

H-e-m-i-s-p-h-e-r-e-s

Some abstractions for a trilogy

Horizontal

This was the position in which I first encountered *BRIDGIT* and *Stonemollan Trail* played in a seamless loop. In Bergen, crisp with Norwegian cold and rain, myself hungover and thus accompanied by all the attendant feelings of slowness and arousal, melancholy and permeability of spirit. It remains the optimum filmic position, not least for its metaphorical significance to sedimentation and landscape, but because of the material honesty a single figure prostrate in the darkness possesses.

Ecstasy

Drugs, sorcery, pills, holes, luminous fibres, jumping out of the world. Sweat, blood, pattern, metabolism, livid skin, a ridding oneself of form. Electronic dance music is an encryption of all of these terms. It is a translation of ritualised unknowing, a primal deference to sensation in which rhythm logic performs a radical eclipse of sensory logic. At expansive volumes, it swallows a room and those within it. It is an irony of abstraction – the repetitive construction of its beat is a formula (4/4) and yet the somatic response is one of orgasmic disarray. The thump of heavy music exploding in a chest turns vision electric, a seething in the depth of the body that rigs image to a pulse. Dance music, like heavy wind or rain, takes queer territorial assemblages and holds them together. It enables new feeling: geographies and celestial monsters multiplying out across the same inferno. Panic and interludes; colour and elasticity.

As psychoactive drugs, acid and ecstasy – empathogens and entactogens – share their etymological roots with *empathy* and *tactile*. These chemicals are named for their delirious properties of “touching within”, for their enabling of an emotional openness. Used in recreational combination with electronic music, the effect is one of horizon broadening: the erotic twinge of arousal pricking in the groin; gnawing sexual appetite breaking like an elastic that has been pulled, is bursting with love, and finally turned inside out such that the raw skin of desire is worn on the surface and is alive to even the friction of breath. This is a knot of mutual sin and benediction. Dance music is a raving language; it is the news of death and brilliant awakening. It is the hunger of fatalism, the expanse of air and our own molecular strangeness.

It is fitting that Prodger’s editing style mimics this pathology of brain identities. Her spoken narratives drive us close to the conceptual experience of chemical pleasure, to lust and adventure. We are waiting to be undone, waiting for disclosure. But like drugs and dancing, the wet dampness of pleasure is morphologically close to the wet dampness of pain. Her words and images deny and reveal in counterpoint. There is peaceful exasperation. Perhaps what this alternate sequencing reveals most prominently is the inherent inscription of human nature’s danger drive, a latent destructive plasticity that allows us to take the temporary face of violence and translate it as radical pleasure. Whether land or sky, intoxicant or steriliser, heartbeat or drumbeat, Prodger takes us close to the margins and limits of control. Perhaps then, we are formed by erosion, by a positive harnessing of the power of annihilation that resides deep within us.

Mercury

SaF05 vibrates with heat and light. Shot in part in Greece and Botswana, the rocks and shrubbery of these landscapes bring with them the space of fiction. The cosmological rhythms of rocks are eternal and sublime, the geology of the earth a plainly beautiful but mystic thing. Like silver oxide or spluttered aluminium, little puddles of liquid look not like water, but Mercury. You can feel the temperature pouring off them, as though they have been heated to boiling point and Prodger’s lens has captured a rapid vaporisation or explosion of everything surrounding to chalk: an aftermath. These pools are oracles into which to pour oneself or to listen for a deep cracked voice, for ancient wisdom beneath the breath thin meniscus.

In their stillness, these puddles speak ardently of life, of the territorial structures surrounding: the monolithic termite mound and its nested colonies; patterns of weather and moisture replenishment; the busy abstractions of wind and its pollination of grasses. For every inch of tenderly scrutinised stillness, there is a reciprocal extrusion of activity. The land expands in all directions and these lumps or holes are but local orifices hemmed in at the surface. Ever attuned to these networked layers, Prodger shoots the natural world like a material metaphor. She cuts out shapes from the landscape as though the camera were a geometric instrument to redefine the codes of the earth, all its complex

ambiguities. She sees detail in detail, in the shaky contours that lie at the edges. Bushes are not bushes but powdery pastels dusted on like makeup; earth looks like vapour and rocks like the medial lines on a palm. By default of biography, this is perhaps a sexual organisation that mirrors the metaphysical organisation of language. For all its beauty and stillness, *SaF05* resonates more with the disturbances and rebellions that occur in the abyss of the unseen.

Much of *SaF05* follows the supple molecular conveyance of a voyage – to search for the lioness cipher of queer identity – with little human interruption. The action takes place across strict margins of space: a drone hovers in a perfectly fixed line, moving incredulously far and still in its ascent from earth; a truck hurtles down the unending straightness of a dusty track; a train slides across a silent left-to-right chronology. The crazy verticality of the city is replaced. The only delinquent still tethered to the centrifugal metropolis is Prodger herself, a disembodied voiceover carefully giving shape to the figures of loves lost and current.

The lyrical nature of circulation in these places is not one of cars, disinfectant or petrol, but the abstract aura of animals, the violent presence of their sound and the obfuscating frustration of their invisibility. Prodger traces lines on the surface of everything. She silently maps and makes monumental the mutual territory of sight and sound. Time, body and feeling are all mercurial variables. Her puddles of mercury are yet another analogy: that like libido, landscape is a partial place in a perpetual state of aggregation and rearrange.

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The narratives and language of Prodger's scripts are precise and intimate. She implicates a cast of characters – friends, lovers, family, animals, minerals, scholars – but almost never identifies them by name. Instead, they are caught in a system of coded language and numbers, a co-system of sexuality and organisation that is not repressive, but gives bodies an alluring sense of secretive energy. As though units in a socially conceived periodic table, Prodger's people have elemental power. They have aura.

Prodger's own voice is the geographic baseline that holds these codes together, which makes each one active in the sense of a series or categoric deployment. And yet this detachment from identity is not militaristic, rather poetic. One has the sense of each person and their story scattered like a pebble to be pocketed, warmed by the intact chemistry of her own place for them.

Prodger's imagery is often that of typology and arrangement. She shows us systems, both organic and technological: roads and haulage vehicles; ships; rocks; appliances. We see how tarmac is snaked by tyre marks in rain, how the blood in a finger boils out its redness when held to light. These moments are all a careful sum of relationships, a method of sifting sediment to find structure. The domestic interiors caught on camera are often those defined by a flow of exchange. There are radiators and lamps that burst like the sun; we hear radios and music with jagged refrains both sharp and magnetic. The effect is to atomise everything. The steam that evaporates from a drying shirt, water in our homes, electricity on the grid – these are all indexes of transfer of waves, particles and radiation. Prodger's is a love of order, but always evidence of the molecular realm of chaos, too.

Spit

Children spit at each other. Rain spits at a rock. Sexual proclivities dictate a spit *or* a swallow. Cuckoo spit is no such thing, but rather the white frothy liquid secreted by nymphs of a sap-sucking bug known as a froghopper, a spittlebug. Whatever the context, spit always sounds mildly pornographic. There is a metonymic excess of desire in all of these actions, an obsessive attention to mouth and touch. Spit has the labour of expression and concealment.

Prodger's voiceover describes boys spitting and flicking cigarette ash with equal intensity. There is no direct accompanying image for this description, but the suggestion is one of a pack, of hooded teenagers and their pallid cheeks flimsy with posture. Prodger catalogues the gestures of personal ramparts, the confusion of facades quickly hoisted. Spitting, cruising, signalling: they are all an excess of self and a performance of baroque incognito.

Pocket

A hand in a pocket is warm, a happy throbbing of flesh against fabric. A hand in a pocket is a reminder that form is rigged and draped like a sheet, made uniform by cotton or fleece. A hand in a pocket is a pose or invitation. A hand in a pocket is just flinches away from the groin and its tweaks of pleasure, from seams and zips and undoing. It is an unlatching of body from place, wet shocks and worried boundaries. A crotch itself is a pocket of darkness to enter. You can touch someone else through a coat and the warmth of breast or belly feels distant, but the minuteness of the gesture is

amplified by its discretion; it is huge, erotic, daring. A pocket is full of longing, an enigmatic signifier of passion and desire – it masks the grey fear of humiliation yet heightens the electric shock of lust. Prodger's description of a pocket is yet another territory of coding. Like the act of cruising, it is an opportunity for anonymity and intimacy. Amidst crumbs and crumpled notes it is a naked celebration of love, of the fragility and fragmentation of queer desire.

Heaven

Heaven is the silent streaming of temperature that distorts distance and creates mirage. Heaven is the sonic torture of the cicada, pouring out frequencies painful to birds. Heaven is the lick of the grass stem through light wind, its individual bend and shiver. Heaven is the flying fluorescent wedge on a pair of Adidas jogging bottoms. Charlotte Prodger's videos capture all of these fractional disturbances and make space around them. Her image sequences make minute calculations about the qualities of collage and overlay, exploring the special elasticity of distance. The great vastness of natural space is held in juxtaposition to the similar vastness of psychic space, of emotional topographies impossible to chart. Prodger's scenes are those of science and magic, diagram and myth: she holds the empirical architecture of the built world against the thickness of desire, measuring both with the same unit.

Prodger's camera looks out of a literal window onto many other windows. Depth of field shifts and tugs with its views of stones or earth, as though the mechanics of the camera body itself were operationally tied to feeling, to the idea of drifting beyond what the eye could capture on its own.

Legs rustle or reeds wave and a semantic comparison is made between the two. It is a remarkable persistence of showing us the minute fluctuations of the world. Erosion and movement. Birds and rain, grains of sand and wind, office blocks and glass. Prodger uses her phone like a barometer, as though its lens might be used as a tool to connect the space between earth and sky. We could all hold a phone up against a sky scraper and note the formal equivalence, the lit floors of one them detached but graphically similar to the lit screen of the other. That phones and light bulbs share many commonalities with ideas is yet another rhyme.

In religious mythology there are seven heavens. In London there is one, the world's most famous gay nightclub. Perhaps the horizon of heaven then, the point at which distant land disappears on itself, is always queer: a place of possible tautology and overlap; a place where mountains are conductors of desire, clouds full of ideology, and the sky just one natural example of the physiology of transcendence. And you can never touch the horizon – it's built from similar structures of futurity and potential. There is only a gap beckoning an event. It is precisely this *otherness* that is unlocatable, that transcends relations within differences that can be known and elucidated.

Excavate

Immoderate points of people are all linked and held in the structures we leave behind. In the trees that rise up in complicated cities. In the little fragments of flint or bone seized from sand on beaches. Archaeology is a means of erupting people out of and away from existence in an undifferentiated mass. It is a method of giving life to dead voices, of finding speech and figuration.

Prodger's excavations are both minute and general. She makes models of the world that understand how dust caught in the light is simply another exponential compression of matter's vastness, of one inner world coinciding positively with external reality. Dust and stones alike are possessed by a resonance that is almost too deep and expansive for us to understand. As a graphic structure for compartmentalising this atomic world, Prodger makes grids.

In computer games and algorithms, grids are the fundamental narrative or ludic elements. Steel frames and lines. Buildings, too, often appear as finely modulated fields, as though they are digitised, with each facet composed of a complex organisational system of pixels. Grids initiate a crisis of inside and outside that can be resolved only in gestures of over compensation, gestures that collapse back onto themselves and are emptied out into the depthless interiors of their own networks. They are models that prescribe an explicit anthropology or psychology. And all the while they are engaged in an almost puritanical procedure of cover-up and concealment.

Retina

The lenses of our eyeballs have become quite literal projectors for an ongoing show reel of entertainment and cosmetic enhancement; they are little logic boxes at the beginning of a vast electrical and chemical machine. Our eyes reveal rather than demonstrate ideas. Hot wounding symbols. Prodger's camera doubles as our screen: it is virtual space, another cycloptic eye, luminous and thus irresistible.

Entropy

A phallic row of trucks, horizontal, endless, futile, one swallowing the other as tire rubber burns and erodes. A city fox amidst trash on the raft of a tartan mattress. A halo of hair in sunlight like a lens flare, scattering a fleeting wash of personal light. A lacy leaf looped on its stem, impossible to express how tiring it is to stay upright whilst its owner films prostrate from the sofa. Prodger's images celebrate the in-betweens: one thing enters another, falls out, begins again. Hormones fizz through their seasonal chapters. Things cycle and decompose.

To mirror this condition of precarity, Prodger's lens often bobs up and down, the hand inseparable from the beat of the heart and rhythm of the lungs. It produces conceptual problems in the same way as Prodger's degraded pixels, always scrambling and falling, both aspirations towards clarity of vision. Prodger illustrates how the brain and eye are appended to the same system of touch. Both contain the refuse and scraps of aging and all are bound by the cruel logic of entropy, a beginning en route to an end.

Snow

Does a discussion of space begin with a rock or a grain of salt? With a strand of hair or the atoms lined up along it? In Prodger's lexicon, the whole world shrivels and becomes giant again in the same breath. Even to think of breath, we become aware that each index of natural material is a modulated field of particles in the same way as our screens are digitised facets, complex systems of organised pixels. As living beings, we orient ourselves by employing a retinal system that innately processes multiple wavelengths and brightness. We are sensitive to a phenomenon of light that allows us to colour and distinguish otherwise identical objects.

Of all weather, snow is one of the most miraculous. Its mineral softness fills the air, catches light and colour. Snow makes us conscious of our own heat. It is a natural extension of the inner silence of the body and therefore a reminder of time. We must decipher our lives, lay them out to be examined, dig a hole and fall into it, or else urinate a golden trickle to assert a new experience of possession or substance.

Like the desert, snow has a cinematic essence. Its purity is dramatic, emphasising form with little effort. As though a plinth to lay down upon, snow takes the shadows of a low winter sun and turns them purple and blue, pure theatre. Snow is not the arrogance of solid ground, but a strange translation. Signs in the landscape stick out ever more bluntly. Trees against snow's whiteness are spiked glyphs, a blackened calligraphy. Or electric green and full of romance. Nature slowly reveals itself as a written language and slides between meaningful word and abstract code. When you emerge from snow, the eye continues attempting to create emptiness all around. The whiteness sticks like a little burn, so just as personal experience accumulates in layers, snow too becomes a sequence of fragments for chopping up, for piling or melting away.

Through Prodger's lens, snow is captured as blanket, as a wonderful ontological mystifier. It functions with the paradox of being both a sound amplifier *and* dampener. This is snow taken as object. Snow taken *in*, crunched through, in the sense of a superlative object. It is almost beyond analogy to matter. It melts over time, but our naive image of snow is that of a singular white mass. We do not see the crystalline fragments of minute architecture in its structure, but understand they are there. Snow suggests the miraculous, so in that sense its filmic equivalent might be smoke. In Prodger's films, we see both intertwined. Snow is neither seamless, or whole, or fundamental, but somehow simply gathers and coats. It is elementally cartoonish and returns us again to pixels, whose tendency is to dissolve and degrade regardless of the happy uniform face they gather to represent.

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March 2020*