**Drifting Through the Looking Glass [a road less travelled]**

Making living books with old and new tools

We are in the age of simultaneity. According to Foucault _'we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein'_ (Foucault, 1967: page 21)

In an exploration of the ways changing technologies affect our understanding of place, I travelled Route 41[1] in Pennsylvania USA using Google Street View. From my studio in England I sent daily 1 hour views to the Street Road Gallery [2] positioned along Highway 41, over time creating a 5 month continuous document of my journey. The shifting landscape liquefied, transported, altered and spat from a fax machine onto the gallery floor like some kind of rebirth. I never visited the actual highway or Pennsylvania physically, my journey was limited to the street view camera, and my appearance unknown to those I passed. Wandering across the landscape, like Travis in the Wim Wenders film _Paris, Texas_ [3] with no fixed itinerary, my dérive had begun.

The dérive mixes desire, chance, and politics, and at the same time examines them. The dérive, as conceived by Debord,[4] acknowledges the importance of chance and also notes that the action of chance is naturally conservative and in a different way tends to reduce everything to an alternation between a limited number of variants and habits (Rumney, 1958). The Google Street View camera enforced constraints, I could twist and turn my viewpoint but could not stray from the highway. This conditioning and control pushed me to find new ways to manipulate, expose and subvert the rules. Indeed, for de Certeau (1984):

> _The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations: no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can only take place within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, personal factors)_
> (de Certeau, 1984: 101)

Familiar places started to seep into my mind, snapshots from road movies, snippets of buildings and trees from pased journeys real and imagined, my own walking tours of Suffolk also captured within Sebald's _The Rings of Saturn_ [5]. I could not resist a silent nod to Ed Ruscha and documented gas stations as I passed by, a man filling up his truck gazed right at me as if he knew. This detachment of the 'real' creates an estrangement and causes a kind of boredom, but equally the boredom makes us look much deeper at the landscape, at the page.

My actions within this virtual practice, embued with the mythologies and poetic images of modernity, connecting the Street Road Gallery to my Mac crossing the Atlantic as if it were a cup and wire telephone bridging the street is translated by Maria Pithara as those of a:

> _stationary, virtual flaneur, processing a far-away geography understood through google earth. He_

selects and transmits his experience of the area surrounding the gallery, image by image via fax to the viewer. The viewer is in turn invited to experience this re-invented version of the very landscape that surrounds him or her through the artist's digital eye, traveling to unfamiliar territory both within a close radius and across continents... (Pithara, 2015).

The dichotomy of old and new work together to form a book, page by page, body matter with no end matter. The images fragmented, pages flickering, the rhythmic voice of the fax machine, a book with noise.

The images, which rhythmically and somewhat loudly enter the gallery space at regular intervals through a hanging fax machine, are fleeting, fragmented, sometimes eerie, pieces of a puzzle which doesn't quite add up to anything akin to physical reality. The fax machine is a near obsolete technology, was almost comically difficult to set-up. We first had to track down the kind of fax machine, which would take rolls of paper on Craigslist, then 'tinker' and adapt it over a significant length of time to get it to print continuously, and test it through internet fax service. In the end, the project presents a convergence of different technologies (fax, satellite imaging, e-mail and data sharing) and art discourses (eastern scroll painting, romantic landscape painting, digital and conceptual art in the post-modern tradition) creating a layered experience of space and a slightly disorienting effect. (Pithara, 2015).

The artefact produced by this process questions the printed form of the book, which has historically been a way to validate content and make it 'genuine' as discussed by Kenneth Goldsmith [6]. Goldsmith considered digital media to be nude media meaning it could be clothed adapted, remixed and mangled on a mass scale, hence not having one authoritative final version (Goldsmith, 2011 p. 81). The printed fax scroll allowed me to evidence and validate my journey in the form of a visual logbook [7]. The scroll only allows for a slow unfolding linear reading of content, the opposite to the codex or web browsing. In fact the codex could be seen as the most original random access device (Halyes, 2002) [8], giving the reader considerably more freedom of movement and access than e-books. However it was the slow 'unwinding' linear approach that drew me to use fax roll. It also represented a physical representation of my actual journey, an artefact, an info graphic. [9]

The term interface is the state of 'being on the boundary' according to Galloway [10]; it is that moment where one significant material is understood as distinct from another significant material. The interface is always an effect not a thing, a process or a translation (Galloway, 2012: 33). Using this translation of image, from real to virtual, from digital to print, allowed me to explore the notion of an interface effect. Landscape impressions were silent, constant, transient and lost. The fax machine, noisy, mechanical but fixed, logged my progress from digital scrolling to the paper scroll.

John Latham (1975) suggests that books consist of three time states and the book itself anchors down as a kind of non-time:

To me, a book is outside of time. A book when it is read begins to bring time into the organism when it's being read. But there's another part of it, which is the story or the material, which is another process altogether. It's

not necessarily architectural. But when we've got the time it's being writ(ten?) and when we've got the non-time, which is the book, and when we've got the idea in the mind of the person who is reading it, you have got three components which are enough to make up the whole heart of existence (Latham, 1992). [11]

I was interested in make a 'living' book, one that existed simultaneously across all fragments of time. Ulises Carrión (1972) defines a book as an autonomous space-time sequence and written language as a sequence of signs expanding within the printed space. He goes onto write 'A book is a sequence of spaces. Each of these spaces is perceived at a different moment - a book is also a sequence of moments' [12]. The final moment transformed the inked scrolls, becoming one last twist in the resting place of my journey: the ink was sensitive to light and over time (5-6 weeks) the images faded, slowly destroying the evidence; eroding back the time, my journey lost.

Notes:

1 Highway 41 is a north–south United States Highway that runs 2,000 miles from Miami, Florida to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan

2 An artist run space showcasing international contemporary art in Pennsylvania, USA www.**streetroad**.org

3 *Paris*, *Texas* is a 1984 drama film directed by Wim Wenders. (In the beginning a disheveled man who wanders out of the desert wandering and drifting with no fixed agenda)

4 *The Map is Not the Territory*, Woods, A. Rumney, R (2001) Manchester University Press (June 23, 2001)

5 *The Rings of Saturn*, Sebald, W, G (1999)

6 *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age,* Goldsmith, K (2011)

7 The term logbook originally referred to a book for recording to determine the distance a ship travelled within a certain amount of time

8 *Writing Machines*, Hayles, K (2002) Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press

9 Infographics are graphic visual representations of data intended to present information clearly.

10 *The Interface Effect,* Galloway, A, R (2012)

11 Petit, C, dir. *The Cardinal and the Corpse (or a Funny Night Out) (1992) Performed by Alan Moore, Ian Sinclair, Driff Field. Channel 4, UK [film]*

12 *The New Art of Making Books*, Carrión, U (1975)