

after alert catchers: a response to a collaborative project

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From the perspective of ordinary affects, things like narrative and identity become tentative though forceful compositions of disparate moving elements: the watching and waiting for an event to unfold, the details of scenes, the strange or predictable progression in which one thing leads to another ... (Stewart, 2007: 5-6)

This project, among other things, brought attention to 'ordinary affects' as articulated by Kathleen Stewart. Over a number of months through 2016 three artists, Megan Calver, Susie David, and Gabrielle Hoad visited, worked with, spent time with the spit of sand-dunes, beach and shore that is Dawlish Warren Nature Reserve on the Exe estuary in Devon. The artists shared some outcomes of this working in a public showing titled 'throw only to an alert catcher' installed in three beach huts over two days in October 2016, and they kept a research log titled *The Buffer Zone* hosted at the a-n.co.uk website. Using language (text + voice + print) along with movement (tasks + games + actions + representations) and observation (mirroring / echoing / tracing / watching) the artists engaged in investigations that mix elements particular to the location, and generate potential actions that are applicable elsewhere. They worked in a shared context, theoretical and artistic, that allowed for quick reactions, and the generation of material that would not have been possible on their own. Questions of closeness and distance, of material and immaterial, of duration and the immediate are played with and teased at resulting in a portfolio of outcomes that can develop in different directions.

...The artists have adopted an approach that plays the site, plays with the site, performing parallels, operating with equivalence. They have engaged in a series of imitative intimate activities. [...]

The bodies of the artists shift role, flickering between being the organiser of a scene, to being seen, being a person to being a thing among things. As a visiting birdwatcher you might want to become unnoticeable to the avian life of the shoreline. How do you hide yourself in a bush? You could drape yourself in camouflage netting and sway in time with the branches' movements. And then as an artist you reveal yourself to the watching camera, being stiffer than a windswept shrub, becoming apparent as in and other than that bush. The aim isn't to fool the viewer, or yourself, but to take time to try on the situation of that plant, to be in the landscape and not only looking at it.

Or how to perform something of the uncertainty of seeing? As we walk along a beach and see ahead some thing, a shape that might be a seal, a stone, a body. And to respond by adjusting to the form, fitting your outline, your silhouette to the seen shape. Can feeling it make clearer what is up ahead? Does fitting to something engender sympathy? Putting on the landscape as a way of learning it, and yet knowing that it is a temporary costuming, that at the end of the day we or the bird leave, and the rock, or fence or dune remain. [...]

...One way in which they expressed this was as 'giving voice' to the other, to another, outside the human, beyond human language. And in the same gesture of expression they

admitted the effort required to shift metaphors and names to accommodate the more-than-human. [...]

Is my interpretation of a score, my mimicking of an action, the same as the original? If I now click pebbles together to make the stones chat, is that the same as the time that Susie did it? Is it my version of her action, is it different? And if it is different, how does it differ? [...]

The project has been personal and political, bringing intimate imitative actions into a public realm. In their focussing of attention on the insignificant (or rather actively shifting significance) the artists have kept an element of play as fun, and play as slack, a slackness that allows entry or access for others.

bibliography

Haraway, Donna (1992) 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 295-337.

Stewart, Kathleen (2007) *Ordinary Affects*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

author

Mark Leahy is a writer and artist operating among textual practices and performance. Recent live work includes 'his voice' (Plymouth, Oct 2015; Manchester, Feb 2016; Totnes, Aug 2016), 'flat-head self-tapping' at Chelsea School of Art (May 2015) and 'answering machine' for Experimentica 14 at Chapter Cardiff (Nov 2014). He has been commissioned to write texts to accompany work by artists including Nathan Walker, Katy Connor, Steven Paige, and LOW PROFILE. Critical publications include essays in *C21 Literature*, *Open Letter*, *Performance Research Journal* and *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*. He was MA Programme Leader at Dartington College of Arts (2007-2010) and teaches at Falmouth and Plymouth Universities.