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LOCATION, DISLOCATION, TRANSLOCATION:

Navigating a Space between Place and Becoming through Practice-led Research

Abstract

The focus of this thesis is the experiential landscape viewed through the lens of a performative visual arts research inquiry. The project explores the dialogue between practice and theory through a series of research projects that focus on the experiential inter-relationship of body and place, incorporating still and moving imagery, sound, text and performance. The inquiry follows an understanding of the body as a site of cross-fertilisation and proposes that the oscillation between an experience of landscape and the reception of artworks (between engagement, understanding, articulation and artefact) aids reflexive creativity in the maker and encourages audience reception. Through exploration, examination and rigorous analysis, this practice-led study applies an affirmative criticality to the concepts of dwelling and becoming, and lays the foundation for a reappraisal of notions of home and identity in theory and in practice. Contextualising these theoretical concepts, indicative creative projects are outlined throughout. An extended review of *Communion*, an artwork first performed in 2008, is pivotal to understanding my expanded research practice through a conjunction of media and a series of collaborations. Personal projects are examined here alongside relevant artworks by other practitioners – namely Ana Mendieta, Roni Horn and Tacita Dean.

Following a largely phenomenological methodology, embodied practice forms the basis of an argument that proposes that attention to the localised specificities of place is a productive means through which to reconsider our relationship with the experiential landscape. In this regard, offering new interpretations and understandings of the inter-relationship between a place and a self, and raising questions around issues of belonging and identity (personal, social and cultural). The discussion rests on an understanding that subjectivity is multiple and hybrid and that the potential of becoming is (arguably) important to more ethical, inclusive understandings of belonging on a range of scales, from the immediately local to the global, the personal to the socio-cultural. The enfolded self and located place in this study are understood to be continually in process – sites of constant (re)negotiation; intimately connected, physically and psychologically co-constituted, and informed and performed by each other in practice.

Chapter One lays the foundation for my discussion, outlining early research and giving an overview of debates surrounding practice-led research in the visual arts before detailing the position and particular approach taken in this project. Informed by a range of cross-disciplinary writers including art historian/curator Miwon Kwon and cultural geographer Doreen Massey, Chapters Two and Three examine issues of place and embodied practice and detail the phenomenology and temporality of place as explored, understood and (re)presented in this research project. Visual examples of relevant works by other artists are given together with personal artworks through which the terms location and dislocation are expanded. In Chapters Four and Five, I examine the concepts of dwelling and becoming in relation to notions of home, belonging and identity as explored in the context of two specific locations – both places I call ‘home’. Here, the words of Luce Irigaray, the artworks of Ana Mendieta and the observations of Edward S Casey inform practical research and the dynamic role of the body in the synthesis of practice with theory is highlighted. Again, examples of personal artworks are reviewed at length alongside those of other artists. In the final chapter, Chapter Six, I discuss the interplay between practice and theory with regard to the philosophical understanding and practical application of photography in this project. The concepts of affect and haptic visibility are examined and particular attention is paid to the oscillation between presence and absence – as experienced in the lived landscape and as reflected through the photographic image. Texts by Roland Barthes and Jean Luc Nancy inform empirical research and, in the dialogue between embodied experience and abstract ideas, the visual examples from personal projects (as well as other artists) are pivotal.

Research in this doctoral project is progressed throughout via an interactive exchange between practice and theory where the lived and the learned both play important roles and together serve to deepen corporeal and conceptual understandings. The body is understood as a site of cross-fertilisation in the performativity of practice where a diverse range of influences and references intertwine and constantly merge to blur the boundary between practice and theory. In this respect, a performative writing style is employed in order to reflect the locus of research (the phenomenological landscape) as well as the performativity of the dialogue between the abstract concepts and concrete particulars that together inform this inquiry. This thesis further proposes that performative writing strategies are necessary in order to adequately reflect embodied research and that, in this respect, the project serves not only as a model for dissemination of practice-led research within the visual arts but across the disciplines.