

Body<>Mind conference paper

Part 1

Today I am screening a DVD titled *Stones*, (that was originally produced as an element of my PhD in Fine Art Practice).

In this presentation I will focus upon *subjectivity* and *desire* in order to expand upon some ways in which human beings function as an amalgam of dynamic forces: psychical, physical and discursive. Critical art practice provides me with a methodological approach, together with a representational means.

Jeanette Winterson has written, '[A]n artist's work cannot be understood in a reductive sense by a reading of his or her life. (...)Rather, the life revealed tells us something about creativity - the process itself, but not the finished work'.¹

PUT DVD ON - NO SOUND

As I screen my DVD, I would like to speak about the creative processes involved in making *Stones*. The concept emerged through an intense feeling of desire. My desire was for a particular type of stone and rubble. This desire was so potent and seductive as to evoke visceral responses, that *urged me* to physically get in among the stones... To feel and see them. To hear the sounds they made as I pushed and dug at them. While I did not eat the rubble, I could feel a sensation of it against my teeth, as I forced my nails into it. Simply typing the word *rubble* is enough to make me salivate, as its associations overflow.

I initially experienced this desire as a form of *weird* pleasure, to be privately enjoyed. These particular stones would be considered banal. They have no beautiful features that might offer an explanation for my yearning. But over time I began to associate the desire with particular sensations, connected with memories from a specific period of my childhood. As I began to consider those things that my desire might be connected with, I developed a need to explore it further... to act upon my mental and emotional urges. And so I constructed an environment in which I could stage an unscripted encounter with the stones. I had a belief, that if I were to engage with the stones experientially, I might better understand my desire, but I also had a coexistent need... to provide my desire with a representational form, to openly acknowledge that it had some kind of significance.

It has been said, 'stones are for building with'.² I like this grounding towards utility - but I also find it limiting. Often overlooked, infinitely multiple, stones are of significance to humanity across differing locations and diverse cultures. They share some common ground with desire in that both are commonplace and yet absolutely individual. Both refer to forgotten pasts and point towards unknown futures, opening up passages to events... to destruction and re-construction.

In *Stones*, geographical boundaries and linear time collapse into the unfixed temporal density of remembrance, enabling traces of the past to manifest in the present.

TURN SOUND UP LOUD AND SCREEN THE REMAINDER OF THE DVD

Part 2

I would now like to address the conference themes in relation to the content of the DVD. But I cannot offer an authoritative account of my work. *Stones* will generate differing responses and questions in relation to individual viewing experiences.

¹ Jeanette Winterson, *Visual Arts: Liza Lou*, (online), accessed 22 June 2007, available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/pages/content/index.asp?PageID=383>>

² A close friend, a joiner by trade, personal conversation.

If I were to segregate differing aspects of my humanity, then *desire* and *memory* might constitute *mind* elements... Those virtual activities that mobilised my creative bodily encounter with the stones. But it is not useful for me to do this. Partly because this short film does not attempt to transport viewers through a linear narrative structure, and regardless of this, the process was not sequential but relational and self-contradictory. Primarily, it would not be useful because the concept developed not from intent, but from a strong feeling, with no known aims that might validate its existence. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha has said, '[N]on-knowingness is an attitude, not a technique to perform'.³ In making *Stones* I physically constructed a psychic space, with mind-body working interrelationally, not oppositionally - aspects of both - not either/or, but a contiguous continuum. In her book *Art Writing: An Adventure with Art and History* Yve Lomax writes, '[W]e are talking then, not so much about definite things, but more about the relations between things. One thing affects, and is also affected by other things'.⁴

BBC Radio 4's series, *The Memory Experience*, seeks to define a particular process of remembrance as follows: Autobiographical memory 'involves your emotional history which feeds back into the present and helps to create your internal sense of self, as well as the public identity that you project to others. (...)These memories combine with episodic memories that contain other information - sensory, perceptual and emotional'.⁵ In some situations, explanatory determinations may offer useful tools, but in the context of an aesthetic field it is inappropriate: 'to reduce the work to the banality of autobiographical meaning or explanation. The work comes out of the place of transformation. Autobiography becomes creativity, the past becomes a door that is open rather than closed'.⁶

Subjectivities are multiplicities, as are their relations with, and in, the world. They are constituted relationally, at the conjunction of: societal influences, personal experiences, psychical activity and discursive positioning. *Stones*, re-presents a feminine subjectivity and desire constituted for and of the self. In, *A Desire of One's Own* Jessica Britten writes, '[W]hat is experientially female is the association of desire with a space, a place within the self, from which this force can emerge. This space is in turn connected to the space between self and the other'.⁷

I took risks in making this work. I was fearful of allowing my desire a space, of where the work might lead me (in a personal sense), and also of the academic implications of allowing an unknown, seemingly individualistic desire a place in my PhD research output. It has been a painful learning process and yet I was right to invest trust in my work. Because my commitment is to my art practice rather than to my narcissistic self, I have been enabled to further my understanding in positive and productive ways, and therefore, my integrity has remained open. A meaningful ethical development, at the level of the subjective register of the self, will invariably extend towards others.

³ Minh-Ha, Trinh T., *The Digital Film Event*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 48.

⁴ Yve Lomax, *Writing the Image, An Adventure with Art and Theory*, (London: IB Tauris Publishers, 2001), pp. 78-79.

⁵ BBC Radio 4, *The Memory Experience*, (online), accessed 22 June 2007, available from the World Wide Web <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/memory/understand/autobiographical_memories.shtml>

⁶ Jeanette Winterson, *Visual Arts: Liza Lou*, (online), accessed 22 June 2007, available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/pages/content/index.asp?PageID=383>>

⁷ Jessica Britten *A Desire of One's Own*, in, *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis, (USA: Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1986), p. 97.