

Andy goldsworthy: concepts of the landscape



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Title: ' Travel constructs a fictional relationship between gaze and landscape' (M. Auge, " Non-Places," 1995; p86). Does this statement seem to you to express a central insight about landscape and travel in the 20th century? Please discuss in relation to the work of Andy Goldsworthy.

The Earthworks art of Andy Goldsworthy challenges, firstly, a classical art-historical conception of the landscape, and can also be implicitly responsive to the ' supermodern' sense of landscape and place, theorised by Marc Auge, in which " Vocabulary... educates the gaze, informs the landscape ^[1] .". Goldsworthy captures the essence of place through texture, allusion to process and a mutual dependability on nature, as if to transform both the materials of the objects and the meaning of their often banal contexts.

It is immediately evident that Goldsworthy's works, in general, strongly accentuate texture and shape. Goldsworthy describes the working process as a tactile expression, implying the involvement of a multi-sensory extension of the body, a recurring artistic intention, especially through cues signifying touch and vision. " For me, looking, touching, material, place and form are all inseparable from the resulting work. It is difficult to say where one stops and another begins ^[2] ."

This obsession with recurring forms in nature using different materials has a ritualistic edge, where the earthworks have lost the purpose and functionalism of the commercial product.

This tactile gaze, used as the central way of identifying the object, is further evoked through the use of text. For example, in a photograph of a spherical

ice ball positioned beside a bleak Autumn bridge, his texts connotes the image not only in terms of its visual impact but also the texture implied by its aural qualities: “ Stacked ice – sound of cracking. ^[3] ”

The shape and texture of the river in the 1988-9 Leadgate and Lambton Earthworks ^[4] symbolizes its sensual form in a way which still identifies it as relating to a river, but without the non-abstracted seamless visual art representation of a river. Goldsworthy describes this process: “ The snake has evolved through a need to move close to the ground, sometimes below and sometimes above, an expression of the space it occupies ^[5] .” Similarly, rather than use the language of signposts to designate a river (in its non-place), the use of more tactile cues reclaims the spectator’s newness of vision: in Auge’s words, the traveller (AG) is recapturing the landscape like it is “ the first journey of birth...the primal experience of differentiation ^[6] .” While Auge asserts that non-places “ exist only through the words that evoke them, ^[7] ” AG’s words work to clarify the gaze rather than condense it to a unified vision.

But what constitutes this gaze? When we refer to his earthworks, are we referring only to the symbolic object, or the whole space inside the photo frame?

Like a travel writer, a heightened perception or rediscovery of the landscape is the central tenet of Goldsworthy’s working process: “ Some places I return to over and over again, going deeper- a relationship made in layers over a

long time. ^[8] " There is a suggestion by AG that site or context affects and, to an extent, has a significant role in generating the features of his objects:

When I work with a leaf, rock, stick, it is not just that material in itself, it is an opening into the processes of life within and around it...The energy and space around a material are as important as the energy and space within ^[9]

While the train, for Auge, is one of the greatest culprits behind the spectator's fleeting vision of space, Goldsworthy's immobilization and transposition of the train track and its practical function to a snaking ...in the Lambton earthworks?, is a way for AG to recapture the essence of the landscape, to shift its perceptual status from non-place to place: " Staying in one place makes me more aware of change ^[10] ."

However, part of this awareness is awareness that the land itself is fleeting and transforming according to environmental 'whim,' and that the photograph merely represents a certain moment in a process.

His emphasis on spontaneity and change according to environmental and climactic conditions, as well as his own sense of navigation, is significant because he is able to evoke the *history* of the object through capturing a *synchronic* moment in its processes. If we look at several of his works in which piles of material are neatly centred with a hollow hole ^[11] , we sense their impermanence and a foreboding decay from seeing their present formal cohesion. A Cambridge earthwork with leaves is accompanied by this awareness in text, where a materialistic description of the object is

transformed into a *narrative* of it: “ Torn Hole/horse chestnut leaves stitched with stalks around the rim/moving in the wind ^[12] .”

Perhaps more than these smaller-scale earthworks, the earthworks in County Durham most forcefully use the concept of environmental process to allude to the movement of travel, not only through their obvious association with trains, but through the movement implied by the object, as “ ripples from a thrown stone ^[13] ”. Freezing these processes is a way of reawakening the senses, by both seeing the object statically without moving too fast *and* by being aware of its continuing narrative, *rather* than being driven by the “ perpetual series of presents ^[14] ” of those unrecognised non-places, exaggerated in Thomas Gursky’s digital photos

. According to Auge, the language of signposts etc. does not heighten the spectator’s perception of a place, but merely substitutes their relationship to it as a mere passing acknowledgement. ^[15] Goldsworthy’s works seem to reclaim that historicity of the natural object that is lost in the immediacy of the commercial product ^[16] , including the signs that describe and name features and punctuations in the land, trying to give it a sense of place.

Challenging the prescriptions of discourse on our subjectivity, however, has always been a preoccupation in landscape art. Constable’s landscape paintings, for example, could represent a different challenge to the supermodern construction of landscape into a fleeting ‘ non-place,’ through his holistic, static, formalist and panoramic vision of the land. While Goldsworthy reconfigures the landscape’s gaze beyond the static to an

awareness of its morphology, materiality, unpredictability and precariousness, Constable and the landscape painters of the 18th century synchronized these natural irregularities, painting the clouds and sun simultaneously and consciously at different periods and freezing the movement of the Hay wain into a stance. ^[17]

In Goldsworthy's work, therefore, landscape is no longer a site, implying static, but a process, implying diachronic, in which the object and its place are interdependent.

Throughout the earthworks photographs and their accompanying text, two main interconnected subjectivities emerge, both of which seem threatened by the dislocation through the " non-place:" organic nature and Goldsworthy, who is simultaneously a conscious manipulator of nature's autonomous processes as well as driven by the manipulations of nature itself.

The larger scope of his County Durham Leadgate and Lambton Earthworks, encourages a more structural and slightly cartographic gaze. A disused railway track becomes the site for a snaking sand track photographed aerially alongside rows of monotonous houses. Their juxtaposition, their mutual encroachment on one another and the snaking imprint's echo of movement, in one sense seem to re-establish the inter-dependency of urban structures and nature, and the similarities in the way we perceive them despite serving different functions. In this sense, it allows greater insight to its organic qualities by its association.

In a technical sense, it could be argued that there is a tension between Goldsworthy's organic creations and their technological control by the intrinsic features of the photograph. However, any hint of the artist's exploitation, evoked in works such as " Snowball in trees" ^[18] or in references to the name of the excavator driver in the Leadgate and Lambton Earthworks, is balanced out, in exchange, by their precarious existence in nature, where a rock could be precariously balanced on a boulder. ^[19]

This relationship between nature and its manipulations is significant because it represents a reappropriation of our relationship with those places, designated by the artist's symbols rather than the symbols of industry with which " individuals are supposed to interact only with texts, whose proponents are not individuals but ' moral entities' or institutions ^[20] ". Goldsworthy navigates and finds his non-prescribed place, by being led by climactic and environmental factors rather than such ' moral entities. ^[21]

Auge defines non-place in detail against the anthropological concept of place, where the traveller occupies a non-communicative, solitary space with the language of ticket machines and train timetables. ^[22] Accordingly, these public facilities and structures give the spectator an image of their individuality, or a ' distanced' simulated familiarity, ^[23] by discursively framing and displacing the ' gaze' and the individual ' essence' towards a simultaneous collective individuality, through the " individualization of references ^[24] ." In contrast, by allowing the serendipitous influence of nature to produce a unique result on each object, each of the processes in

the Earthworks produces individual objects, which, not over-prescribed by images and signs, evolve in partial autonomy.

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Footnotes

[1] Marc Auge, *Non-Places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*, 1995: Verso, London, p108

[2] Andy Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy*, 1990: Penguin Group, London, p1

[3] Andy Goldsworthy, "Stacked ice - sound of cracking," Hampstead Heath, 28 December 1985

[4] Andy Goldsworthy, "Leadgate and Lambton earthworks," County Durham, Winter-Spring 1988-9

[5] Goldsworthy, p3

[6] Auge, p84

[7] opcit, p95

[8] Goldsworthy, p1

[9] ibid

[10] ibid

[11] For example, "Bracken," Borrowdale, Cumbria, 13 February 1988; "Slate," Stonewood, Dumfriesshire, Summer 1987, "Plane Leaves," Castres, France, 19 October 1988.

[12] Cambridge, 24 July 19886

[13] AG, p4

[14] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Post-Contemporary Interventions.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991.

[15] Auges, p97

[16] Jean Baudrillard, *The ecstasy of communication*, trans. Bernard & Caroline Schutze, ed. Slyvere Lotringer, Brooklyn, N. Y. : Autonomedia, 1988

[17] Michael Rosenthal, *Constable*, London Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1987

[18]

[19] Rock on boulder work

[20] Auge, p96

[21] AG, p1

[22] Auge, p107-8

[23] Auge, p106

[24] Auge, p109