PART 5

The conclusion of the project

Introduction

In this last part of the exegesis I will describe the final resolution of the visual work in exhibition format. I will address what I consider to be successes and shortcomings of the project and examine the contribution the project has made to the field.

Resolution of the project in exhibition format

The project has resulted in an exhibition that comprises three parts:
• A photogram frieze arranged in an L-shape consisting of 12 sections and measuring a total length of 18.5 meters.
• A U-shaped space containing 180 finds in the form of digital images.
• A text piece of vinyl lettering on the walls opposite the photogram frieze.

I consider these three components as communicating with each other and together forming one cohesive exhibition.

The photogram frieze in the first space, leaning against the gallery walls, invites the viewer’s dynamic involvement, moving, glancing, and imagining beyond the borders of the individual sections of the frieze. Yet the overall subdued light in the space and the predominantly dark images also want to immerse the viewer and communicate the sense of pre-conceptual experiencing that stimulated the making of the images. The position of the images leaning low against the walls, bids the viewer to yield.

My intention has been to allow the individual sections of the frieze autonomy as images while at the same time constituting parts of the complete piece. Accordingly I have employed a variety of expressive modes and formal strategies. I have attempted to make each section represent a fragment from my accumulated experience of Maria Island. Each section carries with it an invisible larger field of physical and emotional memory. There is a fluctuation between ordered and chaotic, gestural, lyrical and descriptive image structures. On the other hand I have used simple formal means such as lines, tones and positive or negative shapes to give the indication of continuation between the sections. Importantly, all the marks that compose the images have been made by fragments of matter from Maria Island that have touched the photographic paper and have left their traces through the actions of light and chemicals.
The text piece attempts to set a conceptual context without mirroring the images by means of a journalistic, explanatory mode of writing. It relates to my notion of the ground as repository of matter and histories and the idea that, if one had ears to listen one could hear the ground talk. The text is positioned on the wall facing the photogram frieze, in white and at the same height as the upper edge of the frieze. This formal connection aims to create spatial coherence and a sense of enfolding in the first space.

After moving through this sparsely lit first space the viewer is led into a well-lit U-shaped space that holds 180 digital images. This personalised taxonomy of Maria Island is made up of differently sized images that hang in clusters on the walls. Each image represents a trace from an object found on Maria Island. In most cases the scale of the image represents the object in life-size. Occasionally the scale is enlarged up to 200%. This intermittent zooming in closer refers to a particular intensity in stopping and looking, as through a magnifying glass. It also contributes to a rhythmic variation in the overall pattern of the body of images. Each image occurs only once. In some cases I have made two scans and prints of the same object from two sides where I felt that this contributed to the overall reading of the object.

The images are digitally printed on matt archival paper in subtle duo and tritones. The velvety paper surface and the tonal additions of sepia and blue-grey to black render the remnants of flora and fauna precious and assist in attracting the viewer to a close examination of detail. Each print is mounted to give it a presence as object that protrudes slightly from the wall.

The ordering of the images in the space follows a simple left to right or right to left flow, from remnants found near the foreshore to those found on the land and back to the foreshore, acknowledging the island as entity and my passage of arriving, dwelling and departing.

The images in this frieze are not grouped in a scientific system but according to an intuitive mode of collecting and assembling. I refer to a form of classification that is based, unlike the analytical Linnaean system, on a semantic network in which each being or thing is experienced as connected to the world. Historically, the cabinets of the world and the Wunderkammern in Europe during the 16th century were part of these ‘systems of correspondences.’ Barry Lopez refers to a network of associations on the basis of his experiences in the land:

These are all elements of the land, and what makes landscape comprehensible are the relationships between them. One learns a

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98 The text piece reads: calls cries laughs woes float slide shift settle ground songs sighs move linger time tremble fall hover drift

99 I refer here to Michel Foucault’s book The Order of Things in which he elaborates, especially in Chapter 5, ‘Classifying’, on various systems of classification.

landscape finally not by knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationships in it ...

The three components combine a visualisation of being immersed in experiencing the land through the photogram frieze, a reference to an underlying concept with the text piece, and with the body of digital images a manifestation of the wish to comprehend through the accumulation of fragments and detail. The ambient and reflected light levels in both spaces are important. The subdued light in the first space invites and involves the viewer on a predominantly emotive level whereas the bright second space entices alert observing. The two spaces rely on and link with each other.

**Successes and shortcomings of the project and its contribution to the field**

In this project I have developed a photographic language that does not rely on the monocular lens of the camera. Rather, by employing methodologies that required my extended physical presence in a place and a tactile involvement with matter for the making of my images, I have succeeded in presenting a vision of the land that offers an alternative to the mostly scenographic, distancing views of conventional landscape photography. My images of traces link my physicality with the physicality of the land and the fragments that produced the traces and, by implication, my experience of being in the land.

However, I acknowledge that my photographic images like other photographs are flat – the image surfaces indeed deny tactility. Accordingly the communication of a tactile physical experience remains illusory; it can only be evoked in the imagination of the viewer. The haptic quality resides in the methodology of the image-making only.

The investigation of my visual field has shown me that there can be a great degree of fluidity between the concept and the depiction of landscape as perspectival, objectified, scenographic view and the attempt to communicate a physical and emotional experience of being in the land. I have found that artists like David Stephenson, Tokihiro Sato, Hamish Fulton and Richard Long use the monocular lens of the camera for all or some of their works while intensely dealing with, and communicating their experiences of, being in places, and in particular an awareness of time as duration. And John Wolseley’s varied visual accounts of his wanderings include perspectival views as well. The traces produced by Richard Long and Nikolaus Lang, where the artists transfer actual matter from a natural environment to the gallery as a material tactile essence of place, time and experience represent a phenomenological approach perhaps most astutely.

The works that have had a direct bearing on my project, because they have employed the photographic medium in a similar way to how I have negotiated it, are the photograms by Harry Nankin and Susan Derges as well

as the catalogue of plant forms by Karl Blossfeldt. And I connect very strongly to Nikolaus Lang’s Roadkill as concept and visual result.

While I have used remnants – static natural objects – for my photograms as Harry Nankin did for most of his 1993 works, the sense of layering and movement that I have arrived at in my long photogram frieze differs substantially from the indexical intent that I read in Nankin’s images. The photograms of water in motion by Nankin and Derges excite me as concepts and as working strategies and, particularly in the case of Derges’ images, I adore their power and elegance. I see my photogram work as combining the trace of matter with traces of my experiences in the land, or memories of them. Accordingly the images have been thought out, and designed, in a manner that is similar to the way one might work on a drawing or painting.

Lang’s Roadkill, its intensity and relentlessly singular focus on a dramatic scale impacts deeply. I have allowed myself a more lyrical and playful approach in my photogram frieze. The rigour I have applied has consisted in exploring a variety of expressive modes without losing coherence.

I appreciate the differences between Long’s and Fulton’s text pieces, but I want to highlight here the similarities I perceive. These are the factual references to place, time and environmental conditions on walks that both artists often note and infuse with poetry in remarkable ways. My text piece does not relate to a particular time, place or experience on Maria Island but to a concept that has supported my approach to making images.

In my personalised taxonomy of Maria Island, consisting of 187 digital prints, I have developed a systematised manner of image making inspired by Karl Blossfeldt’s methodology, albeit using a different technology. Blossfeldt’s use of ‘formal logic and stringency’ and his capacity to make his photographs work ‘as artworks and as images of nature’ have certainly stimulated my approach. I intend my group of digital images, in their variable volume as one work, to resonate with the two other components of work in this submission.

In conclusion:

My original contribution to the field rests on the employment of two seemingly disparate technologies, the photogram process and the digital scan, to materially engage with a natural environment, and to translate this experience with images and text into a three dimensional gallery environment. My investigation has resulted in an interpretation of the environment of Maria Island and it provides one model for a viable phenomenological approach to the representation of landscape.

102 In the slim reference to scanner photography that I have been able to find the writer links the scanner photography by Katinka Matson to the technique of photogravure and Karl Blossfeldt’s work. See internet page http://www.katinkmatson.com/

103 See ’Part 4: The development of the project’, p. 8.

104 Ibid.
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