FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Heidegger’s Thing and The Island: How Performance Shapes Landscape

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In order to reflect upon how live performance shapes landscape, this essay offers an articulation of a particular experience of making performance with place. To reflect upon the relationship between performance and place I share a series of stories from Project R-hythm, a collaborative performance making project carried out in 2013-14. Alongside theoretical material including Heidegger’s The Thing, these stories are used to consider what landscape is.

Project R-hythm was a collaborative performance project with Martine Vreiling van Tuijl. It used performance making as a research practice through which to explore and develop understandings of a place; for the purposes of this essay we will call that place ‘The Island’. Project R-hythm's year long development concluded with a live performance event that invited the audience to explore The Island through the frame of a loosely choreographed walk.

The Island
Before we begin, there are some things about The Island you should know. The Island is a small tidal island in the North Sea. As a tidal island it is accessible, or ‘open’, to the mainland during low tide, via a causeway. As you drive to The Island the causeway is strewn about with seaweed and the concrete ripples with receding salt-water. The Island’s tidal nature makes the status of ‘island’ a somewhat confusing description, since it could also be defined as a ‘peninsula’ at low tide. The North Sea that surrounds The Island is, in turn, surrounded by Scotland, England, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The water moves, like this list, in an anti-clockwise rotation. At its deepest the North Sea is 700 metres deep. At its warmest the water is 17 degrees Celsius. And at its coldest it is roughly 6 degrees Celsius. I have known The Island for as long as I can remember, but until Project R-hythm it had been no more than a picturesque day-trip destination. My collaborator, Martine, has lived there all her life. Project R-hythm arose out of opportunity. Around the time that I was invited to do some work there I had a vague notion that I wanted to better understand the relationship between
performance and landscape - or probably more truthfully I wanted to make a massive, spectacular performance in a massive spectacular landscape; It would be something like Pina Bausch performing in a Robert Wilson thing. The way I imagined it, in the beginning, it would be totally derivative; You have to start somewhere. The progress of Project R-hym, and my developing relationship with The Island, resulted in rather quieter event and an emerging understanding of landscape as a very unreliable stage upon which to perform. My changing notion of what landscape is, as a result of the experience of Project R-hym, is the focus of this essay.

**Performance-based Research: notes on the relationship between practice and theory**

The aim of this essay is to offer an articulation of the experience of making performance with a particular place. For now we can call this type of performance ‘place-based’ performance. The articulation of making place-based performance presented in this essay supports a wider philosophical consideration of what landscape is, and how performance operates in relation to it. The process of reflection enacted in this essay is informed by a performance-based approach to research, whereby the making of performance is the research process. The stories of making place-based performance that I share attempt to give a sense of the experience of making, performing and being in a very particular place; The Island. They are anecdotal accounts of practice, of relational dynamics, of the failures and epiphanies of the making process, they relay the interconnections between memory and place, and are in themselves a performance of remembering. These stories, and the experiences they express, have informed my own understanding of landscape as temporal, experiential and performative. I will say more on the relationship between the stories and the performance activity itself below. In the context of this essay – as well as within my own performance practice – the stories shared here are coloured by their nearness to the theoretical material I draw on. Theoretical and conceptual material, from Heidegger to Ingold, is mobilized, appropriated, misrepresented and re-assembled throughout this essay as a strategy for reflecting upon the philosophical implications of place-based performance making; namely for
considering what landscape is. The theory present in this essay offers languages, turns of phrase and frameworks for making sense of a deeply confusing experience of place. The theory is not therefore being explained or critiqued as such. Rather, its handling is in line with Karan Barrad and Donna Harraway’s approach to ‘diffraction’, which emphasises the potential for creativity in a ‘deconstructive’ process of “reading for the constitutive exclusions of those ideas we can not do without” (see Barad in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012). The stories and reflective discussions offered within this essay do not, therefore, prove or disprove, explain or justify the theoretical material referenced. Instead the stories cannot be understood without the theory. Celine Condorelli enacts a similar alternative to critique in her own work around Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy. Condorelli’s series of texts, objects and installations entitled The Company She Keeps enact processes of “thinking together” with Arendt and McCarthy (amongst others), this thinking together is also termed “friendship” (Condorelli, 2013). Like Condorelli, accounts of practice are presented here in friendship with the theory that the essay mobilizes; Practice and theory think together through an intimate dialogue regarding what landscape is. Barad, Harraway and Condorelli’s generative alternatives to critique mirror the Heideggarian formulation “into this thing, that thing” (Heidegger, 2001) - more on that shortly.

The theoretical material that is gathered together with the performance activity in this essay defines a ‘site’, in the sense of a field of interest or concern. This thematic or non-location-specific ‘site’, accords with Kwon’s observation that contemporary understandings of the ‘site’ in ‘site-specific art’ tend towards matters of concern rather than the geographical situation:

“It is an informational site, a locus of overlap of text, photographs and video recordings, physical places and things. . . . It is a temporary thing; a movement; a chain of meanings” (Kwon, 2002)
Heidegger’s ‘thing’

It is necessary at this point to outline in brief elements of the discourse in Heidegger’s essay The Thing, along with some related theoretical material. This outline aims to clarify how that text is understood within this essay, and to highlight which particular elements of Heidegger's writing are being put to work in thinking about the nature of performance, place and landscape.

In The Thing Martin Heidegger explains that things, unlike objects, are active presences in the world, and that we become aware of their thingness in their being active, in their “presencing” or thinging (Heidegger, 2001). Heidegger uses the example of a jug to explain how, in thinging, things “gather” the world, and that this gathering – or “staying” - activity is, by definition, what a thing is:

“The jug presences as a thing (...) The giving of the outpouring [from the jug] can be drink. The outpouring gives water, it gives wine to drink. The spring stays on in the water of the gift. In the spring the rock dwells, and in the rock dwells the dark slumber of the earth, which receives the rain and the dew of the sky. In the water of the spring dwells the marriage of sky and earth. It stays in the wine given by the fruit of the vine, the fruit in which the earth’s nourishment and the sky’s sun are betrothed to one another. In the gift of the water, in the gift of wine, sky and earth dwell. But the gift of the outpouring is what makes the jug a jug. In the jugness of the jug, sky and earth dwell.” (ibid.)

Thinging, a gathering force, has the effect of “bringing-near” or “nearing” (ibid.). For Heidegger, the jug “nears” earth and sky, causing them to dwell together “in mutual belonging”; they are “betrothed, entrusted to one another” (ibid.). The activity of gathering, or bringing-near is one that I will return to in order to articulate the activity of ‘place-based’ performance making. Heidegger's jug-thing could be substituted with any other example of a thing; a window-thing gathers the inside and the outside, and in the glass of the window the sand from which it was made is stayed; the rocks – from which the sand became sediment – dwell in the window, and we already know that “in the rock dwells the dark slumber of the earth.” So too the beaches,
deserts and ocean beds in which those rocks once occurred, from which the sand was mined, dwell in the window. These minerals, materials, and places are married to the glass-workers and factories, to the heat in which the glass was formed. As I write these things are stayed in the old sash window in front of me, held in the wobbly inconsistencies of the Victorian glass. Tim Ingold invoked the mound as an example of a thing in his 2012 essay The Shape of the Land. For the purposes of this essay, the jug is a particularly useful example due to its explicitly being a holding vessel, so we will stick with Heidegger’s thing.

**Landscape and things**

According to Heidegger “staying appropriates” (Heidegger, 2001). In recent years phenomenological thinkers working within the loosely defined field of ‘cultural geography’ have appropriated Heidegger’s notion of the gathering-staying-thinging thing in order to put forward conceptions of landscape as temporal, experiential, and performative (see Wylie, 2007). Most enthusiastic of the Heideggarian thinkers of landscape is Tim Ingold, whose phenomenological understandings of place and landscape are indebted to Heidegger and his things. Ingold suggests that there is “an intrinsic connection between landscape and thing”. He uses Heideggarian “thinginess” - which “lies [in the thing’s] capacity to gather, to hold and give forth” - to formulate his own notion of ‘thing-places’ (Ingold, 2012). The thing-place, such as the mound, “gathers the lives of people who dwell in the land, it holds their collective memories and gives forth in the rulings and resolutions of unwritten law” (ibid.). This gathering of people, memories, rulings and unwritten laws (which could come under ‘behaviours’), affected by the mound-thing, *is* the landscape. Landscape therefore is visible and felt, geographical and metaphorical, spatial and temporal, defined as action - the action of gathering or being gathered. It is in connection to this understanding of landscape that I am considering what the activity of performance, and what performance does when it is in dialogue with place.
What is performance?

“Its life is a present one and only memory can carry it into the future”
(Kaprow, cited in Potts, 2008)

This essay considers what landscape is through the activity of performance making. The performance making activities, which constitute the research process, were carried out by myself (the author), in collaboration with a handful of other artists and researchers. These activities were informed by particular approaches to making and understanding what performance is. Despite the rethinking that was necessitated by the project, which I will go on to share, it is important to clarify some of fundamental characteristics of ‘performance’ as it is conceived of within the context of this research.

“Performances are actions” (Schechner, 2002). As such performance is temporal and “performance’s only life is in the present” (Phelan, 1993). In other words performance is live. Or as Kwon suggests performance is defined by its “unfixed impermanence, experienced as an unrepeatably fleeting situation” (Kwon, 2002). Further to this emphasis on temporality and action, the performance enacted within this research was experiential. It was developed through experimental means. And the process of making is understood as a philosophical engagement with place.

Experiential performance

Experiential performance, as defined by Laura Cull and Matthew Goulish, is explicitly participatory and immersive. As such it places emphasis on the audience experience and the temporality - or live-ness - of the event (Cull and Goulish, 2007). Phelan states that “performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated” (Phelan, 1993) and experiential performance brings the unrepeatability of experience to the fore. Through heightening the audience’s awareness of the time-based nature of the performance, and presencing this as a thematic as well as a formal concern of the
event, the audience’s own experience becomes the central and defining aspect of the experiential performance.

Experiential performance tends to occur in locations other than the traditional theatre auditorium. The auditorium is a space in which the audience have been trained not to attend to the specifics of place – to disregard the material particularities of the theatre building itself. The auditorium audience have been primed to ‘suspend disbelief’ and attend only to that which is presented within the bounds of the stage. Performances that take place outside of the space of the auditorium allow a greater capacity for defining the audience role within the specific event and its location; if the location of the performance is already unexpected, the audience’s awareness of the environment is already heightened, and the rules of engagement can be written anew. As Kwon explains:

“the space of art [is] no longer perceived as a blank slate, a tabula rasa, but a real place. The art object or event in this context [is] to be singularly and multiply experienced in the here and now through the bodily presence of each viewing subject, in a sensory immediacy of spatial extension and temporal duration” (Kwon, 2002)

Experiential performance has an established lineage, and the practice implemented within this research recalls the work of Allan Kaprow in particular. Throughout the 1950’s to 80’s artist Kaprow created artworks that he described successively as ‘Environments’, ‘Happenings’, and ‘Activities’. These art events were ephemeral, performative and immersive – and as such can be described as experiential. Audience members and performers moved through specific places according to rules of engagement that were outlined by the artist, conveyed either as explicit instructions or through the limitations of the performance space itself. Kaprow was heavily influenced by John Cage, who was his teacher at The New School (New York). Both Kaprow and Cage’s performances require that the audience realise the work through their own participation in the event – listening, moving, or carrying out practical tasks. Thus audience experience is central to the thematic and formal
concerns of both artists. Kwon describes the work of Cage, Kaprow and related arts as the “anti-idealist, anti-commercial site-specific practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s”, and notes how these performance events “incorporated the physical conditions of a particular location as integral to the production, presentation, and reception of art” (Kwon, 2002). Kaprow’s work, in this sense, was ‘site-specific’. The task-based nature of Kaprow’s ‘site-specific’ work also lends itself to Ingold’s definition of landscape as ‘taskscape’: “just as the landscape is an array of related features, so – by analogy – the taskscape is an array of related activities” (Ingold, 1993). We will return to the idea of place-based performance as a taskscape later.

**Experimental Performance Making**

Discussing the work of Allan Kaprow, Cull describes his ‘Environments’, ‘Happenings’, and ‘Activities’ as “attention training” (Cull, 2011). Attention training activities are tasks that aim to heighten one’s awareness of place and time. In the context of my own research, attention training activities were used throughout the making process and final event to attune the artists’ and audience’s perception of various physical and temporal phenomena of The Island. Through the attention training activities we experimented with our relationship to place. This experimentation was the process through which we tried to get to know The Island, and develop material and performative strategies for the final event. The experiments with awareness that we played with included sensory alterations, such as wearing wax earplugs that affected one’s perception of place in the immediate, as well as methods for note taking designed to encourage attention towards specific aspects of The Island. Often the attention training was designed to support an awareness of that which is not immediately visible in the environment, or to note marked changes in the landscape over the project’s yearlong duration. Activities were developed through collaborative dialogues – practical and verbal negotiations – and were adapted and modified in response to their affect upon us, their practical feasibility as we moved around The Island, and according to the performative and philosophical implications they revealed. This fluid and responsive process is understood here as *experimental* performance making.
Performance Philosophy

Performance Philosophy, in academic terms, is a relatively new discipline—though it works to highlight the existing philosophical bent of historical performance work, as well as manifesting in contemporary practice, performance-based research, and reflection thereon. The field of Performance Philosophy concerns itself with "the myriad potential relationships that might be understood to exist between 'performance' and 'philosophy'" (Cull, 2015). Esa Kirkkopelto suggests that Performance Philosophy's aim is to "to recognise the genuine nature, in other words the philosophical bearing, of the questions practitioners present to their artistic and academic communities as well as to a wider society" (Kirkkopelto, 2015). The reflective process this essay makes manifest, similarly, aims to unpick the philosophical implications of the experience of making performance with The Island, and in doing so come to an understanding of what landscape is through the lens of 'place-based' performance.

'Place-based'

Miwon Kwon explains that "site-specific art was initially based on a phenomenological or experiential understanding of the site", but that with a refashioned conception of 'site' "contemporary site-oriented works occupy hotels, city streets, housing projects, prisons, schools, hospitals, churches, zoos, supermarkets, and they infiltrate media spaces such as radio, newspapers, television, and the Internet" (2002). Before moving on to share some stories of the project itself, I will clarify my own use of the terms 'site', 'space', 'place' and 'landscape'. In doing so I will move towards defining the nature of my own performance as 'place-based'. Clarification of these terms is particularly important in the light of Malpas' observation that "place seems an evanescent concept, disappearing in the face of any attempt to inquire into it" (Malpas, 2006), and Doreen Massey's insistence that despite the significant political implications of the ways in which we imagine and articulate space, the very nature of space itself is thought about very little (Massey, 2005).
As suggested above, within the context of this research ‘site’ refers not to a geographical, spatial or temporally bound situation, but to the matters of concern for the project itself. Site, is thus ‘project-based’ rather than ‘place-based’, and encompasses the reflection process enacted by this essay, as well as the activity that took place on The Island.

The term ‘space’ has come to refer, within cultural geography and related disciplines, to the abstract rather than the specific. Anchored by Tuan’s 1977 *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, this notion of ‘space’ counterpoints measurable, universal spatiality with local, experiential and qualitative ‘place’. In *For Space* Massey argued for a greater proximity of the concepts ‘space’ and ‘place’, which would be achieved through an awareness of the interconnectedness of the local and the global. The necessary entanglement of local and global scales, made more everyday through digital technology’s ability to collapse distance, problematises the implied ‘rooted-ness’ of ‘place-bound' thinking (Massey, 2005). The term ‘place’ in this essay is aligned with Massey’s call for a greater consideration of the non-local aspects of a given, specific location. Place is not *rooted or bound* due to the technological and mnemonic connections that mean our experience of place bleeds beyond geographical boundaries. Despite Massey’s reservations (many of which are well founded), the use of ‘place’ in this essay also aligns itself with Heidegger, who “having shifted from his earlier proposition of time over space […] moved to reconceptualise space as place” (Massey, 2005). In Heidegger’s ‘place’ “the distinction between near and far has been dissolved” (Julian Young in Ralón, 2001), and it is understood as inherently temporal as well as spatial. The temporality of place, and the definition of landscape that emerged out of the experience of making place-based performance is the focus of this essay. Thus, rather than define place in terms of temporality, or go on to discuss the nature of landscape at this stage, I shall let the project’s implications unfold from here.
Notes on the articulation or translation of experience

It looks well on the page, but never
Well enough. Something is lost
When wind, sun, sea upbraid
(Basil Bunting, 2000)

Alex Potts suggested that “writing, for [Kaprow], existed in creative tension with an artistic practice” (Potts, 2008). Such creative tension is caused in part by the impossibility of articulating the experience of performance, or the unfolding of the event into text. Performance by definition refuses repetition, it “occurs over a time which will not be repeated” and “cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulations of representations […] once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (Phelan, 1993). The stories that follow therefore do not represent the performance, neither the making process nor the final public performance event. Instead they are the exposure of a thinking through, a reflection process that puts to work Heidegger’s thing and Ingold’s thing-places, Massey’s insistent call for measured articulations of place, and Phelan’s reminder that performance’s “only life is in the present” (ibid.). This reflection process extends and is a part of the wider project titled Project R-hym. Deirdre Heddon prefaces her own reflections on ‘autotopographical’ performance with the statement “translating a creative practice into written text also necessitates a wilful act of creativity” (Heddon, 2009). In line with Heddon, the stories below necessarily and unavoidably fictionalise Project R-hym in their creative articulation of experience. ‘Translation’ would suggest that there is an original singularly true performance, an event that these stories re-perform in a different language. However, performance, in its live-ness is necessarily multiple – held temporarily in the diverse and contradictory experiences of numerous audience members, performers, human and non-human witnesses – and so there is no true version to re-tell here, no original from which these stories are a translation. Since the experiential nature of the performance event means that “one’s subject resists vision and may not be “really there” at all” (Phelan, 1993) the stories that follow are their own thing, gathered with the performance-thing through
the dialogue of this essay. They hold The Island, the performance and the theory together with you, the reader.

The stories have been constructed from notes taken during the making process and woven through with transcriptions of conversations with collaborators and audience members; they share memories of performing and being in The Island, and they echo borrowed turns of phrase and the absorbed material of others. They aim to invite you into the landscape of the project.

**Waterproofs and Walking Boots**

*There is no rehearsal room on the island.*

I thought if we walked long enough, over and over again enough, then we’d find the constants, we’d be able to reduce it down to its essential constant measurable parts, we would be able to distil the island and identify a stability upon which to build. These sites would make it clear to us what this place is, why this place is what it is. These sites would be our stage.

Because there is no rehearsal room we are always with the wind.
Because we are always with the wind we close down our peripheral vision. Hats. Gloves. Long johns and earplugs. We wear headphones. Are equipped with windshields.

We wear waterproofs and walking boots. I wear waterproofs and walking boots, She wears wet-look leggings and lace up shoes. We use our shoulders and foreheads to fend off the rain. Heads bowed into the wind we call to each other about how we will need more performers and where we will put them.
There is no rehearsal room on the island.

I imagine the private space of her bedroom. You cannot see the sea from her bedroom. I imagine the private space of her bathing. I remember the sanctuary of the bath, of the lockable bathroom door.

About the Sea
The second time we walked to St Cuthbert’s beach it wasn’t there.

The plan was to walk the route again to see what it is like without earplugs. Hearing.

As we descended the gravel path I did not notice that the rocks below are now submerged – this is a clue I haven’t learnt yet – and as we turn right from the steps the beach is not there.

I did know about the sea. I do know about the sea. How it rises and lowers and how this is the reason that people come here in the first place.

This time we are repeating not improvising so we know what we were doing - where we are going to go. As we turn away from the steps and the beach isn’t there I imagine when it is all still sand and you are just floating through it.

She said she’d never been there before and we are coming to terms with the idea that we will never go there again.

We have set out to find some residue or essence of this remembered place, some evidence.

We have been doing this for a year.
Wet-look leggings

If we could float the hydrophone on the water then we’d be able to listen to the surface. Which is the bit we need to hear. That’s the bit in the way. I don’t think it’s the bottom. We listened to that, that’s just a load of seaweed and rocks and shit. That’s a different world altogether - which isn’t what we need. That’s an underwater thing. When we got to the bottom of the steps, it was this surface - when it was all still sand and you were like floating through it – if we can to listen to this grey rippling surface, the thing that stopped us from getting to the beach, then maybe we will be able to work out what this place is.

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Do you have any penny floaters? … any of those cheap footballs that float?

(I think saying the word hydrophone makes me sound like I know what I’m doing. Hydrophones make me look like I’m a specialist).

Neil knows what a hydrophone is.

Neil runs the island shop and he knows what a hydrophone is.

Everyone here knows what a hydrophone is.

It’s a microphone for the sea.

So everyone here knows what a hydrophone is.

He does that sort of roll your eyes “you kids and your hair brained schemes I can only imagine what you are up to this time.” When I’m with Judy this is inflected with sexual innuendo. I’m glad that this can be inflected with sexual innuendo. It means that I can be a hair brained kid and a grown woman - according to Neil – who runs shop – who knows what a hydrophone is. I retain flexibility here.

“This one comes in a net so you can use that to put the hydrophone inside, and weight it with stones so the microphone sits at the surface level rather than under the ball.”
Neil is also two steps ahead on the buoyancy front.

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She throws the ball out and it floats and we hear a brief general wateriness.

Then silence.

Maybe it will rebalance.

Silence. We are wearing headphones.

We wait.

We watch the sound and wait.

Day, dim laps at the shore
In petulant ripples
The football keeps floating.
Our headphones remain silent.

As we pull at the hydrophone cord - hoping for a bit of splish - it slowly drags along the bottom of the sea, bumping over rocks and scratching seaweed towards us.

We agree that because she has wet-look leggings on she should go out and retrieve the ball, that is still bobbing atop the surface of the sound. She seems to have convinced me of this logic.

(When I was small I lent my favourite doll to some film-maker friends of my parents and later found out that they had filmed it floating out into the North Sea).
She’s right, you can’t tell that her leggings are wet now that they actually are.

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**Reflections**

In the early stages of *Project R-hythm* we enacted what might be described as a topographical approach to the task of performance making; we hoped to measure, define, map and *know* the island by traversing it extensively and repeatedly. We approached the task of performance making like the topographer:

“*who is concerned to map out a particular region and who has [...] the task of mapping out that region while located within it. Such a task can only be accomplished by looking to the interconnections among the features of that region and through a process of repeated triangulation and traverse—and a good deal of walking [...] Of course the topographer aims to arrive at a mapping of the region that will in some sense be “objective”—at least within a given set of cartographic parameters*” (Malpas, 2006)

The tools we set out with – windshields on our microphones, Ordinance Survey maps, cameras – as well as our *(my)* attire, betrayed a belief that there was a singular, static and ‘true’ Island, an ‘objective’ knowledge to be found behind the inconvenience of the weather. This approach corresponds to the thinking of early ‘site-specific’ work discussed by Kwon in *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*:

“*initially [site-specific art] took the site as an actual location, a tangible reality, its identity composed of a unique combination of physical elements: length, depth, height, texture, and shape of walls and rooms; scale and proportion of plazas, buildings, or parks; existing conditions of lighting, ventilation, traffic patterns; distinctive topographical features, and so forth*” (Kwon, 2002)

In this early phase of *Project R-hythm*, during our repeated failures to measure The Island and therefore know our performance space, I longed for a rehearsal room, the traditional thinking space of the performance maker. In the rehearsal room I
imagined we would survey our findings, drink tea and make solid decisions about what to put on the stage; the stage being The Island we were yet to discover in amongst all the wind and the rain and the never-ceasing tide. Always outside, our notes, documentation, audio recordings and collected objects felt like they were disappearing behind us as we kept walking to keep warm, they fell out of our pockets, smudged in the rain, were misheard through the tireless wind.

We were thwarted in our ‘topographical’ endeavours rather early on. Despite having a basic understanding of tidal movement from high school geography and an enthusiasm for swimming, we had not married the movement of the water with the reality of The Island as a ‘space’ for performance. As the ebb and flow of the tide submerged, washed away and shifted the parameters of our stage, not only did our plans float away, our tools for working and our conception of how to perform in this place dissolved. To be in this place we would have to learn how to move with it, to work alongside it, within its alien rhythms. The notion of planning became absurd; how do you plan an action when the place you imaged performing it in is constantly changing shape? When each low tide reveals a new stage? I arrived on The Island with a general notion that performance is by its very nature unrepeatable, but with the experience of repeat performances as ‘doing it again differently’ on the same stage. But this time it was not only the performance that couldn’t be replicated, it was the stage that kept disappearing. The Island revealed itself to be very unlike the neat yellow ground plan offered by our maps.

*If you look at the maps you’ll see a representation of the island’s boundary at high tide, and also a large yellow patch surrounding it, which represents the approximate shape of the land at low tide.*

*On Google Maps the island is shown at high tide.*

*On Google Earth it’s at low tide.*
And on Google Street View it’s at high tide – which is odd because the Google Car must have had to stay on the island for a good few hours, but they still haven’t bothered to drive down all of the roads that make up the village. There are a couple of nice pubs on The Island, they all do food, but the Moon Under Water does the best mussels.

In our repeated attempts to return to the site of previous performed gestures we were learning that “place should not be assumed to be identical with the “where” of a thing” (Malpas, 2006). As the sea changed the shape of the island and the weather held us back from connecting with what we believed to be a real place, The Island resisted repetition and return; it kept moving, and in its constant flux it proved that “it is not a background, nor is it a stage” (Inglis, 1997, cited in Bender, 1998). When the “where” of the place failed us we lost our stage and we were forced to develop new methods for getting to know The Island. Defined by change all that was left of this place was our experience of the passing of time, thus place came to be understood through Project R-hythm as primarily temporal. It did not occur to us in these words, we were not fully aware that our notion of place was being fundamentally re-evaluated. The progress of things was a little more like “I don’t know what to do, lets just keep doing this until we think of something”, but in the keeping-doing that The Island encouraged us to enact we became absorbed in the experience of place, and less concerned with the initial – hopeless - topographical endeavour. The keeping-doing moved us towards a philosophical consideration of what landscape is, a broader enquiry than the topographical attempt to know what The Island is.

Like the topographer, though less optimistic about our ability to procure an “objective” sense of The Island, we did a lot of walking. Walking became a base upon which to build the attention training activities that would lead us to a greater understanding of how to move, how to perform, how to “be” with The Island. We used walking in the environment of The Island “as a support system for the formulation, interpretation and exploration of ideas” (Massey, 2012). We walked to specific locations, we walked to listen, we walked with earplugs in, we failed to walk, we walked in the driving rain, we walked in disguise, we walked together and apart;
like The Island, we kept moving. We used the experience of walking as a mode through which to experiment with our relationship to The Island through attention training activities. We did this by altering our sensory experience of the place in various ways, sometimes by depriving ourselves of one sense in order to heighten another, or by consciously attending to particular movements, geographical or meteorological phenomena that we encountered. On other occasions we use the framework of the walk as a context in which to share material that carried associative, personal relevance to our relationship with The Island; as we wandered we told stories, played recorded music, placed objects in particular locations and exchanged images. In doing so we forged new relationships between ourselves, and the materials and places we connected. This forging of connections and associative meanings shaped our experience of the place through a process of bringing-near. As our focus shifted from mapping The Island to considering the very nature of the topographical experience, walking became a “state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together” (Solnit, 2014). Accordingly, our approach to performance making shifted from pre-planned gestures to be situated at ‘sites’ around The Island to developing performative ways of moving and being with The Island.

Kind of Chaos

*Standing in the wind and the rain with the sea and the earth at Spaniel’s Head it felt as if we were finally there now. The memory is of turning. Of temperature and turning and the movement of colour.*

*Its kind of chaos*

*The flowers feel out of place. Washed out flowers guarding a small pile of damp ash - surrounding a small patch of heavy white noise in the periphery of the movement.*

*It is nothing.*
It is weighted differently.

It is precisely nothing now and the bright white obelisk only emphasizes the chaos of sound and colour shifting, so that it too, we too, flicker with.

‘Landscape Performance’
The final performance event took place in the summer. 15 people joined myself and my collaborators on a walk around The Island. It took approximately 6 hours, which fitted with the duration of low tide, meaning that The Island was ‘open’. Walkers were aged between 9 and (an estimated) 70 years old. It was sunny. But not very warm. As we walked, three ‘performers’ - including myself - introduced a series of activities to the audience, ways of walking, objects and textual material. Performers also enacted gestures and worked to gently choreograph the group’s movement around The Island. An early activity carried out by the audience-walkers involved eating and drinking whilst wearing wax earplugs. This attention training performance activity
was intended to heighten the presence of one’s own body in the experience of place, highlight the body as a filter and material through which one experiences place.

“I wasn’t sure what the wax was for, but I took it as an invitation to look around more. I think I presumed for the most part that it was intended to be a ‘sensory’ experience... though I wasn't sure if the idea was to ‘remove’ the acoustic environment (so as to draw attention to the visual aspects of the landscape) or draw attention to it (as the sounds of my ears etc. became quite focused). In either case, it was enjoyable - it didn't matter that I didn't know. We walked down a path to the beach and then sat down and ate some chocolate.” (Audience-walker remembering the event)

Later in the walk the group were invited to dress as tourists, donning cameras, sunglasses, and equipped with maps they blended into the busier parts of the island that swarmed with day-trippers during low tide. The act of disguise alerted the audience-walkers to how they perform their own identity in relation to The Island, and the ways in which this enables or denies anonymity in the landscape.

The tasks the audience-walkers were invited to carry out, along with the material that was read aloud, played through speakers and presenced along the route, shaped their experience of The Island, and in doing so shaped the landscape. The performance can be understood as a taskscape in the vein of Ingold: “an array of related activities” (Ingold, 1993). Ingold’s taskscape is landscape; the taskscape that is the place-based performance shapes the landscape. It does this by being a thing. Just like Heidegger’s thing, the performance gathers people, place, material and memory, and this gathering is landscape. Thus, reflecting upon the experience of Project R-hythm I have moved to a description of such work as ‘landscape performance’, where landscape describes the effect of the performance rather than the context. “To hold a space” is a phrase meaning to centre or focus the activity of a place, to provide a focus. It is used in theatre to describe what an effective performance does with the auditorium; when the actor “holds the space” she holds the attention of the audience and enables them to focus on the emerging elements...
and meanings of the event. Recalling Heidegger’s jug, landscape performance shapes landscape by *holding* people, place, material and memory together over the period of bracketed time in which it occurs. This might also be understood as bringing these elements into a dialogue with one another. Or to use Solnit’s language bringing these “characters finally in conversation together.” Furthermore, the performance maker, like Heidegger’s potter, “shapes the void” of the performance-thing in which these aspects are held, the performance maker’s role is to shape the landscape by holding constitutive elements of audience’s experience of place. *Project R-hyhtm* did this using chocolate, tourist disguises, earplugs and an Elvis song. Further to the choreographed movements and material gathered by the performance makers, the audience bring their own associations, memories, and materials to the performance. This multiplicity means that the landscape of the performance is *intersubjective* and “at any given moment [it is] multiple and contradictory” (Bender, 1998).

**Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Julie Crawshaw for causing *Project R-hyhtm* to happen, to Martine Vreiling van Tuijl for collaborating, and to Tim Shaw and Rachel Gay for their contributions to the project. I am also grateful to Magda Van Tuijl for her support. This research was funded by a UK AHRC KE Hub for the Creative Economy (ref: AH/J005150/1 Creative Exchange) and was also supported by Tender Buttons Ltd.

**References**


