

Exploring Dark Places

Abstract

Over the last 18 months, Office of Experiments, led by artists Neal White and Steve Rowell, have engaged in the Overt Research Project gathering together original documentation of sites of experimentation, intelligence and knowledge not normally accessible to the public. This research brings together a range of issues concerning the UK and its techno-scientific and military complex, and the role of the artist in an experimental society. The outputs of this work have been aggregated into a database, and the first version of this - 'A Fieldguide to Dark Places - South Edition' was part of the larger exhibition that White co-curated at John Hansard Gallery in 2009-10. In addition to discussing the act of documenting sensitive sites such as Corsham Computer Centre, ISEEE and Porton Down, Neal White will also introduce the first archive to be obtained by the Office of Experiments as a part of this project. Donated by the campaigner and activist Mike Kenner, it contains catalogued material of over 30 years of personal research and requests for information to Porton Down, the Cabinet Office and others implicated in experiments involving the spraying of the public with alleged toxic materials. Kenner's work has been so sustained over such a long period, that his knowledge has in turn been co-opted by Porton Down administration, who forward awkward enquiries on to him directly. This tactic turns Kenner into part of the machine that he resists. The talk will reflect on the issues raised by the work of artists and activists operating as independent researchers in a broader context of examining experimental systems, and in a context of socially-engaged arts practices.

Full Paper

"Research systems are tinkered arrangements that are not set up for the purpose of repetitive operation but for the continuous re-emergence of unexpected events. Experimentation, as a machine for making the future, has to engender unexpected events."

Hans-Jorg Rheinberger (Epistemic Things)

In order to set the context for the work the Overt Research Project that surrounds the exploration of Dark Places, it would be helpful to the reader to understand the critical and cultural setting of the practice of the author and that of Office of Experiments.

Formed in 2004-5 by the author of this paper, artist and academic Neal White, the Office of Experiments is an independent research practice and collaborative structure that tests experimental forms of critical and cultural production, as art. As a structure we are a group of collaborators who are interested in the experiment as a form that is conceptual, visual, temporal and spatial and further, understanding how this relates to art as a form of cultural production, potentially transforming it not only in terms of one singular practice, but challenging the representation of art as knowledge defined across disciplines.

The basis of this approach relates to a number of practices, theories, experiences and a critical positioning that led to the groups' formation. For many years, the author has been working in collaboration with others inside institutions ranging from the scientific research space - such as the National Institute of Medical Research (NIMR - 2004-5) to the cultural archives of a museological collection - such as the Henry Moore Foundation (2004-5). These experiences mainly dealt with a series of collaborations with other artists and academics, and led to outputs including; the artist book 'Otts Sneeze' (Bookworks - 2001) that was produced in collaboration with author Lawrence Norfolk and that followed on from a residency at the Human Genome Mapping Project (1998), or the development of the 'Space on Earth Station' (2004-5), made in collaboration with Danish experimental architects N55 (the first Office of Experiments project), or Truth Serum with Dr Nicolas Langitz of the Max-Planck Institute, Berlin (2008-9).

Through such work, the practice-driven research of art in a conceptual sense met with the ethical and administrative practices of the institution and even the rationale for funding artists within these spaces, the public understanding of science. However, when inside a cultural institution, it is the engagement by the artist with the structures and hierarchies of institutional practice that are critical to the context of the Overt Research Project. In some early examples, I will expand some of the critical ideas.

The Third Campaign¹, a project that was undertaken at the Henry Moore Foundation draws on what Hal Foster describes as *'the Archival Impulse'*², and constructs a new site of action from a site of excavation, found in working within the archaeology of the artist archive itself. Operating beyond any functional or analytical relationship to the institution, the work instead draws on passion and intuition. The project is a process driven work, with outputs ranging across film, installation, drawings, correspondence, and as an intervention in which the artist within the archive orchestrates a campaign for the re-instatement of a series of works by Jacob Epstein, destroyed in 1937, and is the continuation of Epstein's personal attempt to save his work in what he himself called the 'thirty year war'³. Based within Epstein's archive, this interventional strategy confronts the limits of the field of Art History in a practical sense, as it addresses the relationship of archive to events through the role of heritage, archaeology and preservation within the museum space. In its final turn, the works of the third campaign are secreted within the Henry Moore Collection and inside the Epstein Archive itself.

¹ Project commissioned by Dr Penelope Curtis for the Henry Moore Foundation 2004-5

² *Archival Impulse*. HAL FOSTER. OCTOBER 110, Fall 2004,

³ Drawings from this project can be seen in the catalogue of the Exhibition 'Modern British Sculpture' currently at the Royal Academy.

In a correlated work, 'The Void' (developed with academics and researchers at National Institute for Medical Research through a project called 'Lets Experiment with Ourselves'⁴) an artwork tests the conventions of experimentation as described by the two disciplinary spheres of art and science. In this project the outputs and process present a challenge to the moral and ethical boundaries in which the artist can operate, by pushing the context for a 'clinic trial' so that it might instead become a 'cultural-trial'. The basis of this work, a fragment of the work of Yves Kleins 1958 work 'Le Vide'⁵ in which visitors to his exhibition might imbibe a drink that later turned their pee International Klein Blue ® is taken through the same process as the clinical trial, ultimately being rejected by an ethics committee before being re-played in an art context. Constructed in a manner to question the ethical dimensions of art operating in the world of science, the project invites the viewer to take risk the institution cannot bare. The work deliberately and carefully places an experiment inside the body, not in the form of the artist performing a spectacle, but in the viewer performing a private and concealed experiment. Shifting the work's site could be considered a turn that removes the legal and ethical limits of the institution, but given the nature of contemporary experimentation techniques in clinic trials, it is also asking where we locate the experimental site itself. Within the corporeal limits are their legal and ethical limits of research? In consensual participation the institution can be considered in grey territory, perhaps one further denial of one of its 'non-standard' methods, that it seeks to conceal, namely the altruistic act of 'self-experimentation'.

In the project Truth Serum (2008-9), a work commissioned after the formation of Office of Experiments, this theme is further explored. In the essay "The Psychopharmacology of Truthfulness", by Office of Experiments collaborator Dr Nicolas Langlitz, standard research methods are used to explore the history and facts that surround the use of truth serum drugs by the FBI and CIA. As a project that is an examination of the psychology of contemporary interrogation techniques, the work probes the public's imagination of a dark world, within a parallel covert culture. Whilst the first two aims are in a sense practical and aim to draw the public's attention to the role of institutions in spaces of global conflict, the other aim is to draw attention to the case of an artist who has been prosecuted as terrorists in the USA, Steve Kurtz of the Critical Art Ensemble⁶. Truth Serum as a work involved 'volunteers' arriving at a gallery to be driven away and interrogated in an off-site space whose location was not known to them. Some volunteers were given Scopolamine, the FBI and CIA truth serum drug of choice. They were then processed through a range of different spaces before being interrogated by software based on a neurological model. The techniques appeared as psychological warfare, entering into spaces of fear, using scientific methods. No data was produced, the participants released bemused onto the street with no directions home. The work was portrayed in publicity as work that examines 'the creep of the security state into the nervous system of the public'. In this sense it could be that in this work, Office of Experiments was exploring a dark place.

There is one last formative relationship that remains critical to the shaping of the Overt Research Project for this artist. In 2004, the author met with the British conceptual artist, John Latham. The resulting conversation that lasted to the end of Latham's life in 2006 was profound and highly influential on the practice. Latham identified that in part due to the book project 'Ott's Sneeze', and critical work inside scientific space, that the author's understanding of his theory of Flat Time was worth developing (a theory the author was not very familiar with at the time). Whilst the ideas associated with the theory are cited as incredibly complex and in many senses over-personalised within John's own personal narrative (they are certainly too involved to illuminate in full through this text alone), the critical and relevant elements were in the fundamental approach to art, science and its language. Flat Time Theory opposed the fundamental construction of science through linearity of language and object-driven research. Beyond the meta-narrative that these ideas held⁷, the key ideas related to the event-based approach we deny of the world. In the making of artworks, events are not only an intuitive aspect of the artist repertoire, but such that if truly of value, the event-based work must critically be produced beyond the studio, and within the context

⁴ Funded by The Wellcome Trust Experiment Fund

⁵ Work shown at The Sensory Clinic at International3, Manchester. 9-24.5.05, Colour After Klein at Barbican Gallery, London. 1.7.05, Introspective Self-Rapports: Shaping Ethical and Aesthetic Concepts 1850-2006 at The Max Planck Institute, Berlin. 5.5.2006, Artists and Alchemist at Sherborne House, Dorset. 20.5 -18.6.06

⁶ see caedefensefund.org

⁷ John Latham, had a long and deep engagement with Professor Isaacs - Chair in Theoretical Physics at Imperial College London

of society itself. Latham discussed the positioning of the widely acclaimed Artist Placement Group of which he was co-founder (1966-89), and the role of these concepts with the artist acting as an Incidental Person - a socially engaged practitioner. The concepts and ideas of the incidental person replacing the artist led to the destruction of APG ultimately, but also pointed to the expansion of the practice beyond the confines of one studio, one laboratory and one space. Soon after, the formation of The Office of Experiments occurred during the project 'Space on Earth Station', developed with social architects N55. Together over two years we built a platform for open social research, and sought an alternative to conducting space exploration within an urban social setting, it was the start.

Relations between institutions of power, the public imagination and the intuitive logics of marginal operations.

Initiating the Overt Research Project

Returning from the Berlin Biennale in 2006 where the extraordinary work of Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel that drew on the archives of industrial and scientific institutions in the US had been shown⁸, Office of Experiments started to explore the landscape of scientific spaces in the UK. Together with the Nicola Triscott of the Arts Catalyst we attended an ESRC funded seminar series with the theme 'Locating Technoscience'. After attending the event called 'Spaces of Secrecy and Transparency' we realised that our plan to research into what we had referred to as 'Dark Places'⁹, could be viable as a framework for exploring a range of sites and spaces in the UK.

Office of Experiments was simultaneously conducting a pre-arranged period of research at the Centre for Land Use Interpretation [CLUI] in Wendover, Utah, USA (2008-2010) - an extension of the project with N55 and funded by The Henry Moore Foundation. It was clear that as well as providing an incredible space to work in, the methods and approach of Centre for Land Use Interpretation were worth closer scrutiny. During this period, we started to collaborate with program manager of CLUI, Steve Rowell, and in 2008, Steve joined the Office of Experiments. As a key member of CLUI, Steve worked on many of their most ambitious projects, and specifically of relevance here is his role with the Land Use Database¹⁰ project, in which sites across the USA are photographed and catalogued.

On the return from Utah, in 2008, Steve started working with Office of Experiments and some of the academics involved in the seminar series mentioned, including Dr Gail Davis at UCL. Office of Experiments became officially 'artists in residence' within the geography department to develop our research. With staff at UCL we began to examine the UK landscape to look at what kinds of extraordinary sites of recent and contemporary experimentation, knowledge gathering and intelligence operated within the techno-scientific and military-industrial complex here. Specifically, we were interested in those sites that were not normally accessible to the public, either in terms of knowledge of their existence as specialist spaces or in terms of general access. We wanted to know what was out there, and what was being done, not in isolated one-off artist projects embedded within the institution itself as had previously been the case, but across the whole spectrum, and autonomously, through independent eyes, set in a landscape we suspected we did not know as well as we should. However, this was not an academic exercise in listing sites and linking to official information, we were also interested exploring the public's imagination of these

⁸ In 1977 photographers Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel sifted through thousands of photographs in the files of the Bechtel Corporation, the Beverly Hills Police Department, the Jet Propulsion Laboratories, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Stanford Research Institute and a hundred other corporations, American government agencies, and educational, medical and technical institutions. They were looking for photographs that were made and used as transparent documents and purely objective instruments--as evidence, in short. Selecting 50 of the best, they printed these images with the care you would expect to find in a high-quality art photography book, publishing them in a simple, limited-edition volume titled Evidence. The concept for the book was clear: select photographs intended to be used as objective evidence and show that it is never that simple. Source : <http://www.schaden.com/book/SuellarEvi03237.html>

⁹ 'Dark Places' was a theme under which the Arts Catalyst and Helen Sloan of SCAN had funded work for artists inside scientific institutions that were less well known. White was invited to submit before becoming involved in both the shaping and development of the Overt Research Project.

¹⁰ clui.ludb.org

places, contrasting the official information with the myths, conspiracies and stories that surround these spaces.

Working together in a form of artistic, practice-driven research, the collaboration consisted of knowledge transfer in terms of methods and approaches, and a process that led to the defining of Overt Research Project. Whilst our initial aim above seemed straightforward, to utilise the existing technologies developed in such experimental spaces - such as Geospatial technologies, alongside standard observation and experimental techniques including oral history and conspiracy theory research, what we had not quite expected was the deep inter-relationship formed between the academe and the military, the industrial research base and the military. The segmented sectors we were thinking about were actually all working together, and working in close proximity to communities, had developed a whole range of strategies for concealment. Initially, whilst we knew that space was one of the issues, we were not quite certain of the role this played in terms of how sites were protected on this relatively densely populated island. In the US, Trevor Paglen extraordinary experimental geography work had unearthed what he describes 'spaces of sacrifice' as those in which an area of land is sacrificed to scientific, military or government research. This approach to the use of land and space is echoed in the project of CLUI, but in a stark difference to the UK. The use of space is fundamentally based around one of the USA's most significant and defining elements - scale. In terms of the land mass and scale of projects, the UK simply cannot compare itself. Here we discovered, we are more inclined to create public secrets, that is to conceal in plain sight.

Our first phase of research was networked, utilising both accessible online materials, and igniting our significant links with those who knew of and operated within academia, as artists or in scientific sites likely to be of interest. With such a project underway, and considering the fate of Steve Kurtz, charged in the USA for terrorism, we knew that we needed to address security concerns, not only publicly but critically as a part of the intuitive logic of our operation. We did not wish to be misunderstood or wilfully misconceived of operating in a covert manner, our intention was to be objective, and we held no interest in revealing activity or operations likely to highlight security functions, even if we did intend to explore sites that in themselves might have such activities centred there. We wished instead to objectively scrutinise the realities of public engagement and openness as essential elements of the agenda of a new consciousness, to examine how sites operates, and to compare this with the public's imagination of such spaces. Drawing on our position in relation to transparency, freedom of information and openness as a cultural and technical shift, we agreed we would not be operating as a clandestine or covert operation. We would in fact counter this logic by operating in an overt way - the Overt Research Project commenced.

With Steve now based in Berlin and travelling to the UK we undertook a serious mapping exercise of as many UK places that we knew we could visit and document. Knowing that our project was going to act as a spine for the show 'Dark Places' at John Hansard Gallery in Southampton, we then focussed our activity around the South. We pinpointed sites that aroused our interest and commenced fieldwork. Before approaching sites, we prepare ourselves in a number of ways. We make a detailed analysis of environment, its geomorphology as landscape, key roads and circuits, entry points and any public notices made available online. We time our visits to not coincide with changes in shift or clocking in/off periods - so as not to expose any staff or ourselves to unnecessary attention. We take note of local bye-laws, of levels of security, we refer to the latest legal documents about our rights as photographers, about trespass, private and public land. In some cases this information was not easily to hand, particularly around no-urban sites, and so we began to look elsewhere.

With Steve working on gaining access to some specific sites as part of his project Ultimate High Ground - exploring US Space and Space Warfare by the US for a project he was developing for CLUI, there was time to focus in more depth on sites that we needed more information on. And some of these spaces you certainly could describe as sitting in the shadows if not in near darkness. They drew our attention because they did not feel transparent, the websites were difficult to understand, information was contradictory, they unwittingly had produced a lot of media materials - from news stories to online conspiracies. With Steve now looking at producing a specific piece around the site US owned site Echelon, I focussed other resources on investigating Porton Down.

Tales from the ARC

Porton Down, or Dstl Porton Down as it is now known (Defence Science and Technology Laboratory), is an agency of the Ministry of Defence. Formerly part of Defence Evaluation and Research Agency [DERA] it is one part of the split that also saw QinetiQ, a private company, establish itself on large parts of defence research estate and infrastructure and whose sites we come over time and time again. However, Porton Down is not a QinetiQ site, it is physically large, over 7000 acres, and operates in near plain sight near to Salisbury, if you call a remote site with little or no sight lines plain sight. Porton Down has a long historic record from World War 2, and lives large in the public imagination. It is in fact well known for its secretive work, that it is arguably why it occupies a special place in terms of the covert world and the overt world. Brian Balmer, who is based at UCL and has conducted significant research around the area of secrecy and biochemical warfare points out: "*Secrecy... is wildy productive; it creates not only hierarchies of power and repression, but also unpredictable social effects, including new kinds of desire, fantasy, paranoia and - above all - gossip.*"¹¹

Undertaking research around Porton Down was therefore sensitive, and in thinking how to best approach the site, we first looked at the MOD website which contains links to a curious document on remote sensing, or a form for military personnel compensation. We found further information on Ploughshare Innovations, a private company occupying the site, and we then followed a string of emails and posts purporting to reveal the truth behind Porton Down, which eventually led Office of Experiments to Mike Kenner. Mike's online identity had been popping up on sites and searches, and some of the material he was making available was clearly well sourced and significant. We tracked Mike down and two of us visited him at his home. Mike was at first hesitant, as he spoke of a significant amount of attention being paid on him by Special Branch, but after meeting, he was reassured and even delighted to find someone was genuinely interested in his work.

Mike Kenner's work is extraordinary. In all he has records that testify to over thirty years of FOI (Freedom of Information) requests and highly detailed research into the activities at Porton Down, as well as into other sensitive research establishments. The documentation collated by Mike contains photographs, de-classified restricted secret and top-secret documents, cabinet office and official correspondence, experimental data, images, diagrams, analysis, video, photographs, newspaper cuttings etc. Many of these highlight experiments that had a significant impact in the region of Weymouth in the UK, with Mike highlighting experiments being conducted on the public using live pathogens, largely around Lyme Bay. Far from being historic research alone, Mike remains keen to point to the fact that some of these experiments could well be ongoing scientific trials, continuing to this day, with the authorities refusing to deny this is the case.

Mike Kenner has shined a light into a dark place, and the result is a long shadow being cast back upon him. Mike Kenner is undoubtedly a conscientious and diligent researcher, his work being motivated by an impulse to uncover what he considers breaches of public trust, and so he has always been careful to follow the letter of the law. His persistence and attention to detail have of course not gone unnoticed. As Mike Kenner has unwittingly become an official historian of Porton Down's activities, and his role has been recognised. So, if you find yourself making an awkward historical enquiry of Porton Down, or ask questions around experiments he has unearthed or that have been publicised in the media, you will find yourself forwarded to Mike Kenner, without his prior consent. In this sense, Mike Kenner feels acknowledged yet uncomfortable about how his work has been drawn into the machine, how he has become part of the system that he has sought to uncover. The question remains, does this legitimate his work in terms of the institution, thereby making it appear more authoritative and therefore less critical?

In considering what to do with this work, and how it might relate to the site, the Office of Experiments was struck by the differences between the closed and open, overt and covert modes of operation. We decided to trust Mike and the work he had undertaken and therefore there was only one logical thing to do, to make as much of Mike's archive available to the public in order to

¹¹ Balmer citing Masco - How does Secrecy work? Disclosing secrets in the history of the UK Biological Warfare Programme.

allow them direct and unfettered access. In the months following our meeting, Office of Experiments catalogued thousands and thousands of documents that Mike had digitised. We sorted through them, identified some of the key materials, duplicated them, printed them out and got permissions. The material we have shown to date from the Mike Kenner Archive highlights specific experiments that were conducted at Porton Down on military personnel, as well as important pathogen experiments in and around Lyme Bay, Weymouth. Maps indicating the spread and distribution of spray experiments can be accessed alongside documents evaluating risks to public safety of these experiments. Formerly classified documents alongside news and media stories are testament to the interpretation within the materials themselves.

Whilst Mike Kenner is the first and only contributor to the ARC to date, it struck us that across the country, nationally and internationally, valuable collections and archives of materials gathered by highly subjective, autonomous and amateur researchers were in danger of disappearing. We wondered whether our standard institutions would recognise this subjective material, would they collate and collect it for future generations. If not, why not do this ourselves? The Autonomous Researcher Collection is therefore an initiative that we hope will grow.

The installation of Mike Kenners archive in the exhibition of Dark Places is called 'Tales from the ARC' (the Autonomous Researcher Collection) corresponds to the layout of one of the facilities inside Porton Down in area. Alongside this we also showed the first iteration of material collated for the Overt Research Project database, "Dark Places: A Fieldguide to the South". Whilst the work, consisting almost entirely of a database of photographic documentation compiled by Office of Experiments, opened up information as to the location of spaces, and provided ID passes and information on a persons individual rights, we knew there was also a need to address the question of physical space too, so that others might be involved in the documentation and experimental fieldwork, to start compiling and participating on their own terms. To this end, we organised a critical excursion with Arts Catalyst in and around some of the spaces that we had visited, the 'Secrecy and Technology Bus Tour - The Cold War Legacy in the South'. The excursion included visits to Porton Down, Chilbolton Observatory, RAF Boscombe Down, International School of Security and Explosives Education at the Department of Homeland Security and finally Blandford Camp - home of the Royal Signals Museum, as well as the Land Reference Centre. Intermixed in this tour, between sites, we showed video materials on our bus taken from the Mike Kenner archive, including films and an interview. We showed films on Crop Circles and information films on Geospatial Intelligence software that were stranger than fiction, and conspiracy films that looked like science programmes.

In December 2010, we publicly launched 'Dark Places' as a stand alone website (accessible from Office of Experiments). The database is accessible to anyone, and anyone who has been to an event, talk or excursion can participate by adding their own materials. We are seeking to open the process of overt research to others whilst maintaining a link between the physical and the network experience. The launch we hope will drive future Overt Researchers on the next stage of our project, based in London and called Experimental Ruins. However, the question we face as an experimental organisation concerned with more than information alone is similar to the dilemma in which Mike Kenner found himself. Are we now operating in the mode of the thing that we are trying to reveal and question - as we create hierarchies of power through accessibility, or can this project remain critical, autonomous and experimental?

Conclusion

It is from our work around the scrutiny of experimentation and the spaces it creates itself that Office of Experiments has developed a new modality. In this sense we have moved from a model in which a singular practice is formed in collaboration with others, to one that is repositioned in relation to a more distributed form of enquiry - an open model? In this sense, and in terms of the overt research project, we are reflecting the operation of the post-modern experiment in relation to its modern form described by Hans Jorg Rheinberger in his paper on the shape of experiment¹²:

"The former, it is argued, relied on clear-cut separations between laboratory and society, facts and values, nature and culture. In contrast, the latter manifests itself as a socio-technological experiment (Latour) with no boundaries, carried out in real time and in the scale of 1:1, thus retrospectively changing our perspective on the seemingly modern form of experiment."

And so our enquiry consists of a range of considered experimental approaches to a field that is by and large, experimental. Whether we can also occupy a critical space is worth further consideration.

In 1989, the Artist Placement Group successor O+I (Organisation + Imagination¹³) led by APG founder John Latham and Barbara Steveni, put forward a template description of how an artist placement should be negotiated within a company department or institution in society, a position which declared that 'Context is Half the Work'. Fundamentally different and indeed historically argued by APG as precedent and superior of the artist residency, the artist placement differentiates itself in the role between institution and artist / incidental person, in which power-relations, transparency and even funding are addressed. The placement itself is conceived around the fact that no pre-conditions should exist for the artist that are not already in place, no negotiation of the output be pre-conceived by the organisation acting as host, and that the artist is paid according to the values of the organisation - if a private company - at the level of the highest paid individual. Unfortunately, this critically powerful idea, initially funded by the Arts Council of England before being cut as social engineering, was then adopted as residencies. This follows a pattern that is relevant to other socially engaged practices, where the work you do will unwittingly provides the template for the institution and its agenda you seek to change.

In Gerald Raunig and Maria Lind reflections on the field of contemporary art and 'Institutional Critique' - an area of artist practice that relates to a dichotomy between artist and institution, they argue we have recently seen a period in a European context in which the formation of 'institution practice's' or 'pseudo institutions', such as the Copenhagen Free University is widespread. Maria Lind refers to this movement as the fourth wave of insitutional critique¹⁴, in which artists begin to

12 Preprint 318, Conference: The Shape of Experiment, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science. Berlin, 2 – 5 June 2005

13 Neal White was a Director of O+I following Lathams personal insistence and then warm acceptance by the rest of the board (2006-9).

¹⁴ Four Waves of Institutional Critique

First wave Artist such as Michael Asher and Hans Haacke

Acted on the assumption of a crisis – institutions that pinion art and conceal diverse exploitative mechanisms regarding structure and methods, institution as building and apparatus. Aim – to discover problems at a distance, an us and them *perspective*.

Second wave– Artist such as Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser

Moved into institutions in order to work concretely with collections, using methods such as guided tours to reveal institutional mechanisms as racist and sexist.

Third wave– Artist such as Rirkit Tirivanija and Bikvanderpol

Remain within institutions, but play with personal and poetic to produce constructive proposals or models for institutional dilemmas.

Fourth wave– Artist such as Marion Von Osten, Copenhagen Free University

Starting 'Pseudo Institutions' . To question more comprehensive phenomena, such as economic structure of art, it's working conditions and the demand for the spectacular.

set up their own institutions in order to; "question more comprehensive phenomena such as the economic structure of art, it's working conditions and the demand for the spectacular." It is in this sense that Office of Experiments was formed around the project 'Space on Earth Station', and that this has further led to a reconsideration of not only the potential of new forms of institution, but the practices and methods of those which currently shape culture, knowledge and in turn society.

Essential to this approach however is also that of US Artists, and their own practices which cover both discourses from institutional critique, from the socially and politically engaged, autonomous '16 Beaver Group'¹⁵, to the distinctly neutral and independent research organisation such as the Centre for Land Use Interpretation. Here we not only have self-organising cross-disciplinary structures, but institutions that can focus on clear objectives and in some cases, also operate from beyond a stated political apex, considering instead new autonomous approaches and announcing themselves as independent of preconception's - new marginal institutions.

It is essentially around these ideas, and approaches that Office of Experiments as a work itself and the Overt Research Project can be considered. We hope to remain autonomous as far as possible and exploring Dark Places is more than a by-product of focus into research of the field and sites of experimentation, it is part of the impulse Foster describes that is closer to love-value than use-value, it is the work of artists deliberately crossing disciplines and modes of engagement of institutional practices in order to map the darker side of the public's imagination, and to confront the physical realities of the world outside of our hermetic urban lives. Conducting a journey through a representation of events as well as spaces, Covert Culture is as Brian Balmer has indicated, an area rich in terms of layers and tiers of hierarchies and power, as well as producing tantalising conspiracy theories, information and disinformation. It is however, like all logical fields and institutions caught between the functional modes of its operations, and the limits of its practices, bound to its own representations and vision. The fact that Office of Experiments seeks to open these spaces for further scrutiny not only provides subject material and focus for new forms of cultural production, but is specifically incidental to the practice of art itself. For as APG and O+I also stated in their document outlining the placement; "The Appropriate Contribution of Art to Society is Art".

Abridged summary from: Maria Lind: Printed Project 06, When Water is Gushing in. pp18

¹⁵ From 16 Beaver Group Website: In 11 years of existence, we have been able to organize 400 or so events, talks, walks, conversations, screenings all free and open to the public. In that time, we have not sought any grants, preferring instead to find an autonomous and sustainable approach to meet our base costs and needs.