

## **Affective Landscapes - little elegy**

### **Quilos and the Windmill**

#### **Collaborations through 'realandimagined' space**

In this paper our aim is to introduce and explore a singular piece of work that embodies an experiential collaborative way of working - a way of working sensitively in landscape which evolved out of two disparate art research practices.

Quilos and the Windmill (Linda Khatir and Michele Whiting) met during their doctoral research at Bath Spa University as part of the AHRC funded project 'Critical Topologies of Landscape' – and now work together and alone, performing small acts of engagement in response to a specific environment. Adopting a range of strategies, materials and tools; the works come together as interventions and installations.

Despite their very different approaches, it became clear that there was a shared interest in space and place, and this became the meeting point for critical dialogue.

On completion of their doctorates they entered into consistent creative discourse centred around notions of (re)positioning and (dis)placement, echoing separate and different experiences of entering and being in and around space and place, image and architecture, text and voice (and so on); these conversations prompting flexible and nomadic approaches to the de- and re-territorialization of art practice.

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**Hollow (2010) Michele Whiting.** 5 screen projection, four channels sound, 28'loop.

**Michele Whiting:** "My practice-led thesis primarily investigated space, place and site through experiencing moving image installation art practice, focusing on ways in which artists use site as moving image subject. Integral to this examination was my own work, where I explored specific sites through filming, editing and installation. By purposeful experimentation, visual finding and discoveries, questions emerging from my practice were examined through further practice and mutual engagement with other contemporary art works.

An experiential and comparative approach led to critical engagement with strategies and tactics used by contemporary artists shown in the U.K. between 2002 and 2009, including Willie Doherty, Ori Gersht, Ergin Çavuşoğlu, also drawing upon selected works from moving image's history through which further commonalities were made apparent, examining works by Robert Smithson, Margaret Tait, William Raban (among others). The works were investigated through first hand experience, through visual analysis including artist and gallerist interviews, and through articulating the making of my own installations.

Space, place and site were critically examined through encountering the projected image, acknowledging that while the works experienced possess powerful imagery, their impact extends beyond purely aesthetic definitions.

The texts engaged with the event of the artwork as a mode of being that occurs in the interval between the viewer and the observed subject. Relevant theoretical approaches were used to consider the works drawing on a broad base of literature, including: Edward Soja, Doris von Drathan and Irit Rogoff in order to investigate the central concepts.

The discursive account interrogated a complex terrain, opening out apperceptive approaches made in terms of filming, editing and installation, constructing a vibrant and reciprocal research field; one that suggests that there exists a collective field of work, which until now has lain submerged in the broader picture of moving image installation. It emerged here for the first time as a (selected) focused view of a significant body of site oriented moving image installations, thus serving as a context for approaches made in my own art practice".

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***Robinson in the corner* (2008) Linda Khatir** installational painting, Somerset Place, Bath

**Linda Khatir:** "My research drew on questions that had arisen during my painting practice, and the first chapters of the thesis looks at the way Formalist critics in the 60s affected abstract painting's material and spatial condition - dictating that the gaps between surface, support, viewer and place be ignored in favour of optical 'flatness' and autonomy. But the painters that interested me rejected these rules in favour of what I came to understand as a more open and 'deconstructionist' approach.

I do not consider deconstruction as a method of critique, or a set of rules, but simply as a means to read and re-read what already exists, as a way of opening up how a thing 'does its being', and how it might do that 'being' differently. This kind of reading entails looking for potential beneath the

surface, beyond the borders, and in the gaps between (for example) painting and place.

In contrast to the American formalist approach, French avant-garde painting (by for example, the *Nouveaux Realists* and the *Supports/Surfaces* movement) is discussed in terms of the 'tableau', an expansive pictorial location where picture planes are displaced, and fragmented, and where painting is freed from its former frame.

Notions of openness and thickness are introduced, and further relations are formed between literary and plastic practices. My cross-readings and re-translations of French texts (including 'the parergon and the passe-partout' by Jacques Derrida, and the 'underneath of painting' by Hubert Damisch) serve to loosen and supplement the meanings of specific works.

The thesis as a whole asserts a particular kind of painting - including my own - as multi-dimensional, fragmented, and open. Uncontained by its physical limits, it is the result of an ontological, topological - and above all spatial - practice".

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### ***The Conversation***

Through ongoing studio based dialogue, Quilos and the Windmill recognised areas of interest spanning both practices and acknowledged that notions of space and place might become a critical departure for further dialogue and methods. In the summer of 2011 they spent a week working in the gallery at Sion Hill, Bath Spa University with the intention of developing a methodology that would enable them to work collaboratively, drawing on their diverse approaches to artistic research.

The gallery became a performance space for dialogue. They set up two conversation islands, representing each of their research fields, and a third in-between island, which became a mutually investigative space. Out of this

came their aim to unfold a multi-layered and poetic topology of the lesser spaces of a specific place, using whatever means available.



*The conversation* (2011) Sion Hill Gallery, Bath Spa University

### ***The residency***

Prior to the conversation they were selected as joint artists-in-residence at Oxbow, Michigan, a rural environment affiliated with the School of the Arts Institute in Chicago, comprising sand dunes, a lagoon and a hundred and fifty acres of forest.



*near the crows nest (2011)* Oxbow Michigan USA

### ***The Forest***

The edges of a forest (like other growing and flexible borders) may be considered a hinge between here and there, now and then - the place itself a transitional space (an elsewhere) wherein other realms and other things come and go. Within these spaces material geographies and spatial practices take shape, affecting subjectivity, consciousness, rationality and sociality; and the notion of the forest as 'elsewhere; opens up limitless possibilities for ways of being and modes of behavior.

Through processes of walking, recording, mapping and sensing the land, we wandered from the constructed paths, in search of new ways through the forest, to experience it from other viewpoints. As we journeyed we created an alternative imaginative guide ...

...a guide that tells of here and there, then and now, of future imaginings and past transgressions; a guide that maps the forest as a place of experiences, daydreams, recollections, re-enactments and fantasy.

Some of those met along the way suggested new routes and became part of the expedition. One of these was Yung Joon Kwak a performance artist who joined us on the third attempt to find a hidden First Generation burial ground. We filmed each other as we made our way through the forest, climbing over fallen trees, walking down paths that were almost invisible and ending abruptly, and looking up at the canopy of trees that gradually blocked out the light.

The further we entered the more we sensed the vital force of the environment, our feet becoming heavy as we pushed deeper into the ground - until we came upon a large flat area surrounded by a perfect ring of trees, and understood that this was the place - the place for the work - and *little elegy* (the text that you will read shortly) was written, read and recorded as sound here.

Place in this instance, became more than an acknowledged site of memory. Dwelling within the circular pause in the dense forest made place a holding bay, a container of things that showed themselves through our time spent there; showing being the flipside of concealing because we spent the time absorbing the stillness around us; a process akin to Heidegger's notion of holding oneself back and allowing for consummation of the present-ness at hand.

Through our lived bodies, we mediated between two seemingly different things; memory and place, experiencing uneven and emotive adjacencies in the folds of this temporal experience. During time spent in the circle of trees we lit a fire, talked and wrote the fragments of texts that would eventually come together here.

*Little elegy* is considered as a form of 'site-writing' - writing that emerges from shared experiences in, and of a space and place; our two texts supplemented by a third voice who stitched our words together as sound.



***Little Elegy*** (2011) spoken fragments of text, Oxbow Michigan (4 minutes)

*here in this place  
time becomes manifest  
intercut  
overlaid and non-sequential  
images sounds configure into an infinite set of variables  
time space a concertina  
site reveals varied flows of information  
not rhythmic but jagged  
shards of fleetingness  
splinters of memory that work their way to the surface*

*little elegy walk with me  
little elegy talk with me  
take me to the place where wanderers sleep  
where land is smoky  
where stars stay longer  
writing the stories they once spoke*

*if I sit here lingering  
and looking  
for a slightly uncomfortable length of time  
perception becomes entwined with duration  
my frames of reference change to other images  
other situations*

*through these shifting images I am kept alert to the changes held within  
I am reminded of being held outside of place  
and because of this a sort of internal reframing occurs  
allowing for further imaginary space to develop  
space that holds exteriority and interiority  
that pushes back and away from a single flat viewpoint  
instead mutating and morphing pervasively synthetically  
existing between and parasitically sucking from singular image planes*

*wandering wandering  
straying from the path to find other place  
the elsewhere that we seek  
the elsewhere that we remember and strain to find again*

*space is orally constructed  
sound a framing device  
drawing us to it  
grabbing our attention  
demonstrating how we exist within in an infinite set of relations*

*through sound time becomes vocal  
provoking movement that builds a metaphorical bridge  
between here and there then and now  
constructing its own synthetic space within site  
surrounded by sound and image  
slight disturbances are imparted to us through discordant relations provoked  
through duration*

*and so the primacy of the image becomes experiential  
its internal and external rhythms felt as raw in the body  
however dissonant  
this is temporary fleeting  
poised at the point where our understanding of place as real inhabits our  
bodily experience in situ  
because of this site actual and imaginal completes itself  
and so right now I reside in the fold of experience*

*little elegy walk with me  
talk with me  
take me to the place where wanderers rest*

As we continued on our journey we sensed a physical connection with the land rather than a visual appreciation of the land-scape. The more we walked the more we felt and imagined. Our feet sinking into the ground and slight movements, smells and sounds escalating as we tumbled and tripped on roots and stumps. We became increasingly aware of the forest's dense odour, and of our fragility in relation to the ground that rose up, enveloping us.

Through writing, photographing and filming, we entered into a new double relation of being in - and observing ourselves as being in - the land.

Recurring spatial metaphors linked art with place – perspective, ground, field, surface, plane, border, frame ...

Beneath the dark canopy of trees there was no horizon, no perspective, no edge and no frame - or rather there was a frame but it was a shifting one, its edges bursting with running, leaping, crawling, falling things, sounds from all sides and sights just beyond reach. A black centipede passed by, dwarfing a jumping yellow frog the size of a bee, and giant acorns thudded to the ground like eggs.

As we entered deeper into the forest the ground shifted from flatness to thickness. A thickness that was temporal, sonorous and spatial as well as material - a layered depth that rose up and burst through the superficial visual plane of landscape.

We negotiated the gaps, folds and cracks hesitantly. The grounds, uprights and spaces of the forest came together as an elusive, temporary and split form, as an unfolding and self destructive form - a labyrinthine machine; its very nature discontinuous and open. In this sense it became less a place and more a series of events.

The burial ground and its ring of trees - we set out three times to find it, and three times the forest led us astray. No matter how we tried to negotiate it within our frame, it remained elusive, splitting, dropping down and rising up,

burying parts of itself inside itself, while releasing other parts of itself to the outside - a double movement in, and of space and time - in Derridean terms, a place of *différance* (defer-ance) - always and already different and deferred. In our sound writing we do not attempt to frame our encounters with this place, but merely offer them up as fragments of experience. As the reading begins, we hold back, watching at a distance. The voice proceeds hesitantly, skipping sections, stumbling, speeding up and slowing down - retracing our steps.

In time with the voice, our thoughts fly, and fold back on themselves. The pages turn. The gaps and repeated words emerge as pauses, false starts and interruptions - as we listen we are powerless, working-blind.

If we are pushed to give this kind of sound writing a name, we might call upon Derrida's *arche- texte* - a text made up of other texts; a text that is at the same time singular and multiple, porous and open to meanings beyond those intended, beyond originality or authorship.

When voiced, the writing within the writing reveals itself still further, opening up a flood of traces and beginnings, the *arche-texte's* multiple and labyrinthine nature disallowing any fixed position or structure.

In giving in to the forest and letting it dictate our journey, we wandered from the well trodden paths in search of un-marked ground, and in the process, discovered a flexible circular frame - the environment itself reminding us that, to truly experience the land we need to delve beneath the surface of its inexhaustible depth.

## References

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