

Institution: University of East London (UEL)
Unit of Assessment: 34
Title of case study: Using public-facing art to enhance awareness of sculpture's contribution to urban regeneration initiatives: Richard Wilson, <i>Turning the Place Over</i> , Liverpool (2008)
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Following his appointment as Henry Moore Fellow in Sculpture (2002-4), Richard Wilson has been Professor in Fine Art at UEL since 2004. During this time he has produced numerous local, public sculptures and installations, many commissioned by national and international public bodies including the London School of Economics, the Cultural Olympiad and the Venice Biennale. These commissions have both themselves contributed to the regeneration and revitalisation of cultural life within the areas in which they are installed, and enhanced public awareness and understanding of the transformative role of sculpture in urban regeneration schemes. These impacts arise from Wilson's creative deployment of site-specific, public-facing sculptural interventions to engage audiences by reconfiguring redundant sites and materials in spectacular and arresting artistic events.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Wilson's research focuses on testing and extending preconceptions about publicly sited sculpture and its social engagement. Earlier sculptural installations such as <i>Queen & Gantry</i> (2005) [1] and <i>Trailer Trash</i> (2006) [2] employed advanced engineering technology to dramatically remodel industrially produced objects and architectural spaces by rearranging the fabric and spatial integrity of objects and buildings. Challenging the conventional boundaries between sculpture and architecture, Wilson's structural interventions demonstrated how the relocation of the altered 'found' object within a culturally meaningful site allowed the object to be recast as a dramatic, engaging installation.</p> <p>In <i>Butterfly</i> (Wapping Project, 2003) [3], Wilson worked collaboratively with UEL students under the gaze of gallery visitors, using hand-operated tools to reshape and 'recover' a crushed Cessna light airplane. By elucidating the power of art to reconstitute crushed and deformed materials as new, large-scale sculptural objects, Wilson demonstrated art's capacity to embrace themes of regeneration in ways that stimulated public interest and encouraged greater engagement. The plane's re-assembling became an arresting performative event, which engaged its live audience in the process of achieving both the 'reconstruction' of the plane and the reanimation of the gallery space by the displaced aircraft. Wilson's choice of disused abandoned industrial sites signals his recognition of the ways in which a location's complex physical parameters, alongside its inherent social connotations and historical contexts, raise compelling associations for the development of meaningful public-facing art. This ambitious approach was subsequently applied to contexts both inside and outside of the gallery. <i>Road Movie</i> (2007) [4], for example, employed a destabilising device in which an Italian small truck was suspended on a rotating arm, allowing its apparently random actions to be caught on film.</p> <p>It was likewise evident in <i>Turning the Place Over</i> (2008) [5], which consisted of a vast 8-metre diameter ovoid section cut from the façade of a disused building and featured in the Liverpool Biennale (20 September - 30 November 2008). The ovoid section, mounted on a central spindle, rotated at an angle to the building. Only when at rest after a complete rotation did it fit flush into the building. Powered by motorised industrial rollers, when</p>

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rotating the façade oscillated out onto the street revealing the building's interior. Being flush with the building only once during its rotation, this movement created an acute sense of disorientation, even danger for the viewer as the architecture physically encroaches onto them. In keeping with Wilson's established interests in reflecting and responding to the social and physical locations of his work, *Turning the Place Over* referenced both urban renewal and burglary.

In all of these projects, Wilson's work has demonstrated installation's capacity to reinvigorate the discarded, misshapen and derelict, as well as highlighting sculpture's capacity to seize public attention by defamiliarizing the architecturally redundant. Interrogating the formal and aesthetic preconceptions of installation, his research – perhaps most especially in *Turning the Place Over* – has generated imaginative forms of architectural animation that combine physical cutting, time-based kinetic processes, spatial reorganisation and architectural hybridisation.

These aesthetic features characterise Wilson's ambitious interventions, which produce spectacularly arresting public events in derelict architecture and disused public spaces. *Turning the Place Over* epitomized these ideas, embodying and reanimating emblems of redundancy and regenerating public confidence and local pride in the memorialisation of the city's cultural heritage.

3. References to the research

[1] Wilson, R., *Queen and Gantry*, Storey Gallery, Lancaster (2005):

http://www.storeygallery.org.uk/programme_archive.php?item=000014

[2] Wilson, R., *Trailer Trash*, Barbican Art Centre, London (2006):

http://www.richardwilsonsculptor.com/projects/trailer_trash.html

[3] Wilson, R., *Butterfly*, Wapping Projects, London (2003):

<http://www.richardwilsonsculptor.com/projects/butterfly.html>

[4] Wilson, R., *Road Movie*, Galleria Fumagalli, Italy (2007):

http://www.richardwilsonsculptor.com/projects/road_movie.html

[5] Wilson, R., *Turning the Place Over*, Liverpool (2008):

http://www.richardwilsonsculptor.com/projects/turning_the_place_over.html

For inclusion of *Turning the Place Over* in Liverpool Biennial:

<http://liverpoolbiennial.co.uk/programmes/projects/3/turning-the-place-over/>

Simon Morrissey, *Richard Wilson*, Tate Publishing, London 2005 contains preliminary sketches and early designs of *Turning the Place Over*.

4. Details of the impact

Wilson's work has been instrumental in developing innovative forms of artistic expression that both contribute to urban generation and demonstrate how sculptural installations can stimulate debates enhancing public awareness of art's role in enriching the cultural life of deprived urban regions [a].

Established in 1998, the Liverpool Biennial is the UK's largest festival of contemporary visual art 'generating economic benefit, leveraging investment and contributing to national and international external image as well as local quality of life' [b: paragraph 1.2]. In partnership with Liverpool Culture Company (LCC) and showcased at the Fifth Biennial (20th September–30th November 2008), Wilson's commission *Turning the Place Over* was

applauded by the LCC as “an astonishing feat of engineering that stunned audiences on many levels”, and the “jewel in the crown of the public art programme” [d]. The installation, delivered as part of Liverpool’s year as European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2008, demonstrated how public art could drive an inner-city renaissance by attracting more than 10 million people to it.

Turning the Place Over both made an important general contribution to Liverpool’s Year as European Capital of Culture (2008) and specifically reanimated a familiar, disused space within the city; as such, it demonstrated how cycles of urban decline and redundancy can involve artists in programmes of social and cultural regeneration. Its reanimation of the façade of an abandoned office block (a disused Yates’ Wine Bar) in Liverpool stood as a compelling example of the cultural benefits accompanying sculptural installations within derelict urban spaces. The impacts of the piece on public discussion, debate and awareness of that capacity for contemporary art to contribute to urban regeneration arose particularly from the fact that it attracted both specialist and non-specialist individuals to engage with the cultural benefits deriving from it.

The piece itself, moreover, made an important contribution to the regeneration of the area in which it was produced and to the revitalisation of Liverpool’s cultural offering more broadly. In a survey by Liverpool Biennial on the impact of *Turning the Place Over*, 90.2% of respondents believed Wilson’s sculpture was good for Liverpool, reinforcing the positive impact that public art in general can achieve – and that Wilson’s work specifically did achieve - on urban regeneration and community confidence. Feedback provided as part of that survey included the following:

‘It brought people across Merseyside together, put us on the map for innovation, inspired thinking and had a real impact on improving the reputation of Liverpool’.

‘It reconnects city and their citizens. It makes them have an opinion because it might be controversial to them. It’s nice to see a bit of change in the city sometimes’.

‘Economically, it generates footfall and can draw people to areas they may normally avoid. This can also help to break down social barriers and preconceptions’ [h].

Wilson’s work encouraged tourism to and within Liverpool as a means of contributing to community regeneration. Written evidence submitted by the Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art Ltd to Parliament highlighted the fact that the 2008 Biennial generated a spend of £26.6 million - more than ten times the level of public investment in the festival [b: paragraph 4.2]. Of its total 975,000 visits, 9% were made by international visitors who came specifically for the event, and it leveraged around 20% of its production budget from Europe and around the world [b: paragraph 4.4]. The report concluded that ‘Liverpool’s year as ECoC proved that cultural output, commissioned from British arts organisations with real weight behind their punch, will attract visitors and the consequent economic benefit’ [b: paragraph 4.4].

Hailed by the Liverpool Development Agency as ‘the most daring piece of public art ever commissioned in the UK’ [f], *Turning the Place Over* attracted significant media attention, both to the piece itself and the Liverpool Biennial more broadly, standing as a powerful social metaphor for the ways in which public-facing art can transform run-down inner city buildings. The Liverpool Biennial and the LCC extended its presence to 18th January 2011 - three and half years beyond the original time-scale - in response to popular demand for

public tours of the 'iconic attraction' [f]. The *Liverpool Echo* (18 January 2011) applauded its 'phenomenal draw' for both visitors and local people, claiming more than 3.5 million viewers had seen the work first-hand [e]. It also became a 'YouTube star', with over 158,000 views [g], contributing to Liverpool's enhanced on-line media profile [c: p. 45].

Its popularity and publicity ensured that *Turning the Place Over* was one of the Biennial's principle attractions, increasing national and local media coverage of Liverpool's cultural offering; the number of press articles more than doubling in the five years to 2008 [b: paragraph 4.5]. It contributed to the increase in perceived positive stories about Liverpool, which rose by 71% between 2007-2008 [c, pp. 4 and 40-41]. The success of the Liverpool Biennial and of *Turning the Place Over* was influential in encouraging highly positive media coverage of Liverpool 'as a world class city' [c, pp. 4 and 39]. Consequently, 68% of UK businesses judged that Liverpool's role as ECoC had had a positive impact on Liverpool's image [c, pp. 4 and 35-6]. 85% of residents agreed that Liverpool was a better place than before ECoC' [b: paragraph 4.5] believing contemporary art, including *Turning the Place Over*, had enhanced community pride and facilitated social cohesion [c: pp. 4 and 53].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[a] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/merseyside/6220938.stm> for media coverage of *Turning the Place Over* and evidence of its contribution to re-vitalising derelict buildings and stimulating local and media interest in the role of contemporary art in enriching cultural life in a deprived inner city area.

[b] <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmcomeds/writev/464/160.htm> for tourism figures, including number of international visitors to the 2008 Liverpool Biennial, and for data showing residents' perceptions of improvements in Liverpool's image resulting from activities undertaken as part of its year as European Capital of Culture.

[c] http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Papers/Creating_an_Impact_-_web.pdf for information about the economic and tourism benefits to Liverpool of its year as European Capital of Culture and about increase in positive media representations of the city in light of that award.

[d] <http://liverpoolbiennial.co.uk/programmes/projects/3/turning-the-place-over> for impact of *Turning the Place Over* as part of a public art programme attracting tourism and driving an inner city renaissance.

[e] <http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/liverpool-news/in-the-mix/2011/01/18/turning-the-place-over-sculpture-stops-turning-for-good-100252-28003816/> for total number of viewers, evidence of the impact on tourism and community regeneration and of Wilson's contribution to that achievement.

[f] <http://www.artinliverpool.com/?p=14758> and <http://www.sevenstreets.com/blog/turning-the-place-off/> for evidence of the positive impact of contemporary art – including *Turning the Place Over* - on media image, community pride and international reputation of Liverpool.

[g] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBXwA0gcBm4> for evidence of reach and impact of Wilson's work contributing to Liverpool's enhanced on-line media profile.

[h] Copies of feedback provided as part of the Liverpool Biennial survey are available on request.