

## making/do: big idea, small budget, can do

Material conditions are central to any site-specific art work, and working in response to particular sites is a key strand of my practice. Each site has numerous characteristics that might inspire me such as particular communities and places which suggest appropriate materials and processes that I then bring together to make an art work. I often use 'bought in' materials to supplement those to hand. In the past I've made works that use water (*Conductor*, 2000) and trees (*Souvenir of England*, 2007) but in each case these on-site materials were modified or used on a large scale, meaning that I depended on specialised tools and technologies to realise the final artwork.



*Souvenir of England 2007*



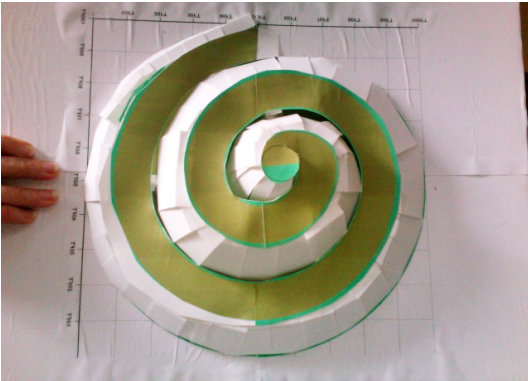
**making / do**  
**Jane Prophet**

For years I dreamed of gardening with tree stumps, but my dreams were dashed by a couple of obstacles: I never had a London garden big enough, or any stumps to work with. Now, living in the predominantly wood-ed State of New Hampshire, with stumps that needed disposing of, I had my chance. I planned a stump fence near to the spiral. Stumpries can be traced back to the 19th-century British Romantic Movement, which rejected the classical forms of the past while exaggerating the glories of nature. One of the first recorded stumpries (with 10-foot-high walls) was made in Staffordshire, at Biddulph Grange, in the mid-1800s. In the US there is a history, evidenced by photographs from the early 1900s, of lines of stumps used as fencing. This convinced me that the form would make sense in a rural NE American landscape.



*Fence made from tree roots and stumps, 1924, P.S. Lovejoy*

At times the best way to learn is by doing. I wanted a more process-based approach to making art (which was how I made *Model Landscapes*, 2007). I wanted to 'make/do' to produce my art work and make changes to it as I went along, rather than planning every detail and then 'executing' that plan, which had been my approach in the past, in part because of the demand for detailed planning by potential funders.



When planning the spiral, I made a 3D model using SketchUp, and when I reached the limit of my ability I switched to paper, cardboard and glue and produced one of my 'Blue Peter' maquettes: rough, quick, a

The fact that so many of us were in the same boat only went so far to ameliorate my sense of failure. It took time before I was ready to give up on the projects I'd been developing.

Social networks kept me in touch with artist friends around the world. During my first New England winter we commiserated with one another as the money for our work stopped, scheduled works were shelved and rejection letters piled up.

It was a frustrating 18 months, as my head filled with unaffordable ideas, I failed to make anything at all. Concurrently, every one of the art pieces that I had spent the previous 3-5 years developing with UK and US partners failed to get funding.

As I got to know the land and develop ideas for artworks to site there, I also came to terms with the fact that there was little money with which to make them. I wanted to 'make do', but after years of having the privilege of production budgets, it was a struggle to discard ideas, and ways of developing them, that depended on materials and processes I could not now afford.

I was fortunate to get funding to make these large pieces, but times have changed. For the last two years my challenge has been to shift my thinking and my art practice away from costly materials and processes. In my current bleak economic climate what can I make? How can I 'make do'?

**The backstory.** The importance of site and location to *all* my work has become clear as my psychogeography has altered. In August 2009 my husband, David, and I relocated from London, UK to rural New London, New Hampshire in the eastern United States. We came with a sketch for the rest of our lives: to buy land and build a studio, a small house and later cabins for visiting artists, writers, musicians and scientists.

For four months we walked various parcels of land, more than a thousand acres, which was a great way for me to begin to familiarise myself with my new environment. In January 2010 we bought a wood lot. Since then we have explored this land, *The Gunnison Lot*, and planned, designed and cut a road through the woods. This has taken up most of our time, budget and headspace and it has given us some priceless experiences.



**Jason Bell**  
Road builder  
Precision excavator

**Ben Feeney**  
Poet logger  
Tree lover  
Tree killer

**Andy Findlater**  
Engineer  
Brother-in-law  
Reality checker

**David Richardson**  
Collaborator  
Tree climber

Thanks to:



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Jane Prophet

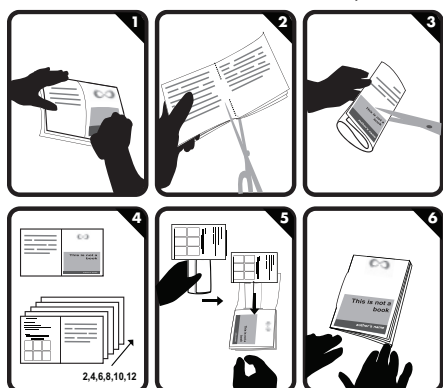
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October 30th 2011: stump lump and early snow



Rocks form the core of the spiral earth work



*The Stump Lump* 2011  
60ft x 20ft  
Tree stumps, boulders and earth  
Newbury, New Hampshire

### Artist's Statement

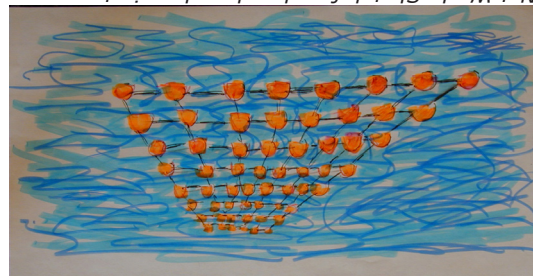
By immersing myself in the wood lot environment to make this work, the strange has become familiar. *Stump Lump* is sited in the 'boney' New Hampshire earth. Its size befits the scale of its location. It's an artificial earthwork to be discovered just off the trail, to be glimpsed from a snowmobile.

Completing the construction phase has been a rite of passage, a process through which I have relocated myself as an artist to north east rural America. It is part homage to Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, equally an experiment in taking the long view.

*Stump Lump* expands my exploration of structure, using the ancient counter clockwise spiral: at once strange and strangely appropriate when encountered in the landscape. It's another experiment with material, switching from silicon and polymer to mud, granite and tree roots.

The general conditions in which I work have also changed radically. After 20 years in London, I felt drawn to a rural life, and while I do not feel like returning to a full-time life in the city, at times I do feel alienated. The area where I live has slow internet speeds (a drag when working collaboratively online)

*Net Work. Sketch for abandoned project.*



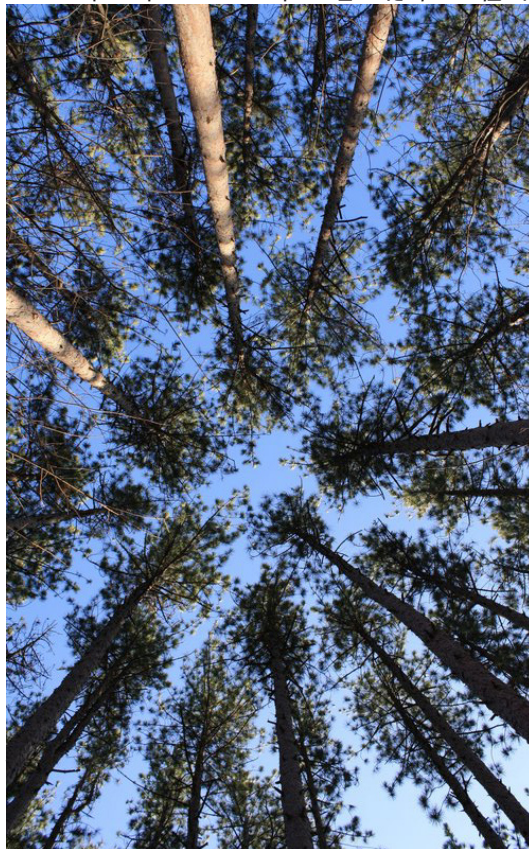
with multiple stakeholders, generate their own momentum and do not 'die' quickly or easily. It took years, or a few cycles of unsuccessful funding rounds, for us all to admit defeat, and for me to recalibrate and scale down my ideas. In retrospect I can see that the writing was my way of 'giving up' those suddenly untenable installations, a way of marking the work that had gone into developing them, before moving on.

The stubborn streak that for two decades had helped me push forward and complete works that other people thought too ambitious, now threatened to derail my whole practice, I had to learn to identify (and dump) unachievable ideas. I needed to change if I was to continue to make art.



**Psychogeography.** In April 2010, when the 4-month winter ended and the snow thawed in New Hampshire, my art 'winter' just deepened. For the following year, between looking for paid work, I spent my days walking and observing, trying to make sense of the New England landscape. While I took so much in, I put no art out.

All I produced were journal papers and chapters for people's books, and that did not satisfy my need to 'make'. Big pieces,



and there is no true 3G mobile phone coverage. I realised that without a good online connection I historically switched to sms but that in the US I did not know enough people to be texting the way I did constantly in London. In 2009 my 'cell' phone went silent - I found it deafening.

Despite 10 years making artworks that were inspired by the structure of (English) trees, I am still sometimes uncomfortable being surrounded by the ones in New England. The tree species, with their unfamiliar branching forms, are strange to me - and in New Hampshire where 80% of the land is forested, trees are a big influence.

My urban and cerebral way of being in the world has been knocked sideways by the physicality of my new environment: bitterly cold winters, the stark glare of snow, hot summers, clouds of insects, rolling mists, extraordinary clarity of light.

Is necessity the mother of invention? When I despaired of ever feeling connected enough to this place to be able to come up with a workable idea - that I could afford to make - the logger moved on to our land.



It has been very muddy all summer. The unusual rains have at times seemed relentless and interfered with my seeding of the area before winter. In spring 2012 I will start the next phase of production, a seeding and planting plan for the 10ft wide walkway and the area surrounding the spiral mound. It will start to soften into the landscape. The roots from the stumps, that form the outer edges of the spiral, will become more stark as the earth weathers off them. There's a lot to do to make it easy to walk up (it is rough underfoot) and to protect it from erosion. But it is a geometric delight that makes you want to run with your arms outstretched.

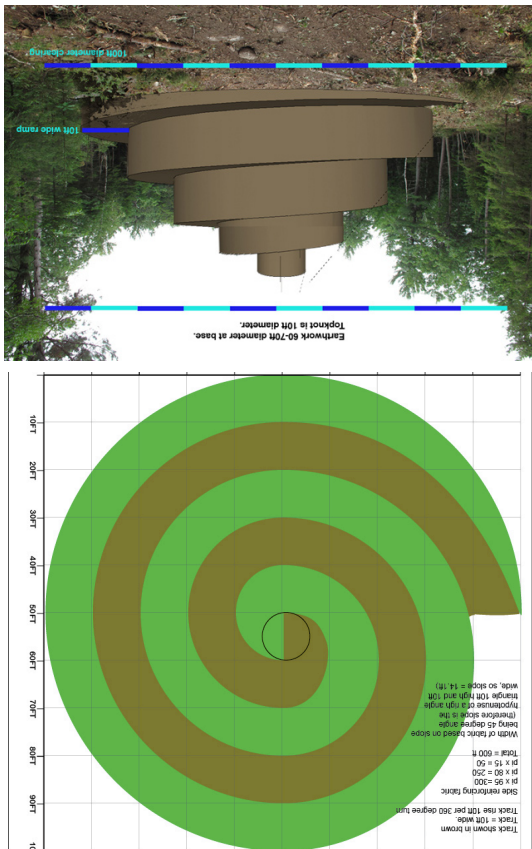


July 2010: a 100ft circular clearing is made



July 2011: stumps and rocks are piled up





As I have learned, to build a road trees are logged and their stumps pulled up. As the road is leveled large granite boulders are removed. Usually stumps and rocks are piled up in the woods, covered in earth, and seeded to make faux banks or mounds that look (sort of) natural.

A decision about where to put the stumps and rocks had to be made so the logger could make a space for them (by cutting down more trees). What kind of bank should we design to absorb the rocks and stumps, or should we use them to fill in a ravine?

Clambering through the woods looking for a potential stump dump I felt more and more resistant to making a naturalistic structure, and the idea for “The Stump Lump” spiral earthwork emerged.



Standing in the road bed during construction

I left it in the back of the car, on hand when- ever I needed it. I tucked it under my coat in the rain and propped against a tree trunk in the sun when walking the site. I was changing, evolving my practice.



3D diagram. I wanted something to show an engineer and the road builder to see if they thought the spiral form was achievable. It was all that was needed to get my idea across and prompt discussion about how to engineer the form. It was a relief that I did not need to spend any time in prettying it up, or making a pristine computer model version, for inclusion in a funding applica- tion.



David on the base layer during construction

We had less stumps and earth than we’d expected, so a design change was needed on-the-fly. The spiral has one turn fewer, and does not climb as high, as it does in the preceding diagrams. In response to this lack of material I altered the design and combined the spiral land art idea with my plan for a “stumpery”.

The result is a precise counter-clockwise spiral with a 10ft path for people to walk up, edged with exposed tree roots. Each stump was picked up with the excavator and shaken to dislodge most of the earth from the root system. Then the stumps were carefully placed with the roots facing out, all around the spiral, as it was built.