

Spatializing Character: on the Work of Geoffrey Farmer

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This paper takes as its point of departure contemporary installation artwork which, through its excessive materiality, inclusion of text, theatrical use of space, and use of “character-like” presence, is amenable to a quasi-literary reading; it might be playfully viewed as a sort of “spatialized literature.” Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer, for instance, makes complex installations which often allude to novels, and adopt a quasi-narrative logic to propel their conceptual motion. Writings on his work have noted this literary affinity by drawing it into relation with literary theory – for instance, Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope, or “space-time” in a literary work, and Barthes’ “Death of the Author.” Without literally depicting sculptures of figures, Farmer’s works evoke extraordinarily complex oscillations between several different sorts of quasi-characters: figures of the worker, objects-as-characters, quasi-faces, material evidence of a character’s action, machines that become actors in the space.

How and why do Farmer’s works “spatialize” character? What might they have to add to an understanding of character that requires a distinctly spatial treatment? To unpack these questions, I will consider Farmer’s installation *A Pale Fire Freedom Machine* (2005) as it relates to both a spatialized conception of character, and, in the inverse, to the character of space itself. I will view this work through a series of spatial/conceptual lenses: the chronotope, the Klein Group diagram and its role in the generic conception of space in sculpture, and what I will call the force of event in these works (and to unpack the latter, I will work with the Deleuze-Guattarian concept of the conceptual persona). I will argue that in Farmer’s works, the “characters” at play are spatial actors: entities who perform an act by changing the properties of space itself, in all its physical, social, gendered, ideological, and playful, emergent aspects.

Emily Rosamond is an artist, academic and educator. For her doctoral work at Concordia University, she combines study in studio arts, art history and English. She received a BFA from York University in 2002 and an MFA from Simon Fraser University in 2007. She has taught in Art and Culture Studies at Simon Fraser University, presented her artwork across Canada, and spoken at conferences in the US and UK.