

September 9, 2011

**Unsettled Entrapment of the Beautiful o/Other in Unified Spaces: a short essay on the conceptual works of Kye Wilson.**

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“The questions of how people use new technologies for cultural work and what role these practices play in daily life are increasingly important to the study of creativity in action.”<sup>1</sup>

This short essay is about creative concept; collaboration; experience; performance and space – all of which are fundamental to works such as Wilson’s *The Entrapment of the o/Other* - a powerful digital installation shown in August 2011 at the Round Tower, a fifteenth century fortification in Old Portsmouth, UK.

Wilson’s concept is popularly promoted as a “site specific sound installation that aims to give the viewer an emotive experience through a form of sensory engagement in an interesting and challenging historical space.”<sup>2</sup> This short essay will argue that such challenges not only provide emotive experience for the viewer, but also raise questions as to how we critique and read installations exhibited in a public place that also have a significant historical aura. How do we experience performance and embodiment in relation to historicity and space? Just what is the relationship of artistic experimentation with creative research here; and what, if any, is the impact on practice and theoretical discourse in the arts? These are some of the questions that work such as Wilson’s inspire.

His installations including *Unsettled – Beautiful*<sup>3</sup> for example, appear to be created within a considered format. They are site specific, and contain life size projections described by Wilson as “video trompe l’oeil,”<sup>4</sup> using the “rigid confines of a long static tableau camera shot”<sup>5</sup>. It is these static shots that not only allow the performer to express a confined embodiment required in the thematic of the work, but also confine the viewer to a specific viewing point. It is this rigidity that binds the audience to the work, and binds the digital performance to the audience. It is in this binding that the significance of the location - and specifically the impact and historicity of the space – that imbue the work with projected meanings by the viewer. This is seen as an intimate space, confirmed in discourse surrounding installations by what has been described as the “choreographic turn” in which there is a “pronounced movement from the grandiose to the more intimate scale.”<sup>6</sup> Wilson’s collaborations can thus become ambiguous depending on the emotive response of the viewer, not only to the content and thematic of the installation but its location in time and space, rendering and reorienting the chosen public space “towards a not quite here, not easily comprehended, nor unified entity.”<sup>7</sup>

However, in a contemporary Western media-rich society such as ours, our relationship to space, location and embodiment are transformed through technology and are in constant flux. We are mobile, transient and constantly engaged with our senses; technologically immersed and networked into our intimate worlds of surround sound, three dimensional moving images, interaction with the virtual, and ubiquitous participation.

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It has been argued “that Fine Art is much more successful when it comes to involving the spectator’s visual perception: the level of the disembodied gaze.”<sup>8</sup> In *Entrapment of the o/Other* the disembodiment is in movement relative to time, and reveals our contemporary engagement with notions of ‘the virtual,’ and ‘second selves’ and notions of tele-presence. More frequently disembodiment has been questioned in terms of physiological and psychic contexts as Dixon suggests:

“The body is the most revered, fetishized, contested, detested, and confused concept in contemporary cultural theory. Moreover, that is just the natural, corporeal body—things become even more complicated with its virtual counterpart. The concept of the body dominates large areas of contemporary cultural, literary, feminist, and cyber criticism, but often in a highly questionable form, since disassembling postmodern impulses have placed the body outside of itself. Although body discourses continually remind us of the body’s interconnectivity to all things (through cultural inscriptions, rhizomatic lines of flight and so on), the body has nonetheless been commonly separated from its physiological and psychic contexts.”<sup>9</sup>

It is the disembodiment of Performance Artist, Helena Eflerova<sup>10</sup>, whose tortuous and emotive movement captured and projected in *Entrapment of the o/Other*, which links the psychic context of the work to the sheer impact of experiencing the space for the viewer. Eflerova’s contribution - part prisoner, part puppet and ritual object, part o/Other and avatar - demonstrates the importance of the processes involved in creating the work. Being digitally captured in situ, and then remediated by projection, she appears life sized and ghostly, seemingly fluctuating in and out of time and presence creating depth and a mixed reality. She is also demonstrating and revealing the process of practice. Eflerova reveals “something of the ‘doing’ involved in the return movement from the unknown of the imagination, to the relative known of the artifacts or productions of artistic space.”<sup>11</sup> This is complemented by John Callender’s<sup>12</sup> evocative and magical sound production that creates sonic layers of depth and atmosphere. It has been suggested that “a recorded or a remembered sound can be retrieved not only at another time but in another place. Time and space are reconciled in the disembodiment of sound, its severance from its point of origin.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently the installation wears a sound sculpture like a lavish fur coat which provides warm memories that invoke past and possible future uses of the space.

These elements become revelations for the audience when experienced in combination with the known narrative of the chosen place and space for the work – in this instance - namely the Round Tower in Old Portsmouth UK. Such experimentation needs to be researched further, and this is what I suspect will be the future of Wilson’s work along with his collaborators. This would mean that we need to “recognize artistic research” which would “upgrade our eighteenth-century standards of authorship, originality, and framing to fit twenty-first-century reality. While artistry may lack these completely, artistic research embodies them, even if they take different forms in the Internet age than they did in the heyday of Modernism.”<sup>14</sup>

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As a group of installations, Wilsons' ongoing body of work entitled *Unified Spaces* will continue to develop and challenge what we experience and understand in terms of embodiment and narrative, and questions the part an audience has to play in witnessing and experiencing such installations. It has been suggested that digital works can provide an "opportunity to entice spectators into participating in a public performance which can destabilize our notions of reality and create a blurring of fiction and everyday life."<sup>15</sup> This is true of *Entrapment of the o/Other*.

Finally in relation to Wilson's ongoing internal dialogue with Lacan, the o/Other and therefore the 'mirror stage', I argue that the installations reflect back to us what "would seem to be the threshold of the visible world"<sup>16</sup>. By revealing this threshold through the installations, Wilson activates the historicity and narrative of space in relationship to our being in it.

Consequently the work enables manifestation of that which is usually invisible to us – and leaves us wanting more.

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<sup>1</sup> Klinenberg E, and Benzecry C. (2005) Cultural Production in a Digital Age. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 597, Sage, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Callender, D. (2011) *Unified Spaces*. Catalogue text. University of Portsmouth.

<sup>3</sup> Moving image site specific artwork filmed on location at the Circulo de Belles Artes Madrid and exhibited at the Madrid Festival of Contemporary Audio-Visual Arts in Madrid, (MADATAC) December 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, K (2010) Installation notes for MADATAC festival.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick, M (2011) Performative tactics and the choreographic reinvention of public space. *Art and the Public Sphere*. Vol.1 (1) p. 66. Intellect.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Bentkowska-Kafel, A. and Gardiner, H.(Eds). (2009) *Digital Visual Culture : Theory and Practice*. Intellect . p 51.

<sup>9</sup> Dixon, S. (2007) *Digital Performance : A History of New Media in Theatre, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*. MIT Press, p. 212.

<sup>10</sup> Helena Eflerova is an artist from the Czech Republic specialising in interactive art, site installation, performance and sculpture.

<sup>11</sup> Dallow, P. (2003) Representing creativeness: practice based approaches to research in creative arts. *Art Design & Communication in Higher Education 2 (1&2)* Intellect, p.50.

<sup>12</sup> John Callender is a musician from the band Helsinki and sound developer based in Portsmouth.

<sup>13</sup> Cubitt, S. (1998) *Digital Aesthetics. Theory Culture and Society*. Sage, p.101.

<sup>14</sup> Blias J and Ippolito J. (2006) *At the Edge of Art*. Thames and Hudson, p.234.

<sup>15</sup> Sheridan, J. Bryan-Kinns N. Bayliss, A. (2007) Encouraging Witting Participation and Performance in Digital Live Art. *People and Computers XXI – HCI... but not as we know it: Proceedings of HCI*. British Computer Society.

<sup>16</sup> Lacan J. (2001) *Écrits: a selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Routledge Classics, p.3.