RETURNING

The past comes back to haunt in all sorts of ways.

This is a key feature of the archaeological imagination.

It may be something like “this happened here”, or “this was the way it was, and still is”.

And, as archaeologists, as all of us do – we return, revisit, rehearse, reiterate, repeat.

This familiar phenomenon is *nostos*. It might be a sentimental nostalgia, though the etymology connects return or homecoming (Homer’s nostos) with *algos*, pain, and nostalgia was first used to describe the experiences, aftermath and mental affliction of mercenaries fighting away from home, what we might well now call post-traumatic stress. Hauntings can be comforting reminders or dreadful specters of things we cannot forget.

In February Mike (Pearson) and I began reviewing our book Theatre/Archaeology, returning to the conversation and collaboration of these past 25 years [Link]. In our fascination with site specificity [Link] (how site and context are never simple setting), we chose to locate our discussion and new plans in a place to which I constantly return, the English/Scottish borders, a place quite unfamiliar to Mike.

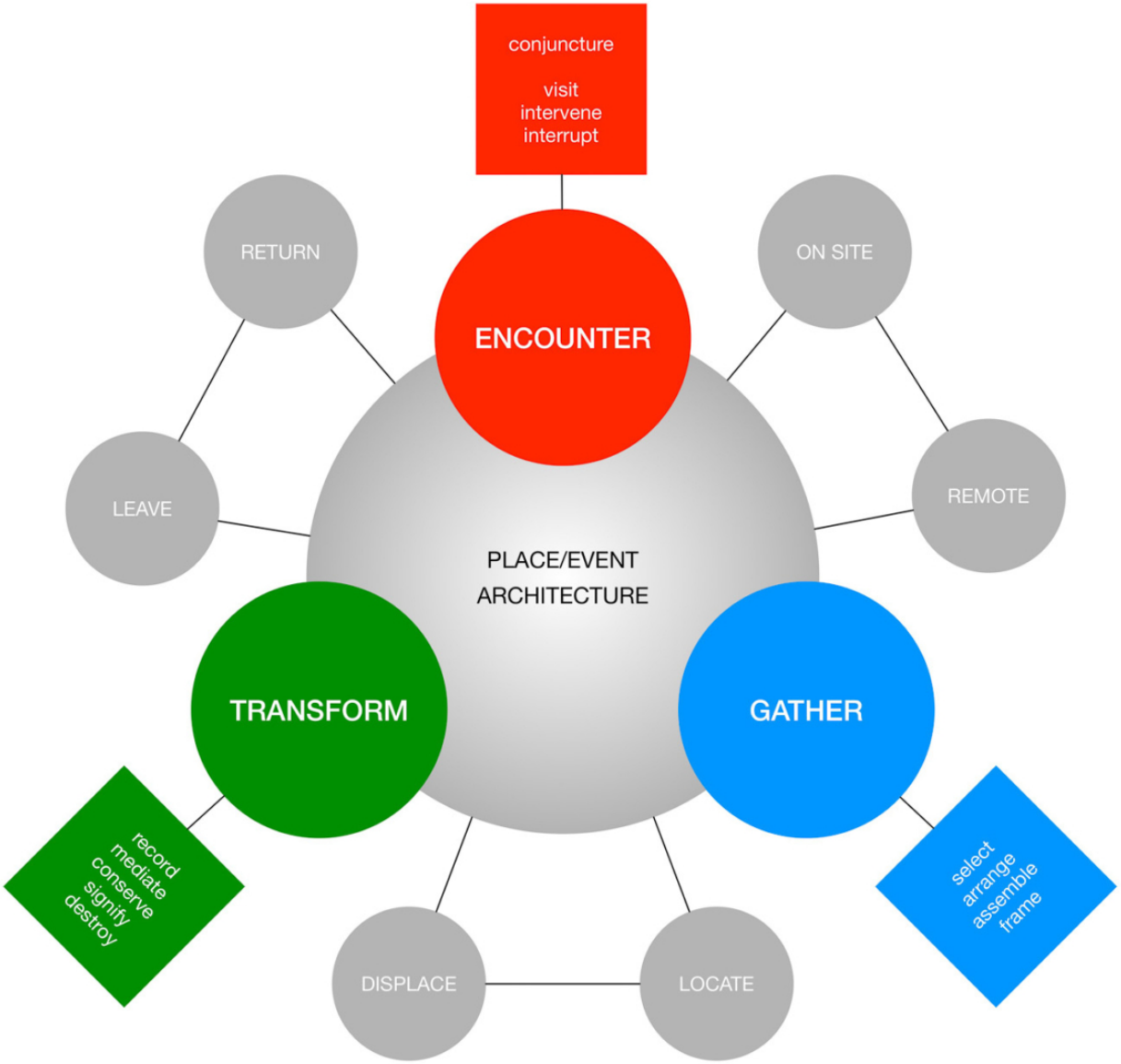
And in the connecting hybridity of theatre/archaeology (the re-articulation of fragments of the past as real-time event), returning (to) pasts (archaeology) connects with performances rehearsed, and the iterative cycles of prototyping, reworking and remaking that characterize any process of design.

Just after our trip to the borders we both joined a conference at deSingel in Antwerp “Tracing Creation” [Link] Tracing-Creation-Program concerned with what surrounds performance and theatre, or any creative act, in the way of planning, preparation, documentation, rehearsal, aftermath.

On Wednesday Tim Etchells offered a remarkable performance of “Looping Pieces” – the repeated delivery, the rehearsal in repeated takes of fragments of text, ideas, overheard conversations, cut-and-paste-excerpts from newspaper articles and web pages, drafts, quotations and other notes.

On Thursday Romeo Castellucci and the Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio presented a revival of their 1995 version of the Oresteia.

What holds all this together is the cultural circuit at the heart of the archaeological imagination.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