged to reconsider notions of community when it is evident that communities linked by common attachment to place are also increasingly seen as an aspect of world which has either gone or is going.

But is it art? Each of the artists comes from a background of making art in non-gallery sites, and uses a particular skill within the project: Bingham documents through video, Collins tends to be most active in the project's public presentation and Goto works through the education programme and on monitoring biodiversity in and around the site. Collins and Goto define reclamation art as '... an opportunity to beautify a devastated landscape, and as an opportunity to commemorate (through formal intervention) the aesthetic components of post-industrial landscapes'. But they see it '... plagued by two controversial arguments ...'. These are firstly, that reclamation can provide solutions which make future devastation of the land more acceptable, on the grounds that most kinds of mess can be cleared up, and, secondly, that reclamation art ceases to be art (Collins and Goto, 1996:1). The former argument is answered when it is realised that destruction takes place within a context and a value-structure, and that a post-industrial approach to the land will not replicate the destructiveness of the industrial, not so much because there are no more heavy industries (light industries also pollute), but, more to the point, because cultural attitudes have shifted, reinvesting green space with value. For Mel Chin the latter was a real question, in that the National Endowment for the Arts withheld his grant of \$10 000 for Revival Field project on the grounds that it was not art at all, but science. Chin responded that he used the traditional method of carving – to remove material (toxins) to reveal form (cleansed earth) – and persuaded the NEA to release the grant. Collins and Goto see the act of reclamation as itself an aesthetic experience, and their funding body, the Heinz Endowments, is not concerned about the infinite varieties of aesthetic category.

To sum up: one of the most effective ways to prevent future destruction of the land may be to change the way people think about it and the associations they lend it. This is a cultural process involving frameworks and knowledges from many disciplines, and those of dwellers. Sustainable solutions are likely to be those for which local people feel an ownership, rather than top-down solutions which are distrusted or seen as rhetorical. Reclamation artists act as communicators and researchers, and as intermediaries between those who have power and those who do not, a possibility derived from the autonomy claimed for art in the modern period, which allows critical distance and independence of viewpoint whilst,

Figure 6.6 Pittsburgh: a dog-owners' Sunday morning parade, May 1999 (photo M Miles)



through the strategies developed here, also, in the post-modern period, regaining a sense of engagement and interaction with diverse groups in society. What projects such as the Nine Mile Run Greenway show is that autonomy can be combined with access, and that it is not the artist's experiences of everyday life so much as those of diverse publics, no longer neatly cohering as communities rooted in place, which need to be given equal weighting to those of experts. Pittsburgh has many publics, including one of dog-owners, who paraded one Sunday morning in May through the city to the downtown waterfront (Figure 6.6). Nine Mile Run is theirs, too.

NOTES

1. The chapter is based on information provided by the Studio for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University, during a visit by the author in May 1999.
2. Another form of the vernacular, in the USA, is the Disney town of Celebration (Florida). Houses are in a variety of older styles, with porches, weatherboard and picket fences; home owners are required to observe a catalogue of regulations from not mending cars in the street to having only white or beige curtains. See MacCannell (1999).
3. Discussion of post-industrial cities is resumed in more depth in Chapter 8, as a context for other kinds of intervention by artists in the built environment.
4. A series of four workshops is fully documented, with verbatim accounts, in Simony, Brodt and Pryor (1998).
5. For another reading of Rodin which places more evidence on his relation to radical ideas and the continuation of Realism, see Elsen (1985).
6. For a history of changing concepts of the avant-garde, see Crane (1987). Crane writes: 'Greenberg argued that the goal of the modernist approach was to establish the autonomy of painting as an enterprise by eliminating from its activities effects that were associated with the other arts. Thus, as Greenberg says, "modernism used art to call attention to art". Because the flatness of the pictorial surface was more characteristic of painting than of any other art form, he argued that "modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else"'. (Crane, 1987:55-6, citing Greenberg, C (1961) 'Modernist Painting', *Arts Yearbook*, vol. 4, pp 101-8, quote pp 103-4).
7. Rosler writes: 'The anti-institutional revolt was unsuccessful, and the art world has now completed something of a paradigm shift.' She argues that patterns of behaviour in the art world increasingly resemble those of the mass media, replicating notions of celebrity status. She adds: 'In fact, the art world has been called a branch of the entertainment industry . . .' (Rosler, 1994:57).
8. For a critical account of the development of the white-walled gallery, from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, see Grunenberg, 1994.
9. The National Endowment for the Arts, in the USA, established public art as a funding category from 1967 - see Miles (1997a).
10. For discussion of some contradictory aspects of the establishment of public art as a category, see Phillips (1988) and Miles (1997a).
11. Lacy writes: 'Moving into the public sector through the use of public space . . . was inevitable for artists who sought to inform and change. Because of their activist origin, feminist artists were concerned with questions of effectiveness.' (Lacy, 1995:27).
12. The term 'de-materialisation' was coined by Lucy Lippard in her book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, New York, Praeger (1973).

13. See Kirk Savage, 'Art, Science, and Ecological Inquiry: The Case of 19th-Century American Landscape Painting', paper published through the Nine Mile Run Greenway project website: www.slaggarden.cfa.cmu.edu. Lucy Lippard (in Lacy, 1995) refers to a contrast between the 'holistic, earth-centered' view of indigenous peoples in America and the 'conquered, exploited and commodified' landscape of white settlement (Lippard, 1995:117).
14. David Matless and George Revill carried out extensive interviews with Goldsworthy in 1995, noting his work in Grizedale Forest, his use of photography to record ephemeral replacing of natural materials, and more recent work to reconstruct a series of sheepfolds. They conclude: 'While he welcomes a popularity beyond a narrow art audience, and a place on school curricula, a popular place-based art can be double edged. If art, artists and locality are so bound up, then what better way to understand Goldsworthy than to visit his places?' This leads to a worry that one day a sign will read 'You are now entering Goldsworthy country' (Matless and Revill, 1995:444).
15. For an overview of art with an ecological content, see Matilsky, 1992.
16. For an anthology of critical writing on land art, see Sonfist (1983).
17. See Ludwig Forum (1999) pp 118-9. Tim Collins and Reiko Goto, two of the artists working on Nine Mile Run, undertook a project on Aachen's buried water sources for the same exhibition.
18. As some of them did on 18 June 1999 when demonstrations were held under the banner 'Reclaim the Streets' in the financial district of London; property belonging to banks and financial institutions was damaged.
19. That artists are in a borderland position is demonstrated by the contrasting histories of London Docklands, in which the presence of artists' studios was one of the first signs of coming gentrification, and Wanstead, where several artists were amongst the occupiers of short-life housing in the path of demolition for the extension of the M11. See Wall, 1999:74-9. For other accounts of the cultures of road protest see McKay, 1996 and Field, 1999 (in Jordan and Lent, 1999).
20. Byrne argues that (for the most part) in the USA, the poor no longer vote, and in the UK national policy is determined in relation to the interests of affluent groups. He adds: 'The poor are politically relevant only as a source of disorder and crime, and responses are designed around the exclusionary maintenance of order . . .' (Byrne, 1997:66).
21. For accounts of Tinkers Bubble, Crystal Waters and Pure Genius, see Schwartz and Schwartz, 1998:43-54; 124-141; 54-65 respectively.
22. Conversation with Chin, Aachen, June 1999.
23. For a range of accounts of this project, see Griffiths and Kemp, 1999.
24. At the time of writing, visitor numbers were below target; but, take-up from school groups has been high. Unrealistic target numbers for visitors were set by consultants during the initial funding negotiations for the project, which was established, like most lottery-funded projects, as a capital scheme without revenue support. Although a large number of local people (many unemployed since the closure of the pits) were employed, in July 1999 some were again made unemployed when visitor numbers did not rise in line with those unrealistic targets. The messages conveyed by the Earth Centre's exhibits, however, are not mediated by government rhetoric, and have nothing of the insipid, fake or banal feeling of a theme park.
25. The structure of the Studio requires that projects constitute research, and it works only at a conceptual level. This could be seen as a limitation, restricting embeddedness in local networks; but the Studio sees its autonomy, enabling it to produce thinking not conditioned by vested commercial or state interests, as part of its value.
26. The site was used in the nineteenth century for farming, a salt works, natural gas wells and a golf club, then designated for housing and some of the stream put into culverts; in

1923 the Citizens' Committee on Civic Plan, an elite group of citizens, proposed that Nine Mile Run be turned into a civic park with recreational facilities. But 94 acres had been purchased by Duquesne Steel in 1922, with further purchases following, and used for dumping slag. Dumping continued until 1972, filling much of the valley.

27. The steel industry produces a range of noxious substances and emissions, including sulphur oxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide, but these are emitted as gasses. A participant in one of the workshops identified zinc, chromium, lead and sulphur as found in the slag.
28. For Child's and Eckstut's work at Battery Park City, see Beardsley, 1989:150-4.
29. Tim Collins and Reiko Goto, October 1996, from website <http://slag garden.cfa.cmu.edu>
30. The source given is Lautenbach et al. in Gunn, 1995.
31. Bradshaw A N, in Gunn 1995.
32. Local people were invited on the basis of existing structures of representation, such as community and residents' groups. To give one example from a round-table discussion: participants included six members of the project team (four from associated departments in the University, such as Engineering and Planning); two local government officers; and representatives from Citizens for Responsible Development, Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition, the Town and Country Alliance, and three residents of Squirrel Hill (Simony, Brodt and Pryor, 1998:40).
33. Collins - the lead artist - cites Habermas (1991) on the emergence of the autonomous self through participation in the shared discursive process.