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Curated Paths: A photographic exploration of walking –
Non-perspectival representations of northern landscapes

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects upon my own uses of photography, which investigates the activity of walking as a means of comprehending, recording and representing the environment as a series of interconnected experiences. Many of my photographic journeys have taken place in the north of England and examine cultural and historic aspects of place through the use of photographic strategies that challenge Cartesian approaches to perspective. The research outlined in this paper reflects upon somatic, psychological and phenomenological experiences of place and their related histories.

Taking the form of an ongoing practice led PhD, the aim of the research is principally to move away from the disembodied or disassociated view of landscape. This distanced view is symptomatic of an adherence to Cartesian perspective, which has its origins in the early technologies of the Camera Obscura, has dominated the medium from Victorian landscape photography through to the present era. As the artist David Hockney acknowledged, ‘photographic perspective (...) implies a single fixed point of view, the reverse perspective principle, as rediscovered by cubism, suggests the viewer is in movement and hence implies time’. (1999. p.136). The idea of engaging with a place through movement over duration in addition to the tacit awareness one develops through walking is one that I believe leads to a deeper experience of space and place. My objective is to generate photographic responses that reflect experience and consolidate my position, which is embedded within particular northern locations, while engaging with what Tim Ingold refers to as ‘co-presence’ (2016 p.8) – walking in the footsteps of others – inhabiting the land rather than occupying it.

This paper discusses these ideas specifically in relation to a series of extended photographic projects in Yorkshire, Lancashire and more recently in Tyne and Wear. This recent project involves tracing the historical pilgrim trail of St Bede, documenting the entire length of the pilgrim trail, which runs from Jarrow to Sunderland passing through rural, urban, suburban and ‘non-places’ (1995). Adopting non-perspectival approaches to photographing these locations, has led me to explore new scopic regimes, a move towards authentic, phenomenological encounters. In practice this has led to the realisation that eliminating or suppressing perspective yields more subjective images that more accurately embody my experiences of the places encountered. The result of this is a series of abstract flat images of ‘groundspaces’ encountered on the trail.

The resultant photographic images are incorporated into a grid system of sequential and dynamic arrangements that extend narrative possibilities and reflect the processes of navigation on account of their visual resemblance to cartographic grids. Maps and GPS tracking are incorporated into the process as a means of contextualizing my activities within the spaces. The dichotomized experience of passing through physical and virtual pathways, are realized as both cartographic and photographic forms. These interchangeable, hybrid forms engender a wider discourse on post-photography, indexicality and post-phenomenological frameworks, which are discussed in the papers concluding chapter.

The research elucidates tacit knowledge gained from my previous projects, as well as documenting and reflecting on the ontologies concerning current practical work in the field of post-photography. Related discourses on landscape, psycho-geography and human geography are employed to interrogate my own photographic images providing theoretical frameworks, which support findings.

References:

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Image References:

<https://markadamimages.wordpress.com/research-2/phdwalk/ground-spaces-st-bedes-pilgrim-trail-2/exposure-grids/>