

CARRLANDS PROJECT

i) Academic rationale

Carrlands is a small-scale case study that proposes *site-specific performance* as both innovative *mode of enquiry* and as tangible *research output*; performance is identified as a medium that can precipitate and encourage public visitation, inform presence, and illuminate the historically and culturally diverse ways in which a landscape is made, used, reused and interpreted.

In an application of advanced and experimental dramaturgical practice, the study aims to develop a *methodology* for the examination and explication of the complexities of landscape, as it is variously and diversely defined and studied, imagined and experienced; to advance the *interdisciplinary* apprehension of landscape, within a medium that can facilitate rapid shifts in attention to, and account of, the nature of places; to enhance and stimulate *public appreciation* and *understanding* of landscape, through the inclusion of the perceptions of disciplinary expertise within an accessible performative framework; and to strengthen local and regional regard for landscape through providing opportunities for *participation* in a) the generation of performative material; b) the reception of that material in performance; c) the monitoring of effects.

At three locations in the agricultural valley of the river Ancholme in North Lincolnshire - a landscape lacking conventional scenic heritage - 'performances' are proposed. In the form of *audio works* - disseminated and publicly distributed as free downloadable MP3 files and orderable CDs - these performances include complex integrations of spoken texts constituted in modes of *performance writing*, and especially composed *musical compositions*, as well as *instructions to users*; the listener is at once audience member and performer. Technology plays a significant and transformative mediating role in the response of art to the physical environment.

ii) Objectives

To inform, enhance and extend the interpretation and appreciation of landscape through an application of perceptions and practices drawn from contemporary performance.

To regard and characterise landscape as both field of research and site of artistic engagement in the development and creation of a series of *mediated, site-specific* performance works, in a focused address to a specific region, and to complex issues of interpretation and meaning creation.

To develop a *methodology* for the examination and explication of the complexities of landscape, as it is variously and diversely defined and studied

To devise and implement a project of *practice as research*, within the academic purview of performance studies, and within which performance is employed as a dynamic agency that can include multi-, inter-, trans- and post-disciplinary approaches – *in toto* and occasionally, simultaneously and sequentially – within its dramaturgical framework.

To employ advanced performance techniques and procedures to help illuminate, explicate and problematise the multiplicity of meanings that resonate within and from landscapes, in order to inform and stimulate the public imagination.

To apply sophisticated forms of *dramaturgy* in the creation of performance texts and structures that can include and juxtapose a variety of voices – personal, expert and popular – set within a musical matrix, to reveal better the *imbricated* nature of landscape: to favour the local and accented, whilst espousing combinations of the creative and the scientific, the aesthetic and the academic.

To devise innovative forms of site-specific performance from which performers are *absent* but within which the audience member plays an active and generative role in meaning creation, as a *participant*.

To enhance public appreciation of the complexities of landscape interpretation through the provision of orientation and guided involvement - through participation in performance - at a series of locations readily accessible to the public; through the

inclusion of the perceptions of disciplinary expertise within an accessible performative framework

To engage and include landscape and environment as constitutive elements within the structural dramaturgy of performance, rather than simply as scenic backdrop: meaning emerges from a combination of the *acoustic* transfer of narrative material with the *physical* experience of actually being in the place.

To examine the entangled nature of land, human subject and event, the contested relationships between landscape, experience and identity, and to acknowledge the close link between culture and subjectivity within a given region.

To strengthen local and regional regard for landscape through providing opportunities for *participation* in a) the generation of performative material; b) the reception of that material in performance; c) the monitoring of effects

To create performative interventions that can include the perceptions of *insiders*: utilising and placing material from personal, familial and communal sources in an academic context.

To construct a series of texts that are *read onto* a seemingly featureless terrain, that enhance appreciation by not only drawing attention to extant details, but also by animating that which is observable through story.

To apply critically, and examine the resonances of, Welsh cognitive notions of place and landscape in an English context, including *cynefin* (environment) and *y filltir sqwar* (the square mile of childhood).

iii) Questions

In what ways...

Can advanced techniques of aesthetic performance practice be employed as an effective research procedure in the apprehension of landscape, and forms of site-specific performance involving participation help explicate landscape as other than merely visual construct?

Can performance enhance public appreciation of the complexities of landscape interpretation through the provision of orientation and guided involvement: through participation in performance?

Can contemporary performance play a role in an active and public engagement with landscape?

Can performance techniques and procedures serve to illuminate, explicate and problematise the multiplicity of meanings that resonate within and from landscapes; to elaborate conflicting definitions of, and attitudes to, landscape; and to examine the entangled nature of land, human subject and event, the contested relationships between landscape, experience and identity, in order to inform and stimulate the public imagination?

Can performance provide a mechanism for examining and enacting the intimate connection between personal biography and the biography of landscape, between social identities and a sense of place, through juxtaposing popular observation with critical academic discourse?

Can sophisticated forms of *dramaturgy* – the creation of performance texts and structures that can include and juxtapose a variety of voices – personal, expert and popular – set within a musical matrix, better reveal the *imbricated* nature of landscape?

Can the integration of narrative and discourse of different orders serve to enhance a broader appreciation of landscape, with performance as an appropriate medium for its interdisciplinary apprehension?

Can landscape be cast effectively as a network of related stories and experiences as much as topographic details?

Can performance help elaborate conflicting definitions of, and attitudes to, landscape, through engagement with an area lacking conventional scenic heritage?

Can a focused case study demonstrate historical and experiential depth in a particular location?

Can performance draw attention to the role of human agency within a *region*, with landscape as *palimpsest* of historical formational processes?

Can a focused case study help position performance practice as a vital tool of engagement with landscape, providing strategies and mechanisms to inform enquiry elsewhere?

iv) Methodology

Site-specific performance is employed here as a radical address to landscape, that itself constitutes the latest occupation of a location within which other occupations are apparent and cognitively active: a conflation of that which pre-exists the work and that which is of the work, the friction of what is *of* the place and what is brought *to* the place. The contemporary presence of performance might be inappropriate or anachronistic but also revealing – enabling the site to ‘speak for itself’ – whilst, in its ambivalence, in its refusal to *re-enact* what might have happened here, resisting the *closure* of interpretation. In full knowledge of – and challenge to – the interests of various communities, the various social and political constituencies, the various contradictory interests that might lay claim to a location and its past – performance might challenge pervasive notions of landscape as simply an area of terrain or as a purely visual construct.

Performance writing – the application of dramaturgical devices of organisation to textual formation – is employed to facilitate the expression of complex ideas through the

juxtaposition and dynamic interpenetrations of texts of different orders and from a variety of sources, both expert and popular: from academic disciplines of archaeology, geography, folklore studies, ethnography as well as local scholarship and popular observation, observance and belief. Within a *recorded* medium, *performance writing* can be multi-vocal, in its inclusion of the reflections of individuals of different ages, genders and accents, and of different registers of rhetorical engagement and disciplinary authority.

Musical composition –instrumental and vocal components, sound effects and electronically generated material – provides the matrix within which the text is embedded. Whilst it may of itself be congruent with place in terms of timbre and atmosphere, it may be equally unsettling or ambivalent, supplementary to an enhanced appreciation of the uncanny or shifting nature of place.

v) Research context

Carrlands is located within the long-term research trajectory of the author that includes performance practice; place and landscape; and archaeology. In an interpenetration of the academic and the creative, it constitutes a contribution to the emergent notion of *practice as research*, within the disciplinary field of performance studies.

Carrlands extends approaches to site-specificity explored professionally by the investigator over the past twenty years: in the large-scale performances of Brith Gof (1988-97); the multi-site, mediated performances of Pearson/Brookes (2001-5); and solo works such as *Bubbling Tom*, the guided tour of an intimate landscape of childhood in Hibaldstow, North Lincolnshire.

Carrlands enacts concepts, proposals and hypotheses outlined in *Theatre/Archaeology* (Pearson & Shanks 2001), the major output in an on-going series of *interdisciplinary collaborations* examining convergences of performance and archaeology. These include, after Geertz, the intention to create a *blurred genre* from the individual disciplines and to generate *thick descriptions* of particular places; and to utilise performance as an active

agency in the formulation and exposition of *deep maps*. The collaborations have involved recurrent address to issues of landscape, exemplified by the curation of the Centre for Performance Research (CPR) conference ‘Performance, Places and Pasts’ (1998), and four research workshops organised as part of CPR Summer (2001-4).

Carrlands accompanies and develops theoretical and practical themes and approaches outlined in the investigator’s monograph *In Comes I: Performance, Location and Landscape* (University of Exeter Press, 2006). Taking the *region* of North Lincolnshire as its optic, it concerns performance and landscape, biography and locality, memory and place; manifestations of performance, past and present in a defined geographical area, in relation to particular sets of historical, social, cultural and environmental circumstance. Its aim is to utilise and position material from personal, familial and communal sources in an academic context. Drawing inspiration from Raymond Williams, Lippard, Tuan, et al., it more directly addresses critical notions from Ingold (*dwelling, taskscape, way-finding*); Cosgrove (*‘insiders’, chorography*) and Ulmer (*mystory*).

Whilst projects involving *mobile technology* are increasing familiar in aesthetic practice – from Janet Cardiff’s seminal *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* (1999) onwards - and in museum interpretation, *Carrlands* uniquely attempts integrations of academic and popular perception, and ascribes the specific conditions of engagement to the participant, in invitations to action that occasion a shift from the optic to the haptic.

Carrlands enacts aesthetic practice within an academic context, revealing it as an instrument of enquiry and an outcome. As such, it is of interest not only to disciplinary scholars in suggesting further methodological endeavours, but also to the general public. Its main aim is to demonstrate the multiple resonances of landscape, through a direct address to a place seemingly lacking in scenic heritage. These issues are explored to enhance a public understanding of environmental surroundings and a renewed sensitivity to the fabric of the present.