

# SAMPLING HIRTSHALS

## A PLAY ON ART IN THE PUBLIC SPACE - Dorte Dahlin on own works in the public space 1993-97

Dorte Dahlin

My name is Dahlin, Dorte Dahlin.  
I now intend to take you back in time, move you to another place through  
hypnotic suggestion (I hope...). So please listen carefully, very carefully.  
Let the play begin!



SETUP  
The stage is set as a classical Greek drama

FRONTSTAGE  
Dorte Dahlin, Danish visual artist (1955-)

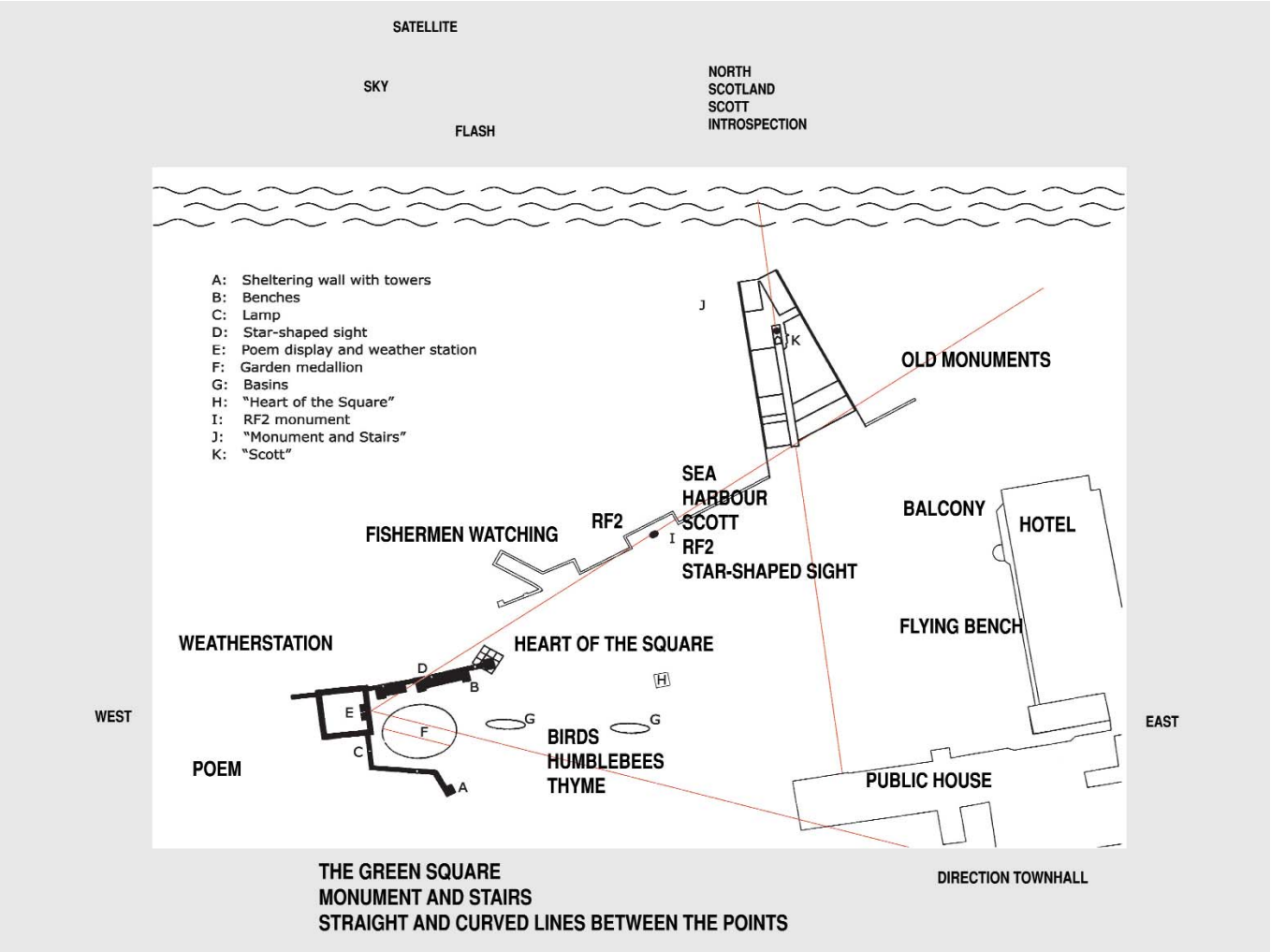
CHORUS  
Susanne Fibiger(1951-) and Niels Jensen (1943-), locals from Hirtshals  
Daniel Libeskind, Polish-Jewish architect (1946-)  
A group of old fishermen

BALCONY  
Else Marie Bukdahl, Rector of The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (1937-)  
Mikkel Bogh, Danish art historian (1963-)

SATELLITE  
Soren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher (1813-55)  
Michel Serres, French philosopher (1930-)  
Soren Ulrik Thomsen, Danish poet (1956-)

ECHO  
Mitchell Feigenbaum, American mathematical physicist (1944-)

FLASH  
The ghost of Niels Bohr, Danish theoretical physicist (1885-1962)



FRONTSTAGE  
*Dorte Dahlin:* Marhaba.....Ana sayide el yom bevedjudacom mahatherati bel Arabia....

CHORUS (crumbling):  
Kidding! she will speak English!

CHORUS (singing):  
- A NON-invitation to a town in change.  
*Daniel Libeskind* (solo): A profound question: to whom does the public space belong, where does it begin, where does it end, and what are your responsibilities as an artist?  
- A tremendous storm and a flying bench.  
- Fishermen staring over the sea in silent watching.  
- A town placed like Acropolis, in some ways reminding one of Las Vegas.  
- A town built by pioneers and fishermen and seagulls, having challenged the sea for ages.

FRONTSTAGE  
*Dorte Dahlin* (hypnotically):  
Close your eyes  
Take a deep breath  
Shoulders down, please

You are NOT in Sharjah any longer,  
you are not on Acropolis, not in Las Vegas,  
your mind is going North.

Imagine North....  
Imagine the “old-lady”- like shape of Denmark, the coast of the North Sea  
- a sister of the Atlantic Ocean.....  
You will soon be on her eyebrow, at the top of Denmark.  
A wonderful light and open landscapes.

Open your eyes, please.  
You are now in the central square of Hirtshals, a small fishing town, built upon a high plateau like Acropolis and with a view over the harbour and the immense open sea. The date is 28th of February 1993 - It’s weekend, pretty cold winter, and there is a heavy storm raising waves 12 metres high. Wind is beating the water into white balls of foam - a flying chaos around your body.  
You can lean against the wind.

You are lodged in a cheap and empty summer hotel at the square next to the sea.

The wind is singing its hypnotic tunes round the corners - breaking windows here and there - and an iron bench chained to a crooked street-lamp is dancing, as if trying to escape, but kept down by the thundering ever-rhythm of the ocean and blasts of wind.

You are alone. No! - You are not alone.  
A small group of old fishermen, dressed in blue overalls, are watching the sea.  
Sheltered by a wall at the square, looking over the harbour, the fishermen are staring out over the sea, in silence.  
Just watching and waiting. Maybe to get a glimpse of one of their fishing boats in the horizon, as if to bring vessels and fellow fishermen into harbour by force of their sight only. - It was here, at the foot of the square that the shipwreck of the RF2 rescue boat took place just outside the harbour. - A boat constructed to be uncapsizable and unsinkable.  
A simple monument in memory of the deceased has been mounted at the outermost edge of the square, with a clear view over the sea.

The square itself is quite small.  
A worn-out lawn with narrow, well trodden paths crossing each other in all directions. Overgrown with hundreds of signs, placed as if by accident, distorted by many westerly winds and drowning visual principles.

Look, stranger!  
What are you doing here? watching the sea go wild?.....having the feeling of being in some kind of small Las Vegas? Or realizing, NOT-Las Vegas. Hotels and restaurants certainly fighting dreams - but for NON-existing customers - with NON-glamorous neon signs confronting only each other at the square - in a town in the middle of an almost empty nowhere, governed by nature.

CHORUS (singing):  
YOU don’t know, YA!  
And the LOCALS don’t know, YA!

FRONTSTAGE  
*Dorte Dahlin:* You are to shape a whole new square, a space of many centres, a multi-pointed, not classical site, satiated with significance, that could most appropriately be called “The Square of many Gazes”. You have five months to go - to stay at that hotel during winter and spring, getting close to the locals, getting to know their history, common and personal dreams. You will be drawing your way through, you will be presenting scale models where the locals meet at the pub, discussing art without using the word.  
You will be discussing the city future - and poetry - with huge fishermen who have been at sea for months, with eyes mirroring the vast horizons and the life of the hunter.



CHORUS (loud):  
Dont disturb the horizon!

FRONTSTAGE  
*Dorte Dahlin:* Exactly on the 28th of February 1993, you somehow become responsible to a site - to the future of a town and its people.  
And in July 1997 you will have constructed the monumental stairs in the form of two huge waves, connecting the Green square with the harbour, the inhabitants with their way of life.

CHORUS (whispering):  
How? - she was not even invited in the first place!  
Her husband was - as a sculptur - to discuss possibilities of where to move some old monuments.  
Since the community, after 20 years of endless discussions, finally and suddenly had reached the point of acting, planning to replace the so-called “Green Square”.  
Now.....she will start speaking of roses...

FRONTSTAGE  
*Dorte Dahlin* (speaking of roses): The only thing I was asked to, was to make a rosegarden ...in a town, where nature only allows vegetations on conditions of sand and salt - wind making green leaves curly and brown in less than 15 minutes.  
But since I came in with the storm and fell in love with the space itself , I didn’t openly disagree on roses, but ended up instead, step by step, designing a whole new square.  
A “horisontal monument”, closely connected to nature, the surroundings, the town, its story and its inhabitants.  
“Watching the sea” and “not disturbing the horizon” came to form the basic rules of a soft, widespread and sea-like geometry.  
By simply using a geometry of gazes - by losing classical distance, by crossing waves with dreams, sky , thyme and history - this is what became of it..

SATELLITE  
(Background noice from 1842):  
*Søren Kierkegaard* : When around one everything has become silent, solemn as a clear, starlit night, when the soul comes to be alone in the whole world, then before one there appears, not an extraordinary human being, but the eternal power itself, then the heavens seem to open, and the I chooses itself or, more correctly, receives itself. Then the soul has seen the highest, which no mortal eye can see and which can never be forgotten; then the personality receives the accolade of knighthood that ennobles it for an eternity. He does not become someone other than he





was before, but he becomes himself. The consciousness integrates, and he is himself. ... for the greatness is not to be this or that but to be one-self, and every human being can be this if he so wills it.

(Background noise from 1982):

*Michel Serres:* As I was sailing along that summer, under a dazzling sky, and drifting lazily in the wind and sun, I found myself, one fine morning, in the green and stagnant waters of the Sargasso sea, at a mysterious spot where thousands of tiny sparks, all shapes and all colors, were glimmering crazily in the early morning light. Bearing off, I was dumbfounded to see an area almost two hundred and fifty acres square entirely populated by dancing bottles. There were countless little vessels, and each one no doubt bore its message; each had its freight and each had its buoyant little roll, ballasted with seawrack and rockery; each carried its hope and its despair. The coiling winds had compelled them all there, from far and near, from a thousand different quadrants. Their constant and perilous collisions made for an acute and cacophonous carillon, and this noise mounted heavenward, wafted to the horizon, it filled all space with giddy ecstasy.

The following night, a wide sargasso put me in danger of shipwreck. I had just about foundered. Swiftly I made a raft of some of the bottles, they worked well as floats and bladders, and thus did I make my way back to Bordeaux.

#### CHORUS

...listen to the echo!

#### ECHO

*Mitchell Feigenbaum:* In a way, art is a theory about the way the world looks to human beings. It's abundantly obvious that one doesn't know the world around us in detail. What artists have accomplished is realizing that there is only a small amount of stuff that's important, and then seeing what it was. So they can do some of my research for me. When you look at early stuff of Van Gogh there are zillions of details that are put into it, there's always an immense amount of information in his paintings.

#### BALCONY

*Mikkel Bogh:* "The Green Square" in Hirtshals is not like any other square. Unlike more traditional squares, it is not surrounded by cityscape in all directions: the northern part, indeed, is open, yielding to a slope towards the harbour and the sea, thus making the square a place of reunion and look-out at the same time, - a place of mutually crossing lines, of different gazes directed towards the wide horizon.

In shaping "The Green Square", Dorte Dahlin has employed the particular properties of the whereabouts: thus, the result has not been just another piece of decoration, not just another sculptural monument erected in the middle of the square, - but rather an interpretation and underlining of certain elements already present. As it is, the square has been encadrée, relieved of most traffic, thus made subject to a total conception allowing it to appear in its very qualities as a square. Most important, however, are the lines - visible as well as invisible - which connect the square to the surroundings, the space of the town, the harbour, the sea - even the sky.



The quadratic pavement, sharing the same geometrical orientation as the hotel and the public house, makes up a powerful grid, cunningly cut across by the oblique "gazes" imposed upon the whole square by Dorte Dahlin. Some of these oblique lines issue from the poem and the weather station in the north-eastern corner of the square. Due to their position right in the middle of the wall, under the same eaves, it is hard not to see these as some kind of eyes. "Eyes", however, which do not look straight ahead, but rather in quite distinct directions. From the weather station a line can be traced between the stones and herbs of the oval garden medallion and further on towards the public house. From the poem, another line can be traced towards the sea through a star-shaped peephole, passing the RF2 monument, raised to the honour of the lost crew members of a wrecked rescue boat. Another section of the square is constituted by the two eye-shaped basins, staring fixedly at the sky. Any one who has been visiting this place, knows how important the sky is: it is just as significant a contribution to the experience of the site as are the sea, the harbour and the town.

With the blue and blazing eyes of the basins, this multitude of oblique lines makes up a texture of glances, brought together to form a pattern reminding us of the ever changing one drawn by the ships on the sea and those ashore gazing into the distance: "The Green Square", endowed with criss-cross gazes, with atomized water and wind-borne scents, is affected, so to speak, by this dangerous, adventurous, unstable element, always able to bring about new experiences - of other views, other languages, other worlds. From this point, Hirtshals may grow.

#### FRONTSTAGE

*Dorte Dahlin:* the square is constructed as a horizontally outstretched and open work in which the different single parts are only conceived as coherent in a soft network of sensing, memory and knowledge.

The "Flower Island" rotates in the grid.

The more wind, the more water - as if the water in the basins were directly connected with the sea.

#### SATELLITE

*Søren Ulrik Thomsen* (slowly reciting his poem from 1987):

The trawlers - blacked-out, hushed  
lolling upon the sea.  
With closed eyes and throbbing gills  
the shoal of herrings pauses askew in the depths.  
The fields are burning, tended by men  
leaning gently up against the tall pitchforks.  
Yesterday was yesterday  
each one comes to halt in his own space

#### BALCONY

*Else Marie Bukdahl* (quoting Søren Ulrik Thomsen):..each one comes to a halt in his own space





BALCONY/FRONTSTAGE  
(Mikkel Bogh, Else Marie Bukdahl and Dorte Dahlin commenting photos ):

*Mikkel Bogh:* “The Green Square” invites all kinds of experiences: in the sheltered corner by the oval herb garden, rather than a splendid view of the sea, the attraction is the scent of thyme, added to the sight of grouse heather, bluebells, and other local species of herbs. If indeed the sea cannot be viewed directly from this intimate point, then one might muse upon the poet’s words on the plaque, or one might listen to the roar of the oval basins, more than four metres in length, recalling the sound of swells “long gone by” - or get a glimpse of the waters through the star-shaped aperture in the wall.

The two niches show, to the left, the display of a poem by Søren Ulrik Thomsen; to the right, a weather station in miniature. The poem suggests the lines between the ships on the sea and the people ashore who frequently, waiting and watching, populate the square. The weather station indicates the wind speed, which in its turn regulates the water supply of the two basins. At the same time, the two niches appear like eyes whose gazes, mutually crossing, are directed towards the square and the space beyond.



Through the star-shaped peephole one sees, looking in one direction, the display of a poem by Søren Ulrik Thomsen; looking in the other direction, the sea and the RF2 monument. Unexpected correspondances thus arise between different elements of the square.



“Heart of the Square” is a tiny bed of lyme grass, poetically fenced with plaited steel.

*Dorte Dahlin :* “Heart of the Square” is a key to understanding “the lost distance”. As small as it is compared to the square, it visualizes the condition of the square as a point of presence for the gaze that, on the one hand, is sent out to a barely visible vessel on the curved horizontal line of the sea and, on the other, to the dot on the radar screen that sends electronic messages from “invisible satellite eyes”. The “Lost distance” is being felt and apprehended both through the overall gaze and the journey through time and space.

*Else Marie Bukdahl :* “Scott” is a group of glass mosaics and bronze sculptures at the outer edge of the bastion: a snowman looking back towards the observer, while a Scottish tartan leans against the plinth.



*Mikkel Bogh:* “Scott” stops the eye’s flight over the harbour and the sea, making an edge at the bastion a place for introspection as well. - Of interaction between subjects - or more generally, between people and the world.

*Else Marie Bukdahl:* “Scott” questions the universal or The Sublime.. The Sublime, which cannot be visualized and which therefore manifests itself as an opening to the absolutely immense, and to the fact that there are set limits to our craving for mastering the world.



*Dorte Dahlin:* The tartan? – It’s an abstract of an original MacLean tartan.. One of the oldest known - probably from the 14th century. By the way: - You know why fishermen often wear golden rings in their ears? - According to popular belief, a golden ring will prevent their ship from sinking at these legendary spots of the sea where waves meet, interfere and make patterns - like tartans... You could say, that the snowman and the tartan connect like two waves - make a crack in the meaning, an opening for The Sublime - I think you are right, Else Marie. Mikkel speaks about introspection – same story! H’m!...Thinking about patterns at sea - and sea foam - I read somewhere, that women made lace watching sea foam - and some Danish poet from the 17th century composed hymns watching lace! – This gives another meaning to patterns than we usually speak of. (Wonder if stalactites are sea-born?)



CHORUS (quoting Else Marie Bukdahl):  
“Monument and Stairs” are formed like a huge wave raising up from the harbour, just before crashing down on to the square around the narrow bastion.



BALCONY

*Else Marie Bukdahl:* “Monument and Stairs” is a compact and tightly knit monument. In its outer form it resembles a big wave crashing down on The Green Square around a narrow, sharply profiled bastion, where it either seems to be divided into two parts or it is met by another dash of the waves. Precisely because the stairway is shaped like one big wave, the sea and the square are linked through an impressive technique whose register is inspired by, indeed actually visualizes, the violent rhythm of the sea. The different sequences of the stairway create a series of spaces and different viewpoints, and these points visualize the relationship between the smallest entities and the largest scales in nature, while at the same time directing attention toward cosmic space. This perspective is illustrated through the sculpturally shaped sequence of abstract forms in different sizes that “move” down towards the point at the harbour square where the two stair sequences meet. Between the two stair sequences a monumental ramp has been constructed on whose extreme edge a group consisting of mosaics and a sculpture is placed that has received the name “Scott”. The brilliantly coloured cluster of mosaics made of glass resembles a tartan plaid with its red, green, yellow, and blue shades. The sculpture, which is modelled by Mogens Møller, is a snowman cast in bronze and silverplated. The complicated network of structures covering its radiant surfaces is an allusion to what we often overlook, the smallest entities in nature - snowflakes, ice crystals, and drops of water. But in this monumental installation’s other spaces the grand perspectives in the world and the firmament itself above us are visualized or exposed. The viewer thus does not only confront an illustration of the patterns inside the chaotic, rolling waves, but also allusions to the stars and the infinite distances in space.

*The ghost of Niels Bohr.* YAIS!

*Mikkel Bogh:* “Monument and Stairs” places itself in the baroque tradition. It doesn’t keep space separated from time and movement, and it builds on the idea that the apparently stable and fixed must always depend on local and temporary creations of forms, just like islands in a sea of currents that are flowing in many directions. It is fed by the conception that culture doesn’t just construct its own forms ex nihilo, out of the blue, possibly obtained from a transcendental sphere of ideals, but that it, on the contrary, inevitably refers to a nature that is already form-generating. The baroque, for the same reason, is partial to reference to the elements, to fire, to wind, and especially to water, because the last makes possible the notion of the continuous transition from one formal state to another, from one type of stability to another.

Just as in the square, we see in “Monument and Stairs” a mixture of different geometries, of the principles of space and form, of historical traces and images, which create the openings and cracks in the material which must be there to transform a monumental form into a pithy figure without an importunate meaning, into a figure that invites questioning, wonder

and reflection. And just as in the square, the unavoidable staring out over the water is staged. Here, however, it is in a less discreet manner. The steps rise, at first, several metres above street level, so, to come down the slope, one first has to go quite a few steps up. As it is split into two wings of different width and rise of the steps there will be a difference in how high one ascends; but both steps culminate a platform that gives an intensified view over the harbour and sea and which, moreover, gives an outlook over the square when one ascends from below or when one turns around to look back.

At the violent encounter of the two rows of steps below the bastion, a kind of fractal-geometric accumulation of columns rises, like a formalized chaos of foam and whirlpools, stylizing the roaring retreat of the wave.

CHORUS:

Fractal-geometric – accumulation – chaos - foam – is it one or two waves, stalactite or stalagmite

*The ghost of Niels Bohr* (materializing) : WAVE OR PARTICLE??? YAIS!?

(It starts raining, everyone disappears into the Public House. Only Niels Bohr and Else Marie Bukdahl remain standing for a couple of seconds, in thoughts).

LITERATURE LIST

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Else Marie Bukdahl: “Staring out over the Sea”, Øjeblikket, Copenhagen 1993  
Mikkel Bogh: “Hirtshals. Art in public space”, Hirtshals 1993  
Mikkel Bogh: “Random Geometry”, Architectura 2000, Copenhagen 2000  
Søren Ulrik Thomsen: “The Trawlers” (“Travlerne”) translated by Dan A. Marmorstein from “New Poems” (“Nye Digte”)Vindrose, Copenhagen 1987  
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Søren Kierkegaard : “Either/or” (“Enten - Eller” ) Copenhagen 1843  
Mitchell Feigenbaum: Quoted by James Gleick in his book, Chaos. Making a New Science, Viking Penguin, 1987, pp. 186-187. and by Else Marie Bukdahl: “Hundred Views of Mount Fuji”, SOUL, Vestsjællands Kunstmuseum, Sorø/Randers Kunstmuseum, 1990

