

Gravitational Waves March 2014

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'Before the Close of Day' is the title of Brendan Earley's latest installation at Mother's Tankstation Gallery, Dublin.[i] The title appears to originate from walks in open terrain in New Mexico as revealed in a text and a photograph he has published in conjunction with the installation. The photograph shows a fairly bleak landscape with a grey sky more befitting Ireland than New Mexico. It is revealed in the text that his companion for one of these walks is New Mexico resident, Lucy Lippard. We are informed that she is the primary reason for his visit there. While the text approximates a time of day when the walk is said to have occurred, this operates metaphorically as well as factually. The text's more significant function is to take us beyond the factual backdrop. It suggests imaginaries which the viewer may bring to the material objects in the exhibition space, or vice versa. If these objects, drawings, sculptures, or linear 3-D drawings, appear connected to one another one piece leans in the direction of another, or a drawing is set in a spatial relation to an object, the ideas communicated through installation and text embrace a much larger constellation, a word Earley has employed in the past.

The constellation involves the meanings we attach to forms, both in the world and in art and literature, as well as the traces of forms which are all that will remain in the larger scheme of things. The larger scheme is indeed large and the Novel in particular facilitates a conjuring up of histories of the world or the universe or to imagine what these might be. Literature is a source of both ideas and images for Earley, but is also a concept that signifies limitless imagining which modern visual art in its obsession with specificity has difficulty in conveying. Conventionally, visual art is physical, until that is, we arrive or return to, *The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, Lucy Lippard's book published in 1973.

We begin to get some sense of Lippard as a lynchpin. Earley's text opens with references to another New Mexico resident, Cormac McCarthy, and his novel *The Road* (re: the walk with Lippard), and moves onto the key text of the project, Arthur C. Clarke's, 'The Sentinel.' Earley has asked Lippard to do a reading of the short story, the recording of which will be played back as audio in *Before the Close of Day*. 'The Sentinel' is the story of the discovery of an object in a lunar landscape. As it dawns on the narrator that the object is alien to the landscape, is constructed, and is therefore the creation of other intelligence, the story involves a sense of man's insignificance in face of these beings who landed there many millennia before human beings had the capacity. Wilson can only imagine what information inhabitants. In this short story Arthur C. Clarke does not tell us exactly what this object looked like; he leaves it to the reader's imagination, and to Stanley Kubrick for 'The Sentinel' is the basis for the film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

An idea that shapes *Before the Close of Day* is the ineluctability but also the incompleteness of constructed things that are around us. Their function can fall into disuse; we lose connection with their original purpose. We add things, we move and remove things, but we never have the whole story. The installation aspires to the scrupulously finite and the infinite and it pretty much succeeds. The former is exemplified in the drawings in mark-making that is meticulous and beautiful. Often there is an absent core or circle as in the pencil drawing which is centrally situated in the space and forms the title piece, *Before the Close of Day*. The pencil marks emanate around an apparently vacant centre but the viewer's eye is transfixed by this lime green, unsteady elliptical band that hovers between the centre and intensive pencil patterns around the outside. It is the sort of colour to be found in a child's felt tip pen collection, the pen that adults tend to avoid as just too fluorescently green! The green is repeated in the colour of the tape that is loosely wrapped around the top of an oak stick that rests against the wall in the proximity of the drawing. It is like an overgrown pencil without a lead. The colour may also allude to the Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP) gene.

The floor piece, *The Messenger and the Key*, is constructed of a circle of acrylic sheet (a cut-out from this object signalled back about Earth and its New Morning?), a cut-out mini-circle within, a meteorite within this cut-out, and an aluminium form which sits upon the large acyclic circle. The latter is characteristic Earley: the aluminium is a cast from a Styrofoam mould that once had a use and was then obsolescent. In its anonymity it can be generalized as symptomatic of all the Goods that propel our capitalist society, but become rapidly obsolescent and then dumped to become pollutants. The installation moves effortlessly from a child-like delight in making marks and colour to thinking about Black Holes; it poses fragile physicality and antimatter. Lucy Lippard's resonant reading of Clarke's story permeates the space.

The more intellectual side of Earley's project seems to be this question of our relationship with material and yet our increasing distance from it. Lippard's voice is an almost physical presence but more than that, as Earley says in his text, 'Her spoken words engendering a wish for better things to come, driven by a lifetime of activism.'

His choice of Lippard is based on a number of considerations. One is the material and dematerial nature of art. Another is the generation she represents with that belief in transformation towards a more equal society which was shared by many. This is mirrored in a different way by Earley's interest in Science Fiction as a post-Second World War genre in which different worlds are imagined. These capacities to think other are what draws Earley to a previous generation, a point at which technological revolution was generally still seen as potentially transforming for society on each side of the Cold War. That may now be an unimaginable prospect in the west. We are left with landscapes of waste but as Earley says of the industrial debris that surrounds his studio in Dublin, these things are 'waiting to become whole again.'

Notes:

[1] Images of the installation are available for viewing on mother tankstation's Website at <http://>