

# DIFFUSION

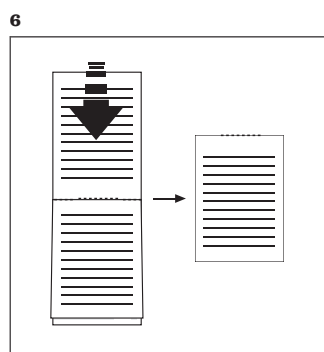
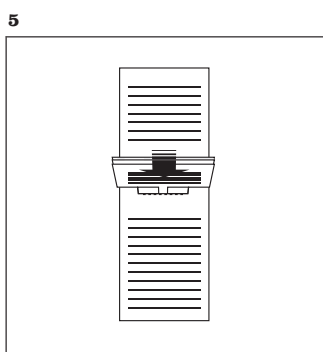
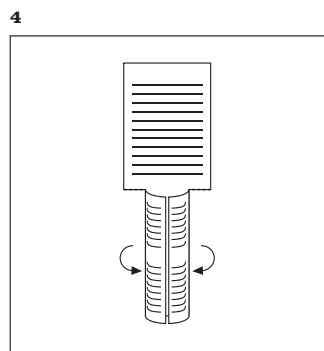
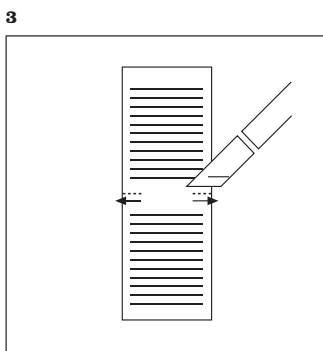
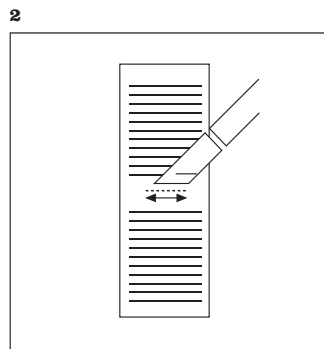
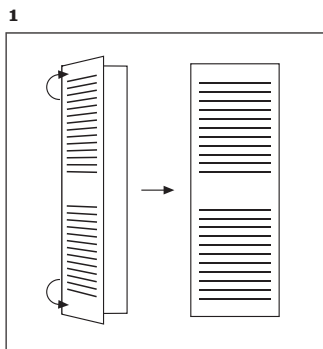
## Construction

- 1** First, fold each A4 sheet in half along the vertical axis.
- 2** Using a craft knife or scalpel, cut a horizontal slot along the centre dotted line of the first A4 sheet. (pages 1/2/13/14)
- 3** Then cut along the dotted lines on all the other sheets. Make sure to cut to the very edges of the paper.
- 4** Stack the folded sheets in ascending order with the even numbers at the top. Curl the bottom half of the second A4 page (pages 3/4/23/24).
- 5** Thread the curled page through the centre slot of the first A4 page. Repeat this process with the third (pages 5/6/21/22), fourth (pages 7/8/19/20), fifth (pages 9/10/17/18), and sixth A4 sheet (pages 11/12/15/16) with the even pages in ascending order.
- 6** When all the pages have been threaded through, check the pagination. Finally, fold the booklets in half along the horizontal axis.

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formal garden and made it a place where people, nature, and traffic could coexist. Smithsonian praised Olmstead for reclaiming land jeopardized by urban growth, and turning it into a thing of beauty. Suzann Boetinger points out that in a section of Smithsonian's handwritten manuscript that Smithsonian deleted,

*"perhaps because of its stridency, where he asserted 'Olmsted combines both art and reclamation in Central Park in a way that is truly in advance of his times. He faced the manifestation of industry and urban blight head on, where other artists would have given up and looked for comfort in an Arcadian utopia, he introduced a complex network of drainage systems and city traffic into his earth work with the help of Vaux.'" <sup>2</sup>*

Three years before publishing this text Smithson rearticulated Central Park in a small pencil on paper drawing measuring 19 x 24 inches, titled *Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island*. The proposal suggested the idea of a floating island inspired by Central Park that would travel around the island of Manhattan pulled by a tug boat. Aside from a note specifying a willow tree, the other plants were left open to interpretation so long as they were native to New York. This inversion of the city would bring a revitalised version of this first earthwork to the city and a doubling back of city space. Interestingly a very similar proposal was developed by the younger artist Gordon Matta-Clark in two drawings in 1971, entitled *Parked Island*

Olmstead eschewed the vision of Central Park as a fixed,

*“park can no longer be seen as a ‘thing-in-itself’, but rather as a process of ongoing relationships existing in a physical region – the park becomes a ‘thing-for-us’ ... Central Park is a ground work of necessity and chance, a range of contrasting viewpoints that are forever fluctuating, yet solidly based in the earth.”*

future. It is a space of potential.

ties purchased by Matta-Clark. Smithsonian's evocation of glacial movement in Olmsted's thinking through topology was a call to engage with the processes of entropic time. Central Park is like an island of Manhattan – a break from the surrounding urban flux where people rest, play, and take time out of the surrounding seas of activity and life. These parks are ones that exist in a moment of continuous present – that is they are constantly evolving which each experience and each development from the moment of the very idea of the park heading right into the

Smithson's text opens with a quote by Frederick Law Olmsted, the architect of Central Park, discussing Buttes-Chaumont Park in Paris. This wonderfully constructed environment was created between 1864 and 1867, opening at the time of the time of the 1867 Universal Exhibition. Located in Belleville in the 19th Arrondissement, it was the visionary project of Baron Haussmann and combined panoramic views of the city with picturesque stalactites, fountains, follies, and an artificial lake all in an unrivalled unnatural nature in a once abandoned rock quarry. The park still maintains these features today and to visit the location is to step back into a past urban pastoral fantasy. Smithson's selected quote from Olmsted's *The Spoils of the*

In 1973 the artist Robert Smithson published a text in ARTFORUM titled *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape* that invites the reader to imagine him or herself standing in Central Park a million years ago, travelling in time to a moment when one would be standing on a vast ice sheet that dragged itself along the bedrock of the earth. Experiences of urban space generally are mediated by the creation of artificial nature – be it the Royal Parks of London or the interior island of Central Park in New York. These breathing spaces set out to provide relief for the city population from the working week; to balance the seemingly ever-expanding urban sprawl. By slowing down time these island-pockets of nature shift experiences with these punctuation points acting as almost-imaginary-spaces within the experienced world.

# Urban Time Travel: Odd-Lots and Floating Islands

**Lisa LeFeuvre**



*Species of Spaces*

URBAN TIME TRAVEL:  
ODD-LOTS AND FLOATING ISLANDS

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ABOUT SPECIES OF SPACES

This publication is one of a series of essays commissioned by Proboscis for the series *Species of Spaces* – inspired by and in homage to George Perec's eponymous book. The series contemplates how we occupy space in the contemporary world of the twenty-first century – the virtual and physical, emotional and social – what Perec called the 'infra-ordinary'. *Species of Spaces* questions the trajectory of contemporary urban existence, intervening in current debates on how the virtual and the physical relate to each other, and how technological advances affect cultural and social structures. DIFFUSION eBooks are designed to be freely available to download and print out. Under no circumstances should any version of this publication, whether print or electronic, be sold by any third party without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

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framework, presenting them as objects to be admired and understood. The intention was to create an impression of a controlled and ordered move into the future. The success of the Crystal Palace Exhibition encouraged other nations to host their own fairs and to compete internationally over their technological achievements. The distinctiveness of the glass Crystal Palace building led to architectural features becoming the centrepiece of the various World Fairs, and as the series progressed the architectural feature became a symbol for each event. New York hosted its World's Fair on the heels of the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1853, with the site dominated by a version of the Crystal Palace. This fair also introduced its own architectural landmark the Letting Observatory, which stood at 350 feet. Using the first Otis lift one could ascend the tower to survey the panorama of Manhattan and the surrounding city.

A few years later, in 1876, the Philadelphia Centennial celebrations again embraced new technology with the 300-foot Centennial Tower providing a point of urban surveillance and a symbol of the event, and 1889 the fourth Paris World Exhibition saw the construction of the Eiffel Tower completed. The use of an observation tower became a characteristic of these fairs and they provided a point of surveillance from which the surrounding city could be viewed. The urban expansion was in itself a spectacle of modernism and technological achievement. This modernist expansion of the turn of the last century

Park describes how

*“the landscape architect Andre formerly in charge of the suburban plantations of Paris was walking with me through the Buttes-Chaumont Park, of which he was the designer, when I said of a certain passage of it ‘That, is to my mind the best piece of artistic planning of its age, I have ever seen.’ He smiled and said, ‘Shall I confess that it is the result of neglect’.”*

To Smithson's mind his embracing of neglect was inspirational to Olmstead, a man who he describes as the making the first earthwork in the form of Central Park. Working with Calvert Vaux, Olmstead submitted his plans to the Central Park design competition in 1857, with a scheme named the Greensward Plan that set out to provide a green haven in the centre of the metropolis, inspired by England's 18th Century notions of landscape.

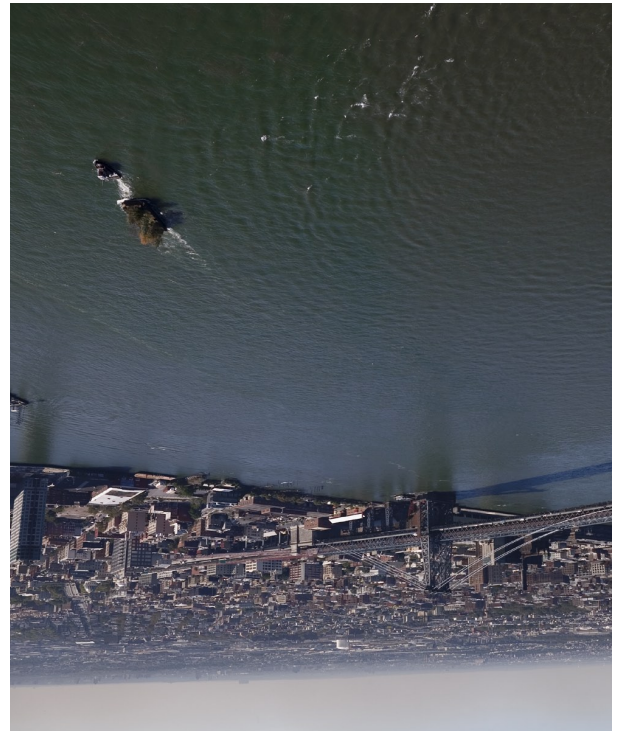
Both Buttes-Chaumont Park and Central Park were conceived in the era of the World Fairs, national events celebrating and hastening in the future. They were initiated the 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of all Nations housed in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London, lauding the birth of the industrial revolution, emphasising how new technologies would bring forth progress and improve the lives of all people. Meticulous ordering was an essential part of the exhibition, as it allowed the public to view the usually unseen tools of production in a comprehensible





could be seen as being characterised by the city, which represented progress and a faith in the future. Providing the public with this opportunity to survey the city in an instant relates to the ordering system of the Crystal Palace Exposition: both offered in a single view rapid technological changes framed in a way that made the changes seem unthreatening and understandable.

From the high vantage point the visual spectacle of the city itself would gradually become recognisable as the viewer located familiar landmarks in the city. From these points of recognition the whole space could then be mapped by assessing the landmarks' relation to the urban sprawl as a whole. This panoramic vision can be described as providing a mastery of the rapidly changing urban space that was available to anyone who ascended. In this way the changes happening within the city seemed a comprehensible progression, and reconcilable to vision, rather than an uncontrolled explosion of development. The later New York World's Fair of 1939 continued the tradition of a concern with the future, but instead of providing a survey of already achieved advancements one could enter a building and see a panoramic vision of the city. At the fair, GENERAL MOTORS' Futurama building contained a model of urban America set in the 1960s where moving chairs gave visitors an aerial view of the future city, with visitors being presented with badges proclaiming 'I Have Seen the Future'. These events aimed to make sense of the quickening world, just as Central Park set out to slow down time



for its occupants – it presented a potential rearticulation of a space that was difficult to comprehend through engaging with temporal forces. New York's 1964 World's Fair ended the glory of the series, with the remnants of the event still present at Flushing Meadows, Queens, where the Unisphere presides over leisure pursuits of the local residents – an obsolete globe incongruous in this contemporary landscape. Beside the Unisphere is the Queens Museum where one of the main features can still be seen – a scale model panorama of New York, which is updated from time to time. This model sought to make sense of the overwhelming urban expansion when a glance from a high point would not be sufficient to make sense of expansion. In its description of the five boroughs of New York the panorama seems, like the Unisphere, a paradoxical travel back to a futuristic vision of a past present.

2005 saw two key exhibitions in New York that drew on the histories of Central Park and the World Fair through the practices of two artists working in the early 1970s. Both projects remapped senses of urban space through an engagement with processes of time, and their insertion into contemporary artistic production doubled this nonlinear expansion of space. the Queens Museum hosted an exhibition, organised by CABINET MAGAZINE, titled *Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark's Fake Estates*. In 1973 Matta-Clark bought a total of fifteen small parcels of land in Queens and Staten Island in public auction for \$25 apiece (these slivers having reverted to the City of



New York due to non-payment of taxes) and these became the work *Reality Properties: Fake Estates*. Matta-Clark was intrigued by their description as ‘inaccessible’ properties at the city auctions. These were minute, irregularly shaped plots between buildings referred to as ‘curb property’ or ‘gutter-space’: some are landlocked left overs of planners’ drawings, other potential driveway additions, but all have little actual use. Matta-Clark’s *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* took the form of a series of portions of land (that would be owned on purchasing the work itself), deeds, photographs of the site, and in some cases inventories of weeds growing on site. Matta-Clark described them as leftovers from architects’ drawings, where they were spaces that conflicted with the architectural designs on the area.

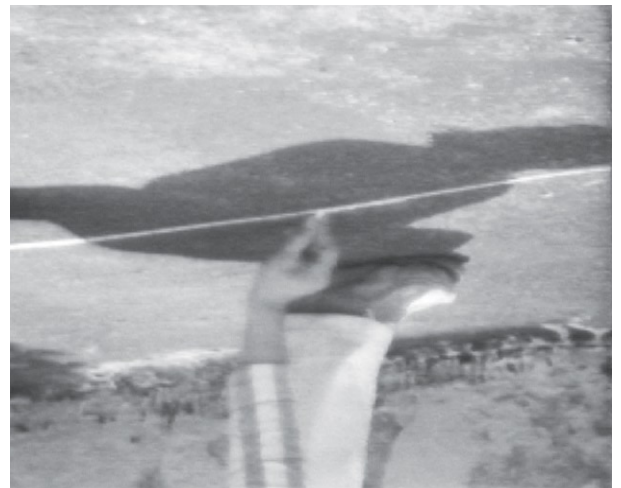
*Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark’s Fake Estates* presented the works alongside the Queens Museum’s panorama, and amongst the room-sized overview of New York markers were placed, indicating the locations of these plots of land. By purchasing these left over spaces Matta-Clark rearticulated a sense of place, which became extended through time in this re-presentation at the Queens Museum. This sense of non linear time too is central to Smithson’s essay on Olmsted. At the time of writing, Smithson was viewing the park in a state of decline from its original intentions as the floundering city struggled with the upkeep of this patch of rectangular land in the middle of city – a situation that led to the auctions of the gutter proper-

3 An Interview with Robert Smithson (1973), Moira Roth, transcribed by Nancy Sawelson-Gorse. In: Robert Smithson, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Edited by Jane Hyun, 2004.

2 Smithson: op.cit.

1 Robert Smithson: Frederick Law Olmsted and the Di-  
lectical Landscape. Artforum, February 1973. Reprinted  
in: Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings. Edited by Jack  
Flam, 1996.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY





gies, ideas, politics, artistic movements, and nostalgia for the past. Smithson stated:

*“I’m interested in something substantial enough that’s permeate – perhaps permeate is a better word that permanent – in other words that can be permeated with change and different conditions.”<sup>3</sup>*

Throughout his practice Smithson was interested in the closed structure of the gallery into which a second closed structure of the Non-site could be inserted. The Non-site points to dispersed ‘elsewheres’. In the floating island the specific location of Central Park becomes moved elsewhere, however the question remains – did the island need to be made? It points to a drawing and an idea effectively shifting ‘elsewheres’ across time and space. To realise the drawing is not to create a Smithson work – the piece is extended through its contingency on current technology.

structure represented the sense of open land. one point it was invaded by a group of artists) the mobile the city, curiously ‘cute’. Off limits to visitors (although at Central Park. running around the island, it moved around trees, a few bushes, and some granite rocks borrowed from September 2005 the floating island was planted with ten of land, pulled by a tugboat the Rachel Marie, for a week in Smithson’s project. Taking the form of a 30 by 90 foot plot shifted space and time and conception into a realisation of Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Fake Estates* in Queens, the project and serendipitously concurrent with *Odd Lots: Revisiting Smithson’s major retrospective at the Whitney Museum, be moored wherever desired. In 2005, to coincide with cut pastoral sections into the city, and potentially could linked by bridges. These mobile landscapes proposed to ing down the Hudson River, each planted with trees and artists’ unrealised works consist of a chain of barges moving down the Hudson and Islands Parked on the Hudson. Both*

