

FEELING JAPAN

Geo-Emotionailty (READ ALOUD)

“In July 2011 I visited the Japanese island of Kyushu and became fascinated with the physical geography I found there. Volcanic forces had dramatically distorted the landscape; sub-surface pressures had contorted its skin into monumental cones and cavernous calderas. Hot sulphurous steam squeezed through rocky fissures and pools of hot bubbling mud. The island’s population appeared to be strangely at ease with their subterranean threat; they were somehow at home with the ever-present peril of potential catastrophe. Indeed, the island’s inhabitants exploited their enemy; they diverted the potentially destructive energy to warm their homes, heat their baths and cook their food. The menace was managed, but the traces of physical violence were there for all to see in the beautiful and expansive scenery; evidence of the fight lay in the black basalt rock formations and the gaping lava gullies. I encountered nothing but calm and polite people on Kyushu. On the surface, nobody seemed concerned with his or her geological predicament at all. This strange set of circumstances set me thinking...”

MAKING IN MINO

Rhythm of seasons. Rhythm of the body making paper – rocking backwards and forwards. Rhythm and routine of the job. Pressures of performing. Working with hands with naturally sourced materials. Touching, feeling, seeing and being in place. A very PROFOUND and affecting experience. The paper I was making became inseparable from me – the smell, the feel all left its mark upon me.

MEN AND MOUNTAINS

Acquaintance with material mountains. Conquering the world (Macho and upper class). Non-reciprocal. Physically comparable and meaningful approach. Elitist and non-inclusive.

COLLABORATION IN THE WYE VALLEY

Professor Richard Coles obtained AHRC funding for project with Wye Valley AONB Team. He and I fitted together due to my interest in haptic interactions and interest in feeling the world through the eyes and his experience in facilitating environmental research.

VIEWFINDERS IN THE WYE VALLEY

Arguably the Birthplace of British guided tourism. 1770 Reverend William Gilpin went down the Wye in a little boat – Plenty of ‘Visual Roughness’ to appeal to the eye (we have that in common). I imagine the experience to have been quite overwhelming. He needed to capture and control the experience and take it away. Birth of the Picturesque Movement. The narrowing of the visual field. Reduced to a single plane of experience.

FEELING FOR SPACE

As an artist, I approached the Wye Valley beyond the Picturesque. Beyond the frame. I suggest we need a bigger picture. Pursue a multi-modal approach to making art. Contemporary society. It’s what’s outside the picture that counts. Experience over representation. Handling the landscape. Storing somatically what we encounter. Touching topography. Feeling for space. Gripping the geography. Responding to the proximity of things near and far.

IMMERSIVE APPROACH

My body has been central to the experience. I relate to the body of the landscape. Lung like trees. Vascular *Trunnels*. ('Chlorophyll soaked') Proximity of materials to the body. Wye Valley is well suited to intensity of physical experiences. The body in space and movement through materials and a real sense of materials moving through us (moisture in the air, smells & sounds). Again the Wye Valley contains magic and 'mystery' and is a place of high visuospatial contrast - a tantalising and *tactile* feast for the eyes.

VIRTUAL COMPETITION

Sony VR arrives in September, arguably democratising military level simulation technology to a massive global audience – it will be immersive, distracting and seductive escapism but it will be a lot of fun. At present though, only the eyes and ears are attended to – not fully immersive in the way reality is...at the moment.

THE FUTURE FEELS GOOD

So far my research has so brought me to the understanding that active bodily engagement is intrinsic to a deeper relationship with place. I have experienced magical moments in the Wye Valley (natural and man-made - in the case of the last two river festivals) and being physically present was central (and indeed WAS necessary) to those experiences. They made me **feel** part of a bigger body and corporeally connected to a wider world.

THANK YOU

Summary of what participants might take away from the session:

- A broader view of contemporary artists aesthetic values – those beyond the Picturesque.
- An introduction to the expression *Geo-Emotional*; what it is and how the Wye Valley exemplifies the term.
- Participants will understand the value of a *multi-modal* (all five senses) approach to landscape encounters.