

Between a Pavilion and a Line in Space

JULIA JAMROZIK
University at Buffalo

Between art and architecture, between a pavilion and a line in space, this paper presents two interactive public projects, “Full Circle” and “Dialogue”, and positions them between the realm of minimal sculptures and humanistic infrastructures. Acting within the expanded disciplinary field, the works define space but also prompt participation and interaction within the public realm, thus embodying the opportunistic qualities of a strategic urbanism.

THE EXPANDED FIELD

Rosalind Krauss in her 1979 seminal essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”¹, argued for a broader scope and definition of sculpture and the relation of that category beyond the binary terms of non-architecture and non-landscape. It is perhaps surprising that almost half a century later while the scope and breadth of artistic and architectural production, their media and forms of practice, have expanded, the distinction between art and architecture persists. In the book *Retracing the Expanded Field*, edited by Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose, Michael Meredith argues that:



Figure 1: “Full Circle” by Julia Jamrozik and Coryn Kempster, Buffalo, New York, 2016. Photo by Coryn Kempster.



Figure 2: “Full Circle” by Julia Jamrozik and Coryn Kempster, Buffalo, New York, 2016. Photo by Brendan Bannon.

“The harder we try to define architecture, art, landscape, painting, sculpture, and so on, the fuzzier their borders become (...). It is now institutional infrastructures – universities, collectors, galleries, museums, building departments, auction houses, professional organizations and the like – that produce the context for “art” or “architecture.” It is no longer the object itself, but the relationship of the object to a cultural narrative.”²

The two projects described here straddle this divide and, depending on the context in which they are presented, have successfully fit both in the realm of art, having been commissioned as public artworks, and the realm of architecture, having been published in many architectural publications.

“FULL CIRCLE”

“Full Circle” was commissioned in 2016 by CEPA Gallery and C.S.1 Curatorial Projects for CEPA’s West Side Lots Project – a series of public artworks installed in Buffalo’s Westside residential neighbourhood. The proposal was selected through an open competition and the series was sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Erie County Arts & Cultural Funding among others.

The project is an interactive installation for all ages that playfully rotates a typical linear swing-set to alter and expand its experience, questioning the basic relationships between people in space and to one another. Further, by bringing a piece of playground equipment together with the charged spatial arrangement of political roundtables and corporate boardrooms, the installation takes a playful construct and positions it in the adult-world.

Aiming to create socially conscious dialogue, the project is positioned where diverse Buffalo communities intersect and is adjacent to International School #45 whose student body represents 70 countries and 44 languages. The installation was supported by a vigorous grassroots campaign to engage the teachers, parents, administrators, city council members, community activists, and neighbors to take active ownership of it.

“Full Circle” has become an identifiable spot within the neighborhood, becoming a small-scale meeting place for children and adults alike. In a low-income community with few maintained green-spaces and little public infrastructure, it is a small but significant gesture.

“DIALOGUE”

In 2017 “Dialogue” was commissioned by the nonprofit LANDstudio and installed in the Eastman Reading Garden of the Cleveland Public Library, in Cleveland, as part of the annual “See Also” program.

In a time of political and social disunity, the project hopes to spark conversation outside the boundaries of individual comfort zones. It encourages communication and moments of spontaneous interaction between friends and strangers. The circle of interlaced sound tubes aims to create conversations ranging in length and seriousness. The sound cones are connected to one another yet their pairing isn’t immediately apparent, resulting in a game of questioning and movement as one tries to discern the location of an interlocutor.

Connecting individuals in the highly public space of the Eastman Reading Garden, “Dialogue” plays into the potential of public space as a place to interact with people from different backgrounds and with different world-views. It highlights the very solitary experience that individuals often create for themselves in contemporary public space through technology and portable devices, where they are surrounded by others but in fact only interact with the echo chamber of their chosen social media platform. “Dialogue” is thus a very analogue social infrastructure that aims to interrupt and expand the experience of public space through the potential of spontaneous interaction.

MINIMALISM OR POP

Demarcating and defining but not enclosing or sheltering, “Full Circle” and “Dialogue” are as pared down as physical architectural manifestations can be. They are linear markers in space. Though not as fine or delicate as the stretched thread installations of Fred Sandback, they nevertheless use a minimum of means to claim a specific physical sphere of influence. In both instances the primary (and primal) shape of a circle is used to define both an inner space and an outer one. Significantly however, both projects encourage the transgression of this open boundary, through the occupation of the perimeter and movement through, around and in-between the tubular framework.

The installations invoke the scale of the human body, and they do this in a direct and conspicuous way. The relationship of the body to the seat of the swing and the head to the sound-cone, are calibrated and specific, even while the sculptural armatures remain paired-down and abstracted. Unlike Robert Morris’ early Minimalist work, such as his 1964 exhibition at the Green Gallery in New York, which alluded indirectly to anthropomorphic scaling, “Dialogue” and “Full Circle” embrace not only their physicality but also occupation by the human body.³ In this respect they are perhaps a stronger reference to the more recent sculptural works of Franz West, as they are intended for active, not just visual, interaction. They also share a self-conscious humor with West’s work.



Figure 3: “Dialogue” by Julia Jamrozik and Coryn Kempster, Cleveland, Ohio, 2017. Photo by Coryn Kempster.

Though simple in form, “Full Circle” and “Dialogue” are recognizable and familiar, while being specific and particular. Their structures are armatures that allow for the attachment of elements, either the swings or the speaking cones, which in turn are instant prompts that encourage participation and spark interaction. In the use of or allusion to off-the-shelf components, a clearer link can be made with ready-mades and Pop Art rather than Minimalism.

PLAYGROUND AS AMENITY

For these projects the reference to Aldo van Eyck’s bent tube playgrounds is an obvious one, not only in terms of their materiality but also in their intentions – to bring playful moments into the urban context, to allow for inter-generational use and to provide open-ended urban infrastructures. Van Eyck recognized the potential of play apparatus to breathe new life into the forgotten spaces of the city, transforming the urban environment into a network of nodes of various scales ultimately turning the city into a playground.⁴ In a lecture given in 1962, having already completed 400 playgrounds in Amsterdam, he states:

“(…) our idea is to create an even finer network of single play apparatuses which the city must be able to absorb. Just as one places a bench because one wants to sit, a lamp-post because one wants to

light the street, a newsstand because one wants to buy newspapers, I am putting a playdome there because children want to play.”⁵

Van Eyck celebrates the messiness and “violence” of the city and sees his play-structures as contributing to its reality. “The special thing about these playgrounds is that they do not belong exclusively to children. The city simply continues in these places, with all the dangers and disadvantages that go with it, and they are not closed off. They are meeting places, for children too, but when the child has gone to bed it’s just an ordinary street again.”⁶

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURES

Looking back at Krauss’s essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”, Beatriz Colomina argues that it is the city itself, “the always expanded field”, which is missing from the author’s argument and from the examples of sculpture she introduces. Colomina states that Krauss’s examples though not on pedestals nevertheless “remain polemically detached from the urban landscape” and thereby reassert their autonomy.⁷

While visually distinct, “Full Circle” and “Dialogue” are rooted in their urban contexts, be that the vacant residential lot or the more formal Library Garden. Their reading depends on their physical context and their use is equally contingent on it. Both projects opportunistically use public art networks and funding to provide



Figure 4: “Dialogue” by Julia Jamrozik and Coryn Kempster, Cleveland, Ohio, 2017. Photo by Coryn Kempster.



Figure 5: “Dialogue” by Julia Jamrozik and Coryn Kempster, Cleveland, Ohio, 2017. Photo by Bob Perkoski.

interactive spaces for public use and to strategically insert themselves into the fabric of the city. This potential, to broaden the scope and purview of artistic commissions, offers a great opportunity as there is still a dearth of creative and experimental public spaces for play in most American neighborhoods.

“Full Circle” and “Dialogue” are two examples of how the boundary between artistic and architectural practice can be bridged to provide for active and social places that resonate on a cultural level but also introduce much needed social infrastructure into their urban contexts.

ENDNOTES

1. Krauss, Rosalind, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October*, Vol. 8. (Spring, 1979), 30-44.
2. Michael Meredith, in *Retracing the Expanded Field. Encounters between Art and Architecture*, ed. by Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), 219.
3. Robert Morris did of course go on to produce pieces that much more actively engaged the viewer as participant such as the 1971 interactive installation “Bodymotionspacethings” at the Tate Gallery in London, reinstalled in 2009 in the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall.
4. Aldo van Eyck, “On the Design of Play Equipment and the Arrangement of Playgrounds” in *Playgrounds: Reinventing the Square* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2014), 121.
5. Aldo van Eyck, “On the Design of Play Equipment and the Arrangement of Playgrounds,” 122.
6. Aldo van Eyck, “On the Design of Play Equipment and the Arrangement of Playgrounds,” 122.
7. Beatriz Colomina, in *Retracing the Expanded Field. Encounters between Art and Architecture*, ed. by Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), 213.