

A.8 Five examples of the transformation of one place to another in contemporary artworks

A.8.1 Adam Chodzko

In Adam Chodzko's series *Better Scenery* (2001) a sign in one place contains a set of directions that would allow you to find your way to an equivalent sign in a location somewhere else in the world (see Figures A.8.1 to A.8.2). The invitation for the viewer is not only to imagine the *there* but also to wonder at how the *here* might be described.

Figure A.8.1 Adam Chodzko, *Better Scenery*, 2002, Angel Mews Islington, London (Dean & Millar, 2005 p. 67).

Figure A.8.2 Adam Chodzko, *Better Scenery*, 2002, Fargo, North Dakota (Dean & Millar, 2005 p. 67).

A.8.2 Francis Alÿs

Two key ideas of interest in the work of Francis Alÿs are the small “gesture” and the moving artwork. In *The Nightwatch* (2004) Alÿs set a fox free one night in the National Portrait Gallery in London and the viewer sees a series of shots from the security cameras of its travels through the empty halls (see Figures A.8.3 to A.8.11). Magali Arriola explains that in Alÿs’s work the gesture “doesn’t create anything, but takes something over and carries it along. For what is art supposed to do if not carry information from one context to another” (2005, p. 112)¹. The focus of Alÿs’s art is often on “micro narratives or small stories of change ‘so that the story can be repeated (and memorised) as anecdote, as something that can be stolen, or travel orally, and, in the best case scenario enter the land of minor urban myth’” (Arriola, 2005, p. 111).

Figure A.8.3 Francis Alÿs, *The Nightwatch*, 2004, National Portrait Gallery, London 20 videos on 12 individual monitors, each 16 minutes or linear version, video 17 minutes 30 seconds on single monitor (Alÿs, Lampert and Lingwood, 2005, p. 36).

In *Cuando la fe mueve montañas, Lima, Perú, April 11 2002* (*When Faith Moves Mountains, Lima Peru, April 11 2002*) Alÿs responded to the political and social upheaval of Peru in a way that was both epic and futile, absurd and urgent (Alÿs, 2002). The work was a “beau geste” in the midst of an imperfect world -- in the midst of a fractured and unstable social and political climate (see Figure A.8.12). Within the sight of shantytowns on the outskirts of Lima, in the Ventanilla sand dunes, five hundred volunteers were given a shovel and lined up at the base of a 480 metre long sand dune. They then proceeded to

¹ “What characterises gesture,’ writes Giorgio Agamben in *Notes on Gesture*, ‘is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported. It is the process of making a means visible as such’” (Arriola, 2005, p. 112).

Figures A.8.4 to A.8.11 Francis Alÿs, *The Nightwatch*, 2004, National Portrait Gallery, London Stills from security cameras (Alÿs, Lampert and Lingwood, 2005, p. 38).

Figure A.8.12 Francis Alÿs, *In Cuando la fe mueve montañas, Lima, Perú, April 11 2002* (*When Faith Moves Mountains, Lima Peru, April 11 2002*) (Doherty, 2004, p. 6).

shovel dirt up over the hill to move the dune ten centimetres forward.

When Faith Moves Mountains attempts to translate (sic) social tensions into narratives that in turn intervene in the imaginal landscape of a place... Here we have attempted to create a kind of Land art for the land-less (Alÿs, 2002, p. 147).

The event happened in a specific place (the *here*) at a specific time, and the artwork spiralled outwards (into the *there*), in the material form of distributed postcards and video documentation of the event (and later articles about it) but also as a rumour at the levels of the local and the artworld. Alÿs seeks to make the art object mobile and to highlight its ability to act as an agent of transmission. "His work never tells any

story in particular but rather crystallizes an image that demands storytelling as an active interpretive process. One day a mountain moved four inches. So begins a tale that we, the audience, must tell” (Anton, 2002, p. 147). Seen as a whole, his practice is an art of passing through.

A.8.3 Pavel Štingl and David Vaughan

In the short documentary film *Druhš Šivot Lidic* [*The Second Life of Lidice*] (Štingl & Vaughan, 2002) Pavel Štingl and David Vaughan traced the story of the village of Lidice (in the Czech Republic) which was razed to the ground on 10 June 1942 by the Nazis in retaliation for the assassination of a Nazi official. 173 men were shot and the women and children were sent to concentration camps where 82 of the children were subsequently murdered². The Nazis rerouted a stream and levelled the ground to erase the village. They used the meticulous footage of the burning and destruction of the village in propaganda films. The women that survived the concentration camps returned after the War to find a field of rye growing where the village once stood.

In 1943 another (Allied) propaganda film called *The Silent Village* had been made in Britain by Humphrey Jennings. This remarkable film was based upon the residents of the Welsh village of Cwmgiedd re-enacting the story of Lidice. Vaughan describes *The Silent Village* as “a passion play in which a village takes onto its own shoulders the fate of another village a thousand miles away” (quoted in Dean & Millar, 2005, p. 128). As time

Figure A.8.13 Humphrey Jennings, *The Silent Village*, 1943, film still of Cwmgiedd (Dean and Millar, 2005, p. 128).

has passed those that were filmed in Cwmgiedd have grown old or passed away. In Lidice the village has continued to evolve through communist, Stalinist and post-communist phases, whilst in Cwmgiedd the villagers of 60 years ago are seen again when Vaughan

² 17 surviving children were eventually found.

replays *The Silent Village* to them.

Pavel Štingl and David Vaughan's *The Second Life of Lidice* (2002) features both villages and their inhabitants. It deals with an investigation of the veracity of memory and experience, of both the women that survived and the villagers of Cwmgiedd whose lives had been captured in *The Silent Village*. For example, Vaughan traced down and interviewed the English wife and son of a fighter pilot from Lidice (who live out their lives

Figure A.8.14 Humphrey Jennings, *The Silent Village*, 1943, film still (Dean and Millar, 2005, p. 129).

Figure A.8.15 Pavel Štingl and David Vaughan, *Druhý život Lidic* [*The Second Life of Lidice*], 2001, Wynne Horák, Pavla Nešporová and Anna Nešporová by the ruins of the Horák farmhouse, Lidice (Dean and Millar, 2005, p. 130).

in England) as well as bringing a grandmother and granddaughter from Lidice to see the village of Cwmgiedd. A Cwmgiedd villager who was in the original film writes of the tension between familial nostalgia of seeing people he grew up with and the horror of another village, an emotional piercing that will not go away. Through the circumstances of history, the two places, Lidice and Cwmgiedd, have been folded back upon each other.

A.8.4 Roni Horn

Roni Horn's work is influenced by ideas of place. Pairing and doubling are recurrent visual manoeuvres in her work. By placing identical objects in different spaces in the work *Piece for Two Rooms* (1986-1991), Horn raises directly the issue of initial and subsequent experiences of an artwork (see Figures A.8.16 and A.8.17). When the viewer stands in *here*, after already being to *there*, the event is fundamentally altered. For Horn the experience of the artist and the viewer are equally important and for each it is seen as an embodied process.

I try to make sensible experience more present... I try to reach the viewer by addressing the bodily and not just the mental/non-physical being. The viewer must take responsibility for being there, otherwise there is nothing there (Horn, 1997).

Her work is concerned equally with the bodily possibility of "placing one part of the world in another... [and] to bring distant things close" (Neri, 2000, p. 66) and the artwork's metaphorical possibilities. Indeed it is the phenomenal and spatial nature of her work that allows her to amplify the experience of the viewer.

Horn uses travelling to a place as an epistemological strategy. There is a restlessness in her relationship to place which has allowed her to keep returning to place as a source of art making³. One important aspect of her work is her thirty-year relationship with Iceland. The water, weather, people and geology of Iceland have been the subject matter of photographs (see Figures A.8.18 to A.8.28). The photographs are often broody and spectacular, but a careful clarification needs to be made between what is represented and what is under consideration. Iceland is not a static or unpeopled wilderness.

³ From Horn's Icelandic field notes in *Pooling Water*:

I don't want to read. I don't want to write. I don't want to do anything but be here. Doing something will take me away from being here. I want to *make being here enough*. Maybe it's already enough. I won't have to invent enough. I'll be here and I won't have to do anything and this place will be here, but I won't do anything to it. I'll just let it be here. And maybe because I am here and because the me in what's here makes what's here different, maybe that will be enough, maybe that will be what I am after. But I'm not sure. I'm not sure that I'll be able to perceive the difference. How will I perceive it? I need to find a way to make myself absolutely not here but still able to be here to know the difference. I need to experience the difference between being here and not changing here, and being here and changing here.

I set up camp early for the night. It's a beautiful, unlikely evening after a long, rainy day. I put my tent down in an El Greco landscape: the velvet greens, the mottled purples, the rocky stubble. But El Greco changes here, he makes being here not enough. I am here and I can't be here without El Greco. I just can't leave here enough" (reproduced in Neri, 2000, p. 58, my emphasis).

Figure A.8.16 Roni Horn, *Piece for two rooms* from *Things that Happen Again*, (Room 1), 1997 (Horn, 2000, p. 19).

Figure A.8.17 Roni Horn, *Piece for two rooms* from *Things that Happen Again*, (Room 2), 1997 (Horn, 2000, p. 21).

Figures A.8.18 to A.8.23. Roni Horn, *To Place -- Book II: Folds*, 1991 (Horn, 2000, pp. 110-111).

Horn writes,

I expect it (the landscape) to change. Of course I am extremely sceptical and critical of humanity and it's relationship to the nonhuman world, but I know in going to Iceland I'm not going there to get away from that. Iceland is really the centre of action for me... When I go to Iceland that's where I get nervous, where I think: "Oh my God, this is intense." ...Iceland is something that is not familiar to me, even after all this time, partly because of what's happening there, but also because it is forever foreign to me. It's much easier to see things when you come from the outside (Horn, 1997).

Iceland is the place that gives Horn the clearest view of herself. The island is not just a landscape or even just a state of mind but the notion of exploration itself. "The basis of her interest in landscape is not objectively empirical, but rather grounded in the recognition that she observes the world not through a window (or... the camera's lens)

Figure A.8.24 Roni Horn, *You in You*, 1997-2000 (Horn, 2000b, p. 139). Photograph, marker pen. Working drawing for walkway of alternating hard and soft rubber tiles case from Kirkjugóf geological formation (83 metres, depth 5 cm) Permanent installation, Basel, Bahnhof Ost.

but by inhabiting it” (Neri, 2000, p. 60). Place is a condensation of acts.

Horn’s interest is in mapping the connections between things through all the senses⁴. These sensings and connections generate the metaphorical level of her work. For example, she was commissioned to make an artwork for the Bahnhof Ost (eastern train station) in Basel. She took a cast of basalt pavement in Iceland and turned it into a 200 metre long rubber walkway. The work (titled *You in You* (1997-2000)) was indistinguishable in colour but varied subtly in softness along the length of the path. Horn used the substance of her experiences in Iceland to create a sensual experience in Basel. Moreover “it introduces not simply an organic form – landscape – into an urban context, a public space, but also a psychological presence, a kind of mirror for the unseen. It introduces the idea of another place in order to form a complex with it and reform the place you’re standing in” (Horn in L. Cooke, 2000, p. 24).

In many of her gallery works the nature of the dialogue between the photographs (of places) and the gallery is constructed so that the space of the gallery becomes a landscape. Of *Pi* (see Figure A.8.26) Horn notes, “It’s half you and half what’s out there, because it keeps you in the space in such a way that the room becomes a landscape... It becomes a place” (Roni Horn in L. Cooke, 2000, p. 18). The corollary of this is that the *there* place is freed of some of its clichéd interpretations because the viewer’s attentiveness to the *here* (gallery) place

⁴ The logic of her relational history tends to develop out of a sensible, as opposed to visual realm, radiating everywhere in the geography of experience and impugning all manner of fixed or essentialising identification (Neri, 2000, p. 30).

Figure A.8.25 Roni Horn, *You in You*, 1997-2000 (Horn, 2000b, p. 140). Collage, ink (working drawing).

Figure A.8.26 Roni Horn, *Pi*, 1998 (Horn, 2000b, p. 8). Photo installation. 45 Iris printed colour and black and white photographs installed on 4 walls. The photographs are of landscapes, of eider duck nests, people (down collectors), empty house interiors, TV soap opera characters from screen shots and stuffed animals. Various dimensions 51.5 x 69 cm; 51.5 x 51.5 cm; 51.5 x 46 cm.

Figure A.8.27 Roni Horn, *To Place -- Book V: Verne's Journey* 1995 (Horn, 2000b, pp. 61).

Accompanying Horn's sculptural works is a series of limited edition books known as *To Place*⁵. Their form varies but they usually contain photographs of places, and especially of Icelandic geology, water, weather and life (see Figures A.8.18 to A.8.23 and A.8.27 and A.8.28). Taken as a whole they can be considered a journal of spatial experiences. Again, whilst they are site dependent, they are part of a discussion of wider issues:

⁵ *TO PLACE*, ongoing limited-edition book series:

Book 1: *Bluff Life*. New York: Peter Blum Edition, 1990. 14 colour images; edition of 1150; special edition of 150; 36 pp.

Book 2: *Folds*. New York: Mary Boone Gallery, 1991. 36 colour images; letterpress; edition of 700; 72 pp.

Book 3: *Lava*. New York: Roni Horn, 1992. 16 colour and 29 tritone images; letterpress; edition of 750; special edition of 100; 92 pp.

Book 4: *Pooling Water*. Cologne: Walther König, 1994. 2 volumes; English and Icelandic text; edition of 1000; special edition of 6. Vol. 1: 27 colour and 25 duotone images; 96 pp. Vol. 2: 4 colour images; 176 pp.

Book 5: *Verne's Journey*. Cologne: Walther König, 1995. 19 colour and 8 duotone images; edition of 1000; 56 pp.

Book 6: *Haraldsdóttir*. Denver: Ginny Williams, 1996. 30 colour and 31 duotone images; edition of 1000; special edition of 100; 96 pp.

Book 7: *Arctic Circles*. Denver: Ginny Williams, 1998. 67 colour and 7 duotone images; edition of 1650; 140 pp.

Book 8: *Becoming a Landscape*. Denver: Ginny Williams, 2001. 2 volumes, each 22 colour images and 44 pp.; edition of 900; special edition of 100 ("Roni Horn: Part I and Part II: Selected artists books", 2001).

I've been working on this since 1988... The books are this very slow process of accumulation in the period of a life, my life... The underlying subject stays the same: Iceland and myself, the viewer and the view (Horn, 1997).

Again, the first interpretation of the title of this series might be going to a place (noun), but the books are just as much about the verb: to place oneself somewhere.

The verb, to place, as an activity in itself is a condition of being present. In the context of *To Place*, the verb operates dialectically (sic). The view is not separate from the viewer: Iceland viewed is something other than Iceland. Similarly, the identity of the viewer is not separate from the place viewed...

In *To Place*, the viewer is me and the view is Iceland. This reciprocity is key to the work. Each volume is a dialogue spun directly out of this interchange (Horn, 2000a, p. 104).

Louise Neri maintains that Horn's ultimate meaning of "to place" is the perceptual process of self-realization (Neri, 2000).

The work of Roni Horn has considerable material presence. She has the peculiar ability of being able to balance the here and the there. In the former case she is concerned with the viewer's poly-sensual experience; in the latter case her relation-

Figure A.8.28 Roni Horn, *To Place -- Book IV: Pooling Waters*, 1991, (Horn, 2000b, p. 59).

ship with the place is the starting point for her investigations. Her photographs show a considerable sensitivity to her own experience of place (and, particularly, to the landscape's changeability). It is by the strength of the connection *between* the here and the there, that her work is both personal and generous to others, retaining specificity to place at the same time as it is collectively available. Regardless of the form of the final artworks, neither the *here*, the *there*, nor the space in between, are neglected.

Figure A.8.29 Paula Levine, *San Francisco <-> Baghdad* (2003) showing the initial state in the animated sequence of a web-based locative media project at <http://paulalevine.banff.org/> (Levine, 2003).

A.8.5 Paula Levine

A different approach is taken by Paula Levine in her work *San Francisco <-> Baghdad* (2003) a web-based locative media project at <http://paulalevine.banff.org/> (Levine, 2004). In this work, launched one year after the United States invasion of Iraq, Levine brought together maps of San Francisco and Baghdad at the same scale to produce what she calls an “interlocational map” (Levine, c. 2004)⁶. At the website military targets from Baghdad were displayed to an accompanying soundtrack of the invasion. On the ground in San Francisco, geocaches⁷ containing information about the project, the U.S. Roll Call of Death and a commentary book, were located at each of the target sites. Levine’s aim with this project and more recent artworks is to create hybrid spaces

⁶ The word, *interlocation*, describes the position or space represented in these overlays. The word is composed of *inter*, suggesting *between* or *among*, and *locus*, meaning *place*. *Interlocation* brings to mind something taking **place** between locations which describes these mappings quite accurately. The maps reflect not only an overlaying of **one** site upon **another**, but they also visualize the space that exists as the result of that overlay, conceptually moving between **one** site and the other. Inter location is the space that arises through this **transposition** of **one place** upon **another**. It allows relationships between distant spaces to be simultaneously realized and offers an extended sense of relatedness (Levine, c. 2004, p. 19, emphasis in original).

⁷ The game of hunting for hidden treasures all over the world using GPS devices. See <http://www.geocaching.com/>.

via transpositional mapping: the *here* is overlaid with templates of events from the *there* as a method of making sense of geographical estrangement by bringing understandings of other places back to the local⁸.

Figures A.8.30 to A.8.31. Paula Levine, *San Francisco <-> Baghdad (2003)* showing the changes in the animated sequence of a web-based locative media project at <http://paulalevine.banff.org/> (Levine, 2003).

⁸ In 2002 when the *fieldwork/fieldwalking* project was formulated one of the original aims was to build a GIS using creative and Cartesian data about a place. At the time the software was extremely expensive. A collaborative partner (from within the University or from a commercial company) could not be found. Levine's project is typical of the flourishing of locative media projects that has resulted in the more widespread availability of open source DIY GIS software and open-source web-based applications since that time.

Figure A.8.32 Paula Levine, *San Francisco <-> Baghdad* (2003) showing the final state in the animated sequence of a web-based locative media project at <http://paulalevine.banff.org/> (Levine, 2003).



Figures A.8.33 to A.8.35 Images from *Walking around taking photographs*, digital print installation series, 2006. *The man who mistook his wife for a hat* (Oliver Sacks, 1986), *Labyrinths* (Borges, 1970) and *Labcoat stranding* retrieved in February 2006.

Famous last words of a field biologist: They never attack humans.