

Fictioning The Sussex Strandline Through Making

What do I know of this place? What does this place know of me? (MacFarlane 2012)

Module AGP732 Rebecca Smith 2023

Image: Rebecca Smith 2023, *The Shape of the Sussex Strandline walked over one year as research.*

I research how my craft practice can be orientated to examine my place within the material and social environment. Through the establishment of a working method I test Weber's (2020) theory that this is crafts' primary contribution within a globalised world.

My theoretical framework is designed to disrupt culturally prescribed associations of place, my usual way of making, and my desire for objects to be useful. The aesthetic of the craft object as a comforting symbol of home and identity is disrupted to reveal subjective hidden alternatives. I combine three approaches:

Psychogeography: (Richardson 2015) is an exploration between the mind and space, where a landscape is deliberately re-mapped through the creation of perception-changing games employed in the field. It informs how I carry out research.

Phenomenology: (Malpas 2012) is the study of the structures of experience from the first person point of view. Experience encompasses the senses, embodied action, social awareness, thought, memory and imagination. I use this to observe how multiple meanings arise to form stories during making.

Fictioning: (Gunkel 2019) is the establishment of an open-ended, experimental practice involving performing, diagramming, or assembling to create or anticipate something that does not exist in our awareness. I combine studio practices that encourage an unpredictable outcome.

To make I map the mechanisms with which my muse, the strandline, indiscriminately juxtaposes, deconstructs, and constructs objects with equivalent studio practices; deposition mapped with electroforming; battering by shingle with hammering; erosion with etching; twisting with the action of the waves;. making marks, the life of objects. I combine them with a psychogeographic narrative developed through creative writing and research in a symbolically cyclic process with site specific materials as the starting form. New meaning is encouraged to layer on top of the old. Words and images are added with photoetching. Finally ambiguous fossil like forms on the edge of material breakdown that resemble objects made by the sea emerge. They act as invitations to discover the psychogeography that created them.

By demonstrating this multi-craft-disciplined, location-based way of working I research through case studies how craft-making can link us to the past present and future of a place. This allows an experience of how materials and objects move through a cyclic existence with us. It's important because it offers agency in changing how materials and objects are acquired and used in an age where consumption is a prominent political and environmental issue. (Yelavich 2014)

The process I have developed overlaps art, craft and the discipline of research. I place it with within the tradition of land and walking art for its concerns and connections. I bring it to a studio practice where film and writing are the predominant media. It is informed by a combination of creative practitioners; Process based makers like Junko Mori (2022) give an insight into what a psychogeographic making practice might look like; The Situationist's and Surrealist's approach to reality I combine with current research on how consciousness works (Seth 2021, Harman (2018) as a way to shift points of view; Anselm Kiefer (2016) is iconic for me for the way he uses the phenomenology of materials to explore his social space; the performance art of Yoko Ono (1964) and Fluxus (Sivanesan 2022) that challenges the hierarchy of art and object.

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