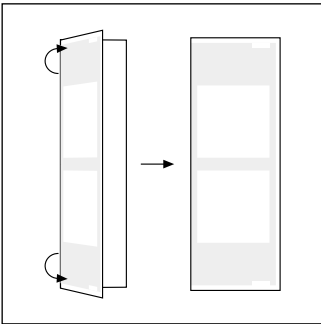
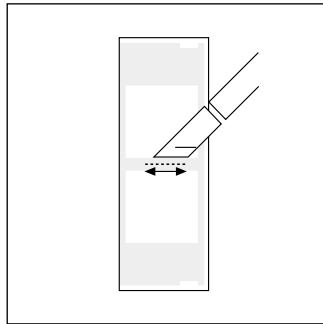


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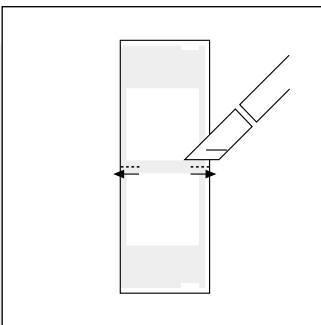
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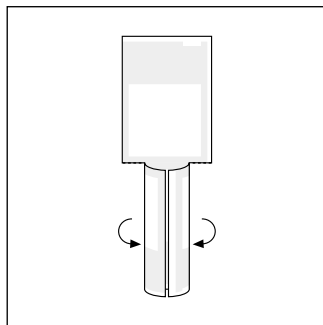
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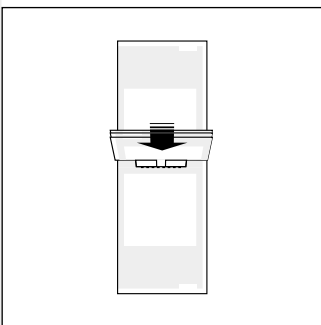
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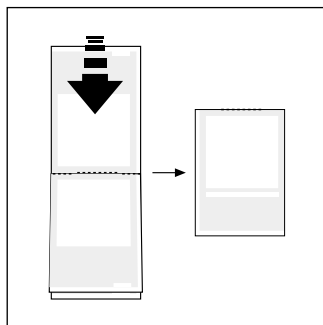
4:



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6:



- 1: First, fold each A4 sheet in half along the vertical axis.
- 2: Using a craft knife or scalpel, cut a horizontal slot along the centre dotted line of the first A4 sheet. (pages 1/2/13/14)
- 3: Then cut along the dotted lines on all the other sheets. Make sure to cut to the very edges of the paper.
- 4: Stack the folded sheets in ascending order with the even numbers at the top. Curl the bottom half of the second A4 page (pages 3/4/23/24).
- 5: Thread the curled page through the centre slot of the first A4 page. Repeat this process with the third (pages 5/6/21/22), fourth (pages 7/8/19/20), fifth (pages 9/10/17/18), and sixth A4 sheet (pages 11/12/15/16) with the even pages in ascending order.
- 6: When all the pages have been threaded through, check the pagination. Finally, fold the booklets in half along the horizontal axis.

Prior to the invention of powered flight, early cartography was constructed from a terrestrial perspective, augmented by oral and material devices. This act of mapping was intimately connected to the scale and experience of the body with its relationship to the earth. The resultant map was the speculation of an aerial, celestial point of view that embodied mythical and telluric experience: the map and the experience being one. The advent of aerial photography changed our perspective of the landscape, shifting cartographic and cultural codes. Maps became externalised, mediated, devices that delivered a prosthetic relationship with body and landscape. In this event map and experience became dislocated. (7)

We make a map for ourselves through our journeyings ideas findings and listenings. We incorporate history, the entangled web of natural and man-made, the ferry crew reading the Sun. Interviews, environments, the eerie silence of the last house on the island still owned by the ex-landlord Keith Schellenberg. Damp furniture, peeling walls, and a room made up to appear as if a dead body was left in the bed. Shoes poking out from the bedspread, a huddled hump under the sheets, and a straw head covered by a book. Undisturbed since he left the island, the house remains an anomaly, a place abandoned in time, a monument to a less cooperative era.

Throughout the next two days, we walk most of the southern part of the island. Pictish stones, tales of exile, massacre and government troops, journeys to caves, the finding of objects both beautiful and profane. A mat of rainbow-coloured sea-tangle, both natural and man-made: fibres seaweed shells and feathers introduced by the waves and then driven on the shore after years of interweaving at sea.

This mat becomes an icon: a reminder of the impossibility of separating the natural and the cultural. We scan it at high resolution before the smell becomes too much and it gets thrown outside. Nesting birds unpick the strands of fabric and disperse them to the rookeries.

We follow up some of the ideas from the walks: we look up Egg Island on a web search only to find Egg Island. This seems like a mistake but we click to go there anyway. Egg Island is off Nova Scotia. Many of the islands' people went there during the Highland Clearances. No coincidence after all... the island seems to be more than itself in the click of a mouse button. Many of the reminiscences and experiences of this alter-island parallel the life of the Hebrides in uncanny ways. (6)

New senses of island are generated in response to our findings. A collection of inter-related micro-movies are built, making our specific experiences into a network of relations. An experiential map and history in one. Film, scans, stills and relations to the world beyond can all be amalgamated into our work, which becomes a dialogue with each other and our responses to place.

Keep Focus

Gair Dunlop

In the beginning there was the urge to make work in the North, and a sense of poetics which engaged with the seemingly remote. Then with new technologies there was an expectation about making work in the North, and its potential. The dialogue between these poetics and expectations form the dynamic of this writing.

Of all corners of the world, North is the furthest. It is the most elusive and the least circumscribed, an ill-defined space rather than a delineated place. An old Russian joke has it, that there are no roads in Russia, only directions. Likewise the North is a direction to which the compass needle points but never arrives; the North lacks locality, territoriality, borders and other signs of our rational geometrical civilisation. (1)

How culturally specific are these definitions of space? Are the signs of North Europe similarly provisional? We'll go Westwards, to the Scottish North...

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SIGNS AND MARKERS





DIFFUSION

This publication is one of a series commissioned by Proposics alongside the Landscape & Identity: Language & Territory Creative Labs held in March and June 2002. Using the themes of Landscape & Identity: Language & Territory, the ebooks explore how innovative use of new technologies can transform our perception of other societies and cultures, territories and places, and provide enabling tools which are a catalyst for the development of new ideas. The LI:T ebooks and Creative Labs investigate collaborations between the arts, academia and civil society organisations using new media and technology. They are part of SoMa's Liquid Geography research theme.

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LIQUID GEOGRAPHY:
 Landscape & Identity: Language & Territory

Keep Focus

www.gairdunlop.org.uk



3 MAP REFERENCES FOR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

NC 223123
 NC 235244
 NC 057247

A BARE CODE, ONE WHICH MIGHT SPARK PASSING INTEREST IN A GEOGRAPHER OR A NUMEROLOGIST

Some forms of enumeration and disposition:
 Trig points, mile posts, books of place names.
 The places visible from the sea with Norse names.
 The places inland with Gaelic names.
 The Hanoverian military matrix.

The distance between the impersonal map reference and the experiential temporary conjunction is huge, but the personal illuminates the bigger picture. Specifics – graffiti, erasures, temporary signs and breakings of the landscape code – serve to remind us of the veil through which we see North.

A smooth salt pile, with the distant mountain of Sulliven echoing its flat-tened brow and plunging flanks. Across the turning circle; a phone box, a bare line of willows, and the end of a harled cottage with a bright lamp shining in the midwinter sun.

A road sign, with the relative positions of WEST and NORTH swapped. It has then been altered in a way familiar to the aficionados of Walker Evans. No call to the lords mercy but a brief curse; North is Shit.

Reflecting the clear blue sky, glass insulators and a rusty pan nestle in the harsh grass beside the A835. An autumn breeze blows.

To put it another way:

1. Medvedev, S., *The_Blank_Space: Glenn Gould, Russia, Finland And The North*, c-theory.com
2. Dunlop, G., *languageLand*, images on www.gairspace.org.uk/htm/land01.htm
3. Boswell, J., *Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides*, 1785.
4. Medvedev, S., *ibid*.
5. Muir, E., *Scottish Journey*, pp.93-94, 1935.
6. "My step-grandfather, Samuel O Webber, was lightkeeper and my father, Warren Kidson was his Assistant. They got \$80.00 per month between them. Unfortunately my father has passed away and I can only remember bits and pieces of stories he used to tell about living on Egg Island. I have been trying to get some stories out of my uncles – but they were younger and don't remember as much." Olga Kidson, Nova Scotia, website of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society on www.ednet.ns.ca/educ/heritage/nslps/egg_isl.htm
7. Boddington, A., in *Cartography: the City*, Catalyst Arts, Belfast, 2000.
8. *Freeflow* an exhibition and DVD of the Scottish Natural Heritage Youth Arts Initiative, CCA Glasgow 1 - 16 June 2002, contact irene.watson@snh.gov.uk

The role of the North as a haven or refuge has been imposed from outside by elaborate systems of ownership and cultural coding. In response, these meanings have been adopted and retransmitted locally for economic survival reasons, but alternative dynamisms are stunted by an organisation that can work with new media in the North, developing both technical skills and social reflexivity.

In other words, a new use of the internet, in and for ourselves, which acknowledges economic and external forces but is not pre-defined by them. A way to facilitate what can be 'rather than what exists already. Discussions of community use seems always defined by access: the questions of self-defined skills knowledge and capabilities are lacking. The journey metaphor promotes the parachuting in... but at least there's a sense of arrival.

All these features define the North through codes which differ from the usual; they allow an intensely personal relationship to place to develop. Counties, place names, and differentiations which have officially vanished years ago still provide identity.

So many people have the same Christian names that their place becomes a supplementary identity, an anchor. So there's Murdo Albhainn and Murdo Inch; Helen Stronchrubie and Helen Allt – surnames become obsolete in an intimate form of address, which combines the personal of the forename with the specifics of place.

Temporary monuments become transient markers of passing sensibility. Individuals have inserted their responses into landscape: North is Shit, taking drugs seriously.

This can be seen as mere sarcasm and palimpsest, but a deeper reflection allows us to conceive of their texts as a meditation on expectation and the view through acerbic criticism. (2)

Frank Fraser Darling's embrace of the land is all-consuming. He moves his family to Tanera Mor, one of the improbably named Summer Isles off Achillibute. By example he seeks to inspire a new relation to land, retailing empty margins by sheer force of will. This land-leninist approach, as an avant-garde to the hoped-for flow of new Highlanders, produces some intense and cogent writing on crafting and ecological strategies. On the other hand, after two seasons they have to abandon the idyll. He becomes one of the first ecologists of the North, based more substantially at

Edwin Muir drives through Assynt and Durness while preparing to write *Scottish Journey*. Prescriptive and troubled in his diagnosis of the cities, his narrative here subsides to descriptive travelogue. In a bare land, there's always the geology. On arrival at the ferry to Orkney, his childhood home, the Highlands enable reverse on the politics and prospects of the Scottish cities rather than its own condition. On disembarking in Orkney, he gives up the hopeless task of diagnosing the malaise of Scotland, and resumes with Willa Muir the translation of Kafkas' *Metamorphosis*.

Johnson and Boswell get off to a bad start;

I awoke very early. I began to imagine that the landlord, being about to emigrate, might murder us to get our money, and lay it upon the soldiers in the barn. (...) We had a considerable circle about us, men, women, and children, all M'Crass, Lord Seaforth's people. Not one of them could speak English. I observed to Dr. Johnson, it was much the same as being with a tribe of Indians; Johnson, 'Yes, sir; but not so terrifying.' (3)

How do you take a consciousness about process into these contexts?
How to make work which is not 'community art' – that stands in itself?
Is it possible to make links which enable long-term production, play and networking in a way that is defined by and responsive to the needs of people in dispersed communities?

There are signs of strategic thinking along more developmental lines. Highland Council (taking advantage of the new multi-purpose architectural spaces being created as school/community centre/theatre/library/sports centre in Highland communities) are involving artists in both the construction stages and in residence during the initial phases of these buildings.

SNH (Scottish Natural Heritage) and other groups are thinking through the possibilities for further partnerships with arts-related organisations. It is necessary for artists to be able to work flexibly and imaginatively with organisations for whom arts practice is an instrument and not a goal. This is liable to be an increasingly common mode of engagement for artists. The responsibility for artists is to take contemporary and new media practice forward in new contexts, to test it in dialogue, not to retreat in the face of a perceived impurity of purpose.

There is room for a new point of engagement; for a network of artists, media theorists, and facility providers. Their potential role is to facilitate projects which work with concepts of self-image, autonomy, and locally defined goals and dialogues. These projects would enable direct local and international communication, bypassing the role of the centre's 'other' which has been accepted as the North's destiny.

Oskar Kokoschka paints here. Occasional recognisable shapes and a sense of overpowering light would suggest he had good weather of it. The place is however contingent rather than necessary. Pleasant excursions by motor car define a tranquil episode in a turbulent life.

Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie revisit the journey of Boswell and Johnson; a post-Romantic Odyssey following in the footsteps of a pre-Romantic one. Contending voices and a plurality of experience are transmitted to the internet, with responses from the online outside world having an effect on the process. There seems to be room for play, 'dérive', the unexpected.

What might happen with a longer-term model of engagement? In the hands of communities, the terms of digital production could be radically changed. Some equipment, and a relationship over time with networks of artists, could lead to new channels of broadcast and narrowcast dialogue. National and international links can be made real.

Now none of this is untrue. The problem is that once that Correct Order of Evaluation has been achieved, and appropriate targets and outcomes can be ticked off, further creative and critical thinking is effectively preempted. The funding has achieved its aims, the projects have made interventions, outputs have been quantified, and the short-term nature of engagement of artists, new media, and community is not addressed.

As part of the tying-up of loose ends at the end of the project, I gather opinions and responses for the Holy Evaluation: a procedure intrinsic to any funded project, with a formal rite and a correct Order of Service. Everyone enjoyed themselves, everyone learnt about new media and got a good feeling about nature, sea and sky, and the delicate balances of island life. And yes, we would all like to do it again.

The projects completed, I submitted the DV tape and CD to the funding body for editing into a compilation of all the other projects over the past year. This was to be a distributive edition, which would enable all the groups to make contact and compare works and ideas. I then discovered that the distribution of DVD players and computers in the North was extremely sparse. A lower-tech propagation would perhaps be more useful for the purpose.

THE ISLAND AND THE OUTCOME

6

The concept of North in Scotland has relations to the Russian, the Scandinavian and the Canadian expression of identity but with one crucial difference: the sense of North in Scotland is predicated on the unfiltered legacy of Romanticism. It retains elements of other world views but these are all refracted through the emotionalising prism of Mendelssohn, Walter Scott, and the Valentine Postcard company.

Now as artists we return to the North, whether as a leisure zone or as tested for new ways to use our new toys. Funds are occasionally available to take some high-tech art tools to the citizens. How do the concepts of beauty, pleasure, and awareness change with digital possibilities, especially if artists and equipment are parachuted in, make some work, catch a glimpse of deeper possibilities, and disappear again?

(...whereas the East, West and South have more or less fixed meanings, and are interpreted as relatively populated and explored, the North appears as a mythological domain, a semiotic project, a constructed identity. The North is more often communicated than experienced, imagined rather than embodied... The North is the emptiness we are filling with our imagination, narratives and texts; a blank sheet of paper, on which words are written and erased; an empty snow field on which lonely figures emerge, pass, and disappear. (4)

MEANING AND ITS FILTRATION

3

The island had withdrawn to the mid-Atlantic.

We make it through the entire weekend: the gale warning comes down on Sunday at 2 pm. We're down at the jetty in half an hour, back on the main-land by 4.30. The girls get in their parents' cars and disperse across the Mallalig and Morvern area. The teachers, ferry-men and I go to the pub and relax. Shortly, I will begin post-production and honing the final work.

Three months later, I return to present the work to the school. This time the weather is not so kind. I go up to the High School in Mallalig, in a howling gale. We share the work done, have a laugh and a wonder at how lucky we were that everything came together. Afterwards I wait in the Mallalig Deep Sea Fishermens' Mission to see if the Eigg ferry will be running any time in the next three days. The answer is negative.

There are whole tracts of Scotland's scenery and history which are woven with legend. The existence of the ballads, and the fact that they constitute the greatest body of poetry in Scots literature, is the most concrete argument I can advance for this theory. Scotland is a country whose past has been moulded by poetry, but which has produced very few poets. The poetry which pervades its history is purely romantic; the Industrial Revolution cut clean across that poetry, destroying it, and destroying, too, the faculty of communal myth-making which was its source. (5)

On the road North from Perth, a car full of artists, their equipment, and their expectations.

Caravans Tesco vans maps and plans. We are all looking for The Real. A lemonade lorry pulls past us gawkers. As it slipstreams away, buffeting our tiny vehicle, the spirit of True Scottishness peers in our window, illuminates our souls, and passes onward up the A9. We scramble to get a camera out and ready, matching speed to the vehicle to make the most of our engine-screaming overtake. Young Scotland peers coyly into our viewfinder, transfixing us in our hurtling trajectory, then gently peels off for Pitlochry.



Of course this project, investigation, and party didn't just happen miraculously. Although we went in order to discover, we also were there in response to agendas set externally. Our group were beneficiaries of a Scottish Natural Heritage initiative, which was not primarily about making art. They wanted a catalyst to change the relationship between youth and the wider environment.

Their perspective was straightforward. In their researches about the relation of people to the natural environment, it was becoming apparent that young people did not see the natural environment as a place 'for them'. Young people did not go out into the countryside in the way their parents or elder brothers and sisters did, and did not see what happened in the natural environment as being anything to do with them. The idea of the artists projects was to use new technology –as a feature of their lives with which they were familiar and interested in knowing more- to provide a bridge to a relation with the natural world. So with equipment, funding for a short project, and an open mind as to outcome, artists and youth groups all over Scotland linked up and began to work each other out. (8)

The process involves a voluntary relaxation of control from the artists point of view; differing projects involve differing relations. The sense of play, a reentry into the forms and conditions of place and life feel like a rural take on the Situationist tactic of the 'dérive'. For once, the residents and makers of the sense of Highland space and identity were able to step slightly aside from their accustomed places and roles, able to take a new perspective on what gets taken for granted. To inhabit playfully...

4

A RESULT

I was discussing a project with a senior art teacher at a Highland School. The project, which was fully funded, was to involve groups in making a digital video piece on their relation to the sea, and then to produce a finished CD or video. Links had been made with a wide variety of potential collaborators, and I could tell he liked the idea. Nonetheless, I could sense that he was building up to turn the project down. I asked him why. He replied that the assessment requirements for art qualifications was geared for conventional imaging, and that new media was disadvantaged as the assessors didn't have any clear view on how to evaluate it. He had the best interests of his students at heart. I made the work with a local boys' club instead.

What constitutes the expectations of an art piece in northern places? The apparent effortlessness/evanescence/weightlessness of digital art production leads to a situation where artists can be parachuted in more easily than ever before, somehow the expectation that what they make will have an influence is even higher. Yet the means to produce new media art in these places are still elusive. A CD of images scanned from 35mm negative film will cost at least £12, and will take at least 10 days to return. The immediacy of the medium can be negated by distance.

A PROSPECT OF THE WESTERN HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND AS SEEN FROM THE WESTBOUND PLATFORM OF HOLBORN STATION, LONDON.



partion of a weekend away... usual beach pleasures, heightened by the freshness of place and the antic- and straightforward. Games, sculptures, collections of material; all the We're soon off down to the beach, and the DV cameras are quickly familiar tape, and a struggle for the soul of the hostels' music system begins. NowThat'sWhat!Music CDs. The island boys have got the new Slipknot food clean socks energy and keen informed hosts. The girls have brought The North is visiting itself. We have scanners cameras computers printers

tainable numbers, and we're here on a journey. tion is stable, subtle community developments are bringing visitors in sus- Puritan island, it has a range of new and ancestral residents. The popula- ing to the outside world with its own sense of identity and resolve. Never a island from the feudal grip of its eccentric owner, Elg is a community look- In recent years known mostly for a long and bitter struggle to wrest the

Nature opens itself around us: gannets seals whales and dolphins escort us across the water.

Four twelve-year-old girls from Mallalag High School are tickling each other while leaning over the front of a boat with high-end digital cameras in their hands. It's a beautiful day, and we're leaving Arisaig harbour with a severe gale warning imminent. We are off to Elg, duration unknown as we have to be ready to return at a moments' notice. The island is a mere 5 miles from the mainland but it feels like the mid-Atlantic when the hard Westerlies bear down.

NONNONNONSTOP!!!needtokeepfocusneedtokeepfocus!!!

5

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