

Making and Entering

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Introduction

In this dissertation I will firstly explore the potential for art to provide liminal experiences that allow for transformation to take place in the viewer/participant, and secondly to examine the artists role in catalysing these experiences.

In understanding our alienation from nature and from our natural being, I propose here that art has the potential to challenge these boundaries and the established nature/culture dualism, and to provide individuals with a way of finding transformed meaning.

To this end, I will look specifically at works that deal with the natural world, are made from natural materials and are often situated outside. My research has been inspired by Meredith Sabini's, *'The Earth Has a soul- C.G. Jung on Nature, Technology & Modern Life'*, which looks at society's disconnection from 'nature' - both internal and external - and the increasing awareness of the negative effects of this disconnection on health and wellbeing, for individuals, society and nature itself.

Our changing understanding of the term nature, and what we consider natural, is in itself an indicator of our relationship nature. For example, we can consider society's changing acceptance of genetic modification. My own experience working with children and adults in the outdoors has taught me to understand the potentially transformative power of connecting with nature and leads me to consider the potential role of art in facilitating these experiences.

This dissertation draw from theorists and philosophers who have considered the body as an important tool in aesthetic appreciation and learning. I will also look at the work of anthropologists who have examined the liminal phase in transformation rituals, and where liminality can also be found in psychoanalysis. I draw parallels between the liminal phase in ritual and individuation, the power of the threshold experiences, and the transformative experiences of participating

bodily in certain artworks. I will look more closely at three art works that I believe are providing these experiences, and in the process, connecting people with nature. I will also explore the role of these artists in comparison to the trickster figures examined by Lewis Hyde in his book *'Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art'*, These figures are often seen as catalysts of liminal, and therefore transformative, experiences.

The word 'transformation' has different meanings in different contexts. In genetics, transformation refers to the alteration of cells resulting from an uptake and incorporation of genetic material from its surroundings. In biology, it is a physical growth or metamorphosis often accompanied by a change in environment or behaviour. A cultural metamorphosis is a dynamic process of adapting to external and internal forces. Spiritual transformation is usually characterised by a change of meaning systems, how a person defines themselves, understands their purpose and their idea of the sacred, or what is worthy of reverence.

Context and historical background; how did nature become othered?

Before I examine how art can transform our ideas about nature, we must first explore the cultural and historical factors that led to nature being considered separate. The Romantic era in poetry and art was characterised by a yearning for nature and for individuality. This is often seen to have emerged in response to the tumult caused by the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the 19th century. During this period of great upheaval, there was a seismic shift in modes of production as industry moved from hand production to mechanised factory production. This resulted in an increasingly urbanised population and increased alienation from the rural environment. Such pastoral nostalgia is expressed by Constable in many of his famous paintings.



1. John Constable, The Cornfield, 1826 (National Gallery)

The Land Art movement of the 1960's was a reaction against the artificial aesthetic of American art during that period, and the disengagement of modernism from the social and political issues of the time. The Land Artists were protesting against the commercialisation of art and strove to make art outside of the art market, away from the gallery setting. In doing so artists engaged with the political activism of the decade. Art works were created in the natural environment and with natural materials that therefore changed and eroded over time. Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty epitomises this movement.



2. Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty, 1970, Utah

The turn of the 21st century has seen another revolution in technology with the emergence of communication technologies and the internet galloping forwards at a rapid pace. This progress has led to further alienation of humans from the natural environment and further, from direct physical interaction with each other. (Marx's Theory of Alienation). As we enter a new geological epoch, that of the Anthropocene - in which human activity is for the first time affecting the earth's atmosphere and ecological systems - we see also the emergence of new movements which respond directly to this alienation from, and sense of dominance over, the natural world. Post Humanism, Deep Ecology, psychology and environmental art are amongst many movements that reevaluate our place in the natural system and attempting to find some reconciliation and reconnection with nature and ourselves as natural beings.

Much of western philosophy refers to nature as being 'other', separate from culture and from human beings. Part of this is a rhetorical problem – even the language we use serves to separate us from the natural. Even to speak of 'connecting' with nature implies that it is separate from us in the first place. As Susan Hiller notes; 'All known human societies seem to formulate ideas of the 'other' in order to define and legitimate their own social boundaries and individual identities.' (Hiller, 1991, p3). This argument is supported by Catherin Bell's reading of anthropological philosopher Rene Girard. According to Girard, '...the group becomes conscious of itself as a group in relation to the sacrificed totem victim not by means of identification with it but by contrast to it as "other".' (Bell, 1997, p.16) 'The ritual sacrifice is the means by which the community deflects or transfers its own desire and violence on to another, someone who has been made into an outsider or an 'other'.' (Bell, 1997, p.16). I would argue that identifying nature as 'other', as though it were separate from us, has allowed us to do violence towards it, to feel that we were in control of our environment. In the process we have sacrificed it, and therefore ourselves.

The '*disconnect*' between humans and nature is explored by Bruno Latour in his Gaia lectures. He claims that we are no longer dominated by mighty nature, in

the manner glamourised by the Romantics, but we have dominance over it, in that we now affect its very workings in the age of Anthropocene.¹ We have been changing the shape of the earth, at the same time the 'Earth has metamorphosed of late into something that James Lovelock has proposed to name Gaia. Gaia is the great Trickster of our present history.' (Latour, 2011, p.8) Lovelock's theory proposes Gaia (after the mythological mother goddess who both personified and gave birth to the earth), to be a series of complex, self-regulating systems that maintain conditions for life on planet earth. While we threaten to wipe her out, we must also support her as she both supports us and threatens to wipe us out.

The disconnect between the nature of the crisis and the 'set of emotions, habits of thoughts, and feelings' necessary to handle it, has rendered us ill equipped to deal with this state. We feel responsible, which leaves us with the problem of 'How to feel the sublime when guilt is gnawing at your guts?' (Latour, 2011, p.3) We need to feel that nature is sublime in order to be moved to care for it.

Latour argues that 'facing this new disconnect, there is no solution except to explore the disconnect' (Latour, 2011, p.5) He proposes to resurrect the term 'political arts' and to "train professional artists and scientists —social and natural— to the triple task of scientific, political and artistic representation' (Latour, 2011, p.11) in order 'to close the gap' between our feelings about the challenges facing nature and the way we behave. I now continue to examine how artist can 'close the gap' identified by Latour through facilitating transformative experiences through their work.

¹ 'What is so strange about this abysmal distance between our little selfish human worries and the great questions of ecology is that it's exactly what has been so *valorised* for so long in so many poems, sermons and edifying lectures about the *wonders of nature*.' (Latour, 2011, p. 2) When nature was a mighty, dominating force, the distance was sublime. Now that we have dominance over nature, the distance is 'abysmal' and lonely.

The body as a tool for aesthetic appreciation, learning and transformation

One of the tools artists use to affect powerful transformation is the physical experience of art. The philosophy of somaesthetics explores the role of bodily experience in the aesthetic appreciation of art. The term was coined by the American philosopher Richard Shusterman, who argues that in the conversation about aesthetics, the body is often overlooked. Somaesthetics brings together the study of the somatic - things relating to the human or animal body, as distinct from the mind or spirit, with the philosophy of aesthetics - the study of the perception of art, beauty and taste.

Shusterman has written extensively on philosopher, pragmatist and educational reformist John Dewey's ideas about aesthetics. Dewey was writing at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th Century. Of Dewey's book '*Art as Experience*', Shusterman has written:

For Dewey all art is the product of interaction between the living organism and its environment, an undergoing and a doing, which involves a reorganisation of energies, actions, and materials. Though the fine arts have become increasingly more spiritualised, "the organic substratum remains as the quickening and deep foundation," the sustaining source of the emotional energies of the art which make it so enhance to life (AE 30-31).

(Shusterman, 2000, p.6)

Dewey laid great importance on the physical relationship of the viewer to the art object. Art is a form of self-expression for the artist but also a tool for communicating something with other human beings.

Dewey's writing on education further added to this conviction. He believed in experiential education and in hands on learning. This is apparent in Dewey's belief that, 'if knowledge comes from the impressions made upon us by natural objects, it is impossible to procure knowledge without the use of objects which

impress the mind' (Dewey, 1916, pp.217-218)². Dewey is also careful not to divide the human being into separate components, but was Hegelian in his belief in the interconnectedness of body, mind and spirit and his 'prizing' of the person as a whole. Philosophers and theorist have long held that the body is an important part of having aesthetic experience of art. I am particularly interested in this aspect of Dewey's work because it informs my own practice of inviting viewers to have a physical experience of nature. I am going to look at artists who have created physical experiences for the viewer.

Anthropology and Liminality- Ritual transformation

In this section I will explore the role of liminality in rituals, and how the 'phases' of ritual reflect older myths, and have been used to describe the process of the individuation of the psyche. Ritual is one place that we find powerful transformation affected. I will draw parallels with transformation achieved through art.

In her book '*Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*', Catherine Bell defines ritual thus: 'Traditionally, ritual has been distinguished from other modes of action by virtue of its supposed nonutilitarian and nonrational qualities.' In this context nonrational means a 'lack of any practical relationship between the means one chooses to achieve certain ends.'(Bell, 1997, p.46). "Ritual' is not an intrinsic, universal category or feature of human behaviour... it is a cultural and historical construct.' It is used to create and maintain religious, cultural and social structures by 'its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place in a larger order of things.'(Bell, 1997, p.0).

The importance of the liminal in ritual - understood as the space or threshold between one thing and another - was identified by French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep during the first half of the 20th century. In his book '*Rites De Passage*' he looks at the use of liminal experience in the rituals and ceremonies of transition. Van Gennep identified three stages in ritual. The first phase an initiate

² In art, this could best be illustrated by haptic arts, which use touch to produce an aesthetic effect in the minds of the viewer/participant.

must go through is the separation phase, here they are detached from their group or culture and their previous identity. Van Gennep coined the term 'liminality' to describe the state of the initiate during the second phase, the intermediary, where they become ambiguous, identityless and placeless. They are a passenger on their way through, before passing into the aggregation, or rebirth, phase where their new identity is consummated. They come out the other side of the ritual with a new identity, or new role in society. This liminal space often involves a breaking down of the old self, or pain, before the person can grow into the new self. There is an 'actual passing through the threshold that marks the boundary between two phases, and the term 'liminality' was introduced in order to characterize this passage' (Arpad Szokolczai, 2009, p.141). This reflects what occurs when an entity is transformed by its environment.

Traditionally the ritual takes place 'under the authority of a master of ceremonies' (Szokolczai, 2009, p.148) who makes sure the rites of passage run as they are intended. This overseeing, or midwife figure is manifest in many places in the modern world, such as an analyst overseeing the individuation process or the artist/gallerist showing the work of art. However, social Anthropologist Virginia Hine argues, 'People do not need a priest or a holy man to be a mediator or intermediary between the great Mystery and themselves. We all have a high priest or priestess within.'(Hine, 1987, p.304) We have our own master of ceremonies within us. It is this 'inner master of ceremonies' that guides us when we chose to take part in a work of art. We begin to see how individuals can have these transformative experiences outside of the traditional ritual framework.

Elaborating on Van Gennep's writing about transition and liminality, cultural anthropologist Victor Turner said 'I prefer to regard transition as a process, a becoming, and in the case of *rites de passage*, even a transformation' (Turner, 1967, p.4). Louis Carus Mahdi, editor of *Betwixt & Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, identifies in Turner 'a pattern for understanding initiation as an individual and inner process of growth and individuation.'(Mahdi, 1987, p.3) This growth and individuation for the individuals goes through the same pattern as that of the guided ritual.

The artworks I will look at parallels ritual structures. They set up encounters with thresholds. The artist acts as a kind of guide or midwife to these experiences.

The Importance of Ritual

Looking further at the discourse surrounding rituals, Walter Benjamin's project *Passagenwerk*, berates the lack of transition rituals in our modern world 'In modern life, these transitions are becoming ever more unrecognizable and impossible to experience. We have grown very poor in threshold experiences.' (Benjamin, 1982, p.494)³ Benjamin's concern reflects what Catherine Bell says; 'Van Gennep's theory contributed directly to the questions that have been raised about the relative lack in modern society of formal social rituals and the possible correlation of this lack with modern social ills.' (Bell, 1997, p.37) This potential for social dysfunction is illustrated clearly by the African proverb 'If the young are not initiated into the village, they will burn it down just to feel its warmth.'

Bell sites sociologist and social psychologist Emile Durkheim's theory of religion as social construct for maintaining bonds of community, reflecting Campbell's suggested sociological function of ritual. Ritual is part of a social institution designed to repeat the structure of the group itself 'in which individuals experience something larger than themselves.' (Bell, 1997, p.24) Durkheim emphasises the importance of '*experience*', of taking part bodily in the ritual. This view is reminiscent of Jung's claim that 'Without any body, there is no mind, and therefor no individuation.' (Jung, (in Sabini) p.155) Experience, and therefore change, begins with a physical action.

'Van Gennep also suggests the importance of rites of passage to the psychological well-being of individuals... not just the structural-functional well-being of the

³ In his search to identify where these transitional experiences still exist, Benjamin sites waking up and falling asleep, and also the act of communication, conversations before exact conclusions have been reached. Overseeing communication is attributed to the god Mercury.

community as a whole.' (Bell, 1997, p.37). Meredith Sabini says 'Individuation does not remove the individual from the social sphere but enlarges one's connection to it.' (Sabini, 2002, p.14). The wellbeing of the individual and the community are interlinked.

Identifying a pattern - Individuation and the Monomyth

This section explores the significance of the phases identified by van Gennep in order to understand why they might still be important today. According to Catherine Bell, Carl Jung the founder of Analytic Psychology, and mythologist Joseph Campbell both:

...used the model of van Gennep's three-stage process of initiation, with its echoes of older myths and ritual theories of the dying and rising god, to analyse the structure of the hero myth, and by extension, the process of human individuation that leads to the achievement of a mature sense of self. (Bell, 1997, pp.101-102)

I would suggest that the repeated motif of the dying and reviving god (sic), the killing of the victim and resurrection as a god, echoes the cycle of the changing seasons of the year, and is therefore more ancient than myth itself. If so, this pattern would be thoroughly ingrained in the human psyche, van Gennep says: 'life itself means to separate and to reunite, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn.' (van Gennep, 1909 p.189).

By examining Campbell's ideas about a 'Monomyth', we can see that there is a wider and more ancient pattern underlying all myths and cultural development 'composed of basic stages like separation from the world, penetration to a source of great power, and then a life-enhancing return.' (Bell, 1997, p.16). Campbell identifies four functions of myth and ritual. The first is the metaphysical or mystical, inducing awe and reverence. The second provides an image of the cosmos. The third is a 'sociological function that integrates and maintains

individuals within a social community', and the fourth is the psychological, which 'guides the individuals internal development'. (Bell, 1997, p.16).

This pattern can also be found in the process of individuation. Carl Jung developed the concept of archetypes and became interested in alchemy, which he likened to the process of individuation during psychoanalysis. Individuation 'is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated [from other human beings]; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology.' (Jung, 1921, p.448)

'Rites of passage not only effect transition in the sacred sphere but also concomitantly in the psychological sphere.' (Bell, 1997, p.102) An individual's psyche, their soul or total self, is changed during initiation, as the psyche is changed during individuation. In simple terms, it begins with the analysand's disunion, or disconnection, then passes through a liminal stage, during which there is an immersion into darkness and uncertainty before emerging into the light, connected. Jung is clear that this unified state is a marriage of opposites and must not be solely cerebral, but must balance what he identified as the four functions; thinking and feelings, sensation and intuition. As with Dewey, Jung is prizing the person as a whole. Individuation is a rebirth, making anew by crossing the threshold, going through the liminal space.

During the individuation process we see the liminal being used to facilitate transformation. Paraphrasing late 20th century writer Maulana Karenga, Catherine Bell describes ritual 'as a primary means for self transformation and cultural revolution.' (Bell, 1997, p.xi)

We have seen that this pattern is important for the social function of society, and for the emotional wellbeing of individuals. Since this ancient pattern is found less and less there is therefore an opportunity for artists to provide this.

Later I will look at how artists use this pattern to affect transformation through their work.

The Catalysing Trickster

Trickster is an agent of transformation, and transformation is directly connected to the trickster's typical character as a shape-shifter, neither fully one thing nor the other, someone betwixt and between all moral and ontological categories. The trickster is the embodiment of contradiction, creator and destroyer of norms, clown, monster, giver of fire, creator of worlds. Having such a confounding figure at the centre of one's worldview helps to keep the mind nimble as it moves between opposites, both creating meaning and tearing it down to make room for new creation. (Louis G. Herman, author of *Future Primal* and professor of political science at University of Hawai'i West-Oahu.)

Where to find this figure in the modern world is one of the questions that Hyde asks in his book *Trickster Makes This World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture*. Lewis Hyde says 'it is mostly to the practices of art that I turn in hopes of finding where the disruptive imagination survives among us.' (Hyde, 2008, p.13) He is clear that 'Artists are not tricksters but the practice of art and the trickster myth coincide' (Hyde, 2008, p.14). Most Trickster figures are not purposeful creators, although their breaking down of boundaries often has the result of creating new ones, by their disruption they make things visible, 'When Pablo Picasso said "art is a lie that tell the truth," we are closer to the old trickster spirit.' (Hyde, 2008, p.13)

Trickster figures traditionally display high levels of intellect or posses secret knowledge. They play tricks, disobey normal rules and flunk behavioural conventions. Trickster both creates and breaks down divides and boundaries. Trickster is 'The creative idiot, the wise fool' (Hyde, 2008, p.7).

In *'The Myth of Primitivism'* Susan Hiller says that as well as inevitably reflecting the societies from which they come 'artists are actively involved in changing their society and in reflecting possibilities of change.' (Hiller, 1991, p.3) The artist can be a questioner of accepted norms, and through this the boundaries may be shifted.

Trickster is one of the archetypal figures that Jung identified. For Jung, Mercurius is the archetypal trickster figure whom allows the individuation process to take place. He is the catalyst. He guards the gateway, the god of the threshold, who oversees the liminal experience at the centre of the process of the individual becoming whole, the marriage of the conscious and the unconscious. The Roman god Mercury, who took on the characteristics of the Greek god Hermes, is one of the trickster figures that Lewis Hyde examines. He is the messenger of the gods, a 'boundary-crossers' with winged shoes. Hyde says 'He is the spirit of the doorway leading out, and of the crossroad at the edge of town.' (Hyde, 2008, p.6) They are gods of travel and travellers, of communication and poetry, of transitions and boundaries, they guide souls to the underworld, and sometimes steal them back again, indeed 'The road that trickster travels is a spirit road as well as a road in fact.' (Hyde, 2008, p.6)

The trickster figure is important to transformations because he 'keeps the mind nimble' (Herman) and knows how to 'slip the trap of culture' (Hyde, 2008, p.201), it is this disruptive force that enables the questioning of accepted norms and breaking down of barriers. These characteristics can also be seen in the practice of art.

Initiating transformative experience through challenging conventions

An artist can intentionally use matter out of place to affect change to create ambiguous experiences. Lewis Hyde notes 'the character who can freely play with dirt, is also the cultural hero who brings fundamental change.' (Hyde, 2008, p.189). Hyde describes many of the trickster stories as 'stories about redemption and re-creation through dirt.' (Hyde, 2008, p.182) The liminal phase at the centre

of ritual could be seen as the 'dirt' phase. The individuate is seen as being in a process of 'gestation and parturition', and therefore ambiguous. Anthropologist Mary Douglas says 'Ambiguous things can seem very threatening.' (Douglas, 1966, p.xi) According to Turner, Douglas holds that 'What is unclear and contradictory (from the perspective of social definition) tend to be regarded as (ritually) unclean.' (Turner, 1967, p.97) Therefore, Turner says;

Transitional beings are particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing nor another; or maybe both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere....and are at the very least 'betwixt and between' all the recognised fixed points in space-time of structural classification. (Turner, 1967, p.97)

The individuate is seen as socially unclean when they are passing through the liminal phase as they no longer belong to any of societies structures and are therefore a danger to it.⁴

Summarising Douglas Hyde says 'dirt is always the by-product of creating order. Where there is dirt there is always a system of some kind, and rules about dirt are there to preserve it.' (Hyde, 2008, p.176) He uses her well-quoted suggestion that 'Dirt is matter out of place.' (Douglas, 1966) She sees dirt management as a positive ordering motion, maintained by dirt expulsion rituals. This reflects Durkheim's ideas about ritual helping to maintain societies structure.

Hyde talks about the phenomena of Carnival, or the Feast of Fools, the use of dirt ritual in maintaining order; 'carnival celebrations, despite their bawdiness and filth, are profoundly conservative.... carnival reinforces the status quo...it provides the exceptions that proves the rules.' They work by 'Mocking but not changing the order of things, ritual dirt-work operates as a kind of safety valve' or a 'psychic and social drainage system'. (Hyde, 2008, p.187) However he says;

⁴ This same 'gestation and parturition' is reflected in the processes gone through during individuation. After a period of submersion into the dark of the unconscious, the psyche is 'reborn'

Where change *is* in order, dirt-work also has a role to play, for it simply isn't true that these rituals are always conservative. Dirt rituals may stabilize things for years on end, but when the order is in fundamental crisis these rituals can become the focal point for change, catalytic moments for dirt's reevaluation and true structural shifts. (Hyde, 2008, p. 188)

If an individual, passing through the liminal phase of a ritual, is outside the structures of society and therefore a danger to it, then a participant taking part in a transformative artwork also has the potential to think outside of this structure and create social change. Latour believes art has the potential to act as a 'focal point for change', and provide 'catalytic moments' to aid us in making some major shifts in our attitudes towards the crisis facing the earth, to reevaluate the value of this 'dirt'.

Olafur Eliasson-Riverbed 2014



3. Riverbed, Olafur Eliasson, 2014, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

Sculptor Olafur Eliasson is a useful example of an artist who subverts the traditional gallery experience by turning the gallery into a new environment. This creates the potential for participants to be immersed bodily in the work.

In August 2014 Eliasson transformed a wing of Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark into a huge riverscape, covering about a thousand square meters of the gallery with Icelandic rock and water.

Much of Eliasson's work explores man made constructions of features of nature. It forces people into contact with 'nature'. Through this introduction of 'natural' phenomena into the urban or built environment Eliasson hopes to jog the viewer into perceiving the surroundings they may otherwise not have noticed. He has described this moment of perception as 'Seeing yourself seeing' (Eliasson), implying that, for a moment at least, the viewer steps outside of their own day-to-day life and gains a new consciousness of themselves. This reflects what occurs during the liminal phase of a ritual.

A *Louisiana Channel* video follows three writers through Riverbed, James McBride reflects;

Good art, in addition to imitating life, moves your life forward, inches it forward just a bit, and what this piece does is to help move the collective forward, just that much more. Because as people move through this, the earth changes them, the earth moves their insides, and the shifting tundra is like the shifting paradigm of life and personal evolution. (McBride, 2014, Video)

Becoming part of the work as you enter it is central to the idea of art providing a liminal experience. Being *in* the work encourages us to look differently. The artist controls how the viewer's body moves through space, manipulating the experience, making them look inwards and forcing them to re-evaluate their position as art audience. As they move through the work, viewers are transformed into a component of the piece.

Another writer speaking in the video, Sjon, argues 'A piece of art should never make a stable atmosphere or a stable conclusion.' (Sjon, 2014) He is suggesting that it is in the unstableness that the work lays. It leaves questions open that the audience must take part in addressing. If the questions are answered already

then the work becomes merely an advert for the thoughts of the artist. Like Mercurius, Sjon says, 'Olafur Eliasson is the master of making encounters between people and experience.' (Sjon, 2014, video) It is in the encounter that the work happens.

The third writer, Daniel Kehlmann, demonstrates modern societies view that human beings and their endeavours are separateness from nature and its cycles and creations. This view has become a binary that the 'disruptive imagination' (Hyde, 2008) attempts to break down.

There is a very clear line between what is art and what is nature, and they are opposing concepts, but, of course, when you are a very intelligent artist, you can blur that line, and you can create things where it is actually not clear whether it is art or nature. (Kehlmann, 2014)

This description of the artist reflects the trickster spirit. Eliasson is acting as a kind of go between for these two apparent opposites. He is challenging the assumption that they are opposing concepts, muddying the divide in order to sweep away the lines. This prompts us to ask questions of ourselves and our beliefs and helps us to see ourselves more clearly

David Nash- Ash Dome, 1977 onwards



4. Ash Dome, David Nash, 1977 onwards, Cae'n-y-Coed, Gwynedd

In December 2014 I visited the sculptor David Nash at his home in North Wales. He is an artist who works intimately with nature, and much of his work is accessible for the audience to interact with. In February 1977 Nash planted a ring of twenty-two Ash trees, which he trained to grow into a large dome.⁵ *Ash Dome*, is in Cae'n-y-Coed woods in Gwynedd. To view it, you must enter the woods and climb a small hill. The dome is viewable from the outside, one can walk around the circumference, but it can also be entered and viewed from

⁵ Writing about Ash Dome in the book *David Nash*, Nash says; 'Some people are discomfited by Ash Dome and the controlling and interfering nature of my process. There is a sense that its ok for hedges but not for art. The environmental movement in the 70's was spit between the belief that the human being is an alien parasite and that nature would be better off without us and a conviction that we are an essential part of holistic nature if we can work with it rather than attempt to dominate or conquer it.' (Nash, 2007, pp.46-48) Nash is a firm advocate of the symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment. Human culture is interrelated with the natural world. In Britain we have been working with and shaping the land for thousands of years, we are not separate from the land, it has formed us and we have formed it.

inside. Entering the dome, you become at once part of the community of dancer-like figures, sensing your own body in a new way, and aware of their stillness, their imperceptible movement, in relation to the speed of your own movements. I was made aware of this difference, but struck by the similarity of our forms. The experience was an opportunity for a new perception, gained through my body.

In the book accompanying Nash recent exhibition at Kew Gardens, Tim Ingold writes; 'Far from enclosing the material within fixed and final forms, the maker is one who *opens it up*, so that one can get to see it and to know it from the inside.' (Ingold, 2013, p.47)

Ingold talks about Nash's studies into 'the anthropology of trees', building an understanding of their characters and community based on spending large amounts of time in their presence. Anthropologists call this method *participant observation*⁶. Ingold says; 'the crucial thing about participant observation is that it is a way of *knowing from the inside*.' (Ingold, 2013, p.48) This links back to Durkheim ideas about the importance of *experiencing* something bodily or from the inside, and also relates to the experiencing of Nash's work in the first hand. My state of mind was altered by my bodily encounter with *Ash Dome*. I felt invigorated and peaceful.

Reflecting the mercurial spirit Ingold writes:

It is not that humans are bent upon the transformation of nature, on turning what had once been a pristine and untouched wilderness into an artificial environment. Their role is rather to assist in the world's transformation of itself. (Ingold, 2013, p.43)

As the analyst guides the individuation process, Nash 'has assisted in the tree's transformation of itself- in its metamorphosis.' (Ingold, 2013, p.44) The villagers

⁶ To gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals through an intensive involvement with it

of the Kii Peninsula in Japan call the transforming of tree from living organisms to building materials, giving it a 'second life' (Ingold, 2013, p.40) This traditional view reflects the idea of the dying and reviving god expressed in the monomyth. Ingold says; 'The ending of one life is the beginning of another, and at the moment of transition stands the maker,' (Ingold, 2013, p.47) the artist stands at the threshold, a mercurial figure guiding the transition.

Nash's interventions into nature make him an enabler or even an instigator of liminal experience. Nash's work has a trickster like affect on peoples understanding of the nature/culture binary. It muddies the divide, making it increasingly unclear if there is one at all.⁷

⁷ Grande asks Nash 'Do your works have anything to do with ritual or performance?' Nash answers: 'You can bring those associations to them, but my concerns are fundamentally practical. The spiritual is dovetailed into the physical, and the two are essentially linked with each other.' This links back to Shusterman on Dewey 'Though the fine arts have become increasingly more spiritualised, "the organic substratum remains as the quickening and deep foundation," the sustaining source of the emotional energies of the art which make it so enhance to life'. Nash says; 'To varying degrees we spiritualize material by our work with it. Unconsciously we are creating a language that another human being can pick up on.' (Arts overlapping with the act of communication return us to Benjamin's modern day transitional experiences) David Nash strongly eschews any suggestion of ritualistic intentions in his work, which may align him with the irreverent trickster figures that Lewis Hyde discusses, for although many of them are gods or semi gods, they are often seen as being on the side of man and his labours.

Agnes Denes-Tree Mountain- A Living Time Capsule, 1996



5. Agnes Denes, Tree Mountain- A Living Time Capsule, 1996, Finland

Agnes Denes has created many large-scale environmental installations that deal directly with environmental and socio-political issues. Denes believes it is a political statement to take art out of the gallery, and therefore away from the systems of commerce that govern the art world. Claire Bishop says that the lack of art object, there being nothing to sell, is in itself anti capitalist and therefore questions the validity of the capitalist system under which we live. This kind of art practice echoes the social function of the carnival ritual. In *'Artificial Hells'* Bishop describes the changing roles of artist and audience in the emerging practice of participatory arts;

the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an on going or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*. (Bishop, 2012, p.2)

Denes is an example of an artist who takes the role of producer as well as visionary and maker. Her 1996 project *Tree Mountain- A Living Time Capsule* was made on a reclaimed site in Finland; a small mountain was constructed and 11,000 trees were planted in a Fibonacci type pattern. The volunteers who did the planting were then given an inheritable certificate granting them

stewardship of the forest. The forest is to be protected for the next four hundred years. Although Denes has hands on involvement in the planting of the forest, 11,000 volunteers from all over the world also took part, the giving of the certificates of stewardship effectively making it 'theirs'. This is an example of the artist acting as a kind of 'master of ceremonies', the mercurial midwife, through whom the process of planning and regrowth is able to take place. Like Eliasson and Nash, her trickery is to reshape the boundaries of what is 'natural'.

Her work *Tree Mountain* attempts to make us see the world anew, it proposes a new system, that of the many human and natural systems working as a whole, and to unite, or reconnect, human thinking and nature;

the human intellect pitted against and positioned with nature's intelligence not to win but to unite instinct with intellect, process with pattern, back to a state and forward to a hybrid. Unite the state of the art processes of the mind on the edge of knowledge and let it blend with nature. © Agnes Denes (From essay written in 1983)

This sentiment is reflected by environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott in his essay *La Nature est morte, vive la nature!*

Nature as Other is over The modern picture of nature is false and its historical tenure has been pernicious. A new dynamic and systemic postmodern concept of nature, which includes rather than excludes human beings, is presently taking shape. (Callicott, 1992)

They hint at the birth of a new state of being, one in which nature and the human intellect are not opposed to each other, or undermining each other, but have evolved into a hybrid greater than the sum of its parts, striving for the same purpose. The process of individuation is hinted at here. (Denes was interested in psychology and it is highly likely that she would have been aware of Jung's alchemical ideas.)

The creation of a new landscape as a piece of work epitomises the idea of a work that you can enter and become a part of. The bodily experience may be had

through the act of planting a tree, which also creates an emotional connection, or walking through this strange forest. The entry point is ambiguous, it is neither entirely natural nor artificial, one is submerged in the liminal experience itself.

One of the reasons why these works of Denes and Nash are affective is because they are successfully recreating the old pattern identified in the myth. Made in locations far from galleries, the decision to take part begins well before the entrance to the works themselves. Someone wishing to experience them must go on a pilgrimage of sorts. Bell says; 'Van Gennep's model has also been applied to the ritual-like, even initiatory, nature of pilgrimage and some of its more recent analogs.' (Bell, 1997, p.102) Leaving the familiar, the pilgrim journeys through the unfamiliar and a state of not belonging, often encountering hardship along the way. When they arrive at the holy place they are given a gift, often of learning or insight. On their return the pilgrim find they are changed by their experience and does not fit back into their old life.

All three of these works blur the line between nature and human activity, they are moving and questioning the established boundaries, creating the unstable atmospheres that Sjon says are so important to affective artworks. They are without forgone conclusions, leaving the audience to fumble for their own interpretation, and in the process to change their minds, perhaps.

Conclusion

The human relationship with nature, and how we understand that relationship has clearly changed over time. This altered relationship has resulted in individuals becoming alienated and disconnected from the natural environment and even human nature itself. Positioning nature as 'other' has supported a cultural acceptance of violence against the natural environment. The effects of this separation from our natural environment have only recently begun to be understood and experienced. As many struggle to rebuild a new, healthier relationship with 'Gaia', Latour argues that new ways must be found to change people's feelings and beliefs about nature. Ways that will support a sustainable future for the planet and for the human race.

Rituals are found to play an important role in maintaining society's structures, catalysing change, giving a sense of belonging and relation to a greater purpose, and supporting individual's psychological wellbeing. There is a strong common thread between van Gennep's stages of ritual, Jung's processes of individuation and patterns found in far older myths which in turn also reflect cycles found in nature. Identifying how this ancient pattern re-emerges in different guises may reflect a deep connection with human experiences of transformation.

Physical participation in artworks finds important characteristics in common with the liminal phase in ritual. The artists discussed facilitate transformative experience by creating a very physical experience for people to engage with. My experience of Nash's Ash Dome demonstrated the importance of taking part physically, of 'experiencing' bodily, to learning and transformation. Artists can disrupt and subvert social structures, challenge cultural beliefs, create ambiguity and uncertainty. Clear examples of how artists generate transformative 'threshold' experiences through use of liminal type elements were found here through discussion of Eliasson's Riverbed, Nash's Ash Dome and Denes' Tree Mountain.

Hyde believes the spirit of the Jungian Trickster archetype is found overseeing many threshold experiences, including the practice of art. This '*disruptive imagination*' (Hyde, 2008) helps societies to keep re-evaluating beliefs and provides a mechanism to support wider change in society and individuals. Artists can challenge accepted norms whilst providing opportunities for people to change their views and feelings. The three examples explored here demonstrate how this has been achieved in relation to understanding human's relationship with nature.

Transitional rituals are fading from our modern culture so that threshold experiences are increasingly hard to find. Latour and Hyde may be right in saying the mercurial spirit can truly be found in the practice of art. It is therefore artists that will increasingly become relied upon to provide individuals and

groups with transformative experiences. Finally, these transformative experiences through art can transform our understanding and find a healthier, more holistic relationship with nature.

List of Images

1. John Constable, The Cornfield, 1826, National Gallery, London
2. Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty, 1970, Great Salt Lake, Utah
3. Riverbed, Olafur Eliasson, 2014, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark
4. Ash Dome, David Nash, 1977 onwards, Cae'n-y-Coed, Gwynedd, North Wales
5. Agnes Denes, Tree Mountain- A Living Time Capsule, 1996, Ylöjärvi, Finland

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