

Coolorta - revisiting the landscape via lens-based art practice

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This research takes the form of a series of experimental and philosophically guided attempts to represent place through the practices of photography and film. Informed by the phenomenological approaches and theory of the image produced by Judith Butler, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Laura U. Marks and Vivian Sobchak, the research draws upon the history of experimental approaches to cinema and photography in order to frame the lens-based practice reported in this dissertation. In this thesis I argue for an approach that privileges the role of the sense in a lens-based engagement with the landscape, focusing, in particular, on the sort of 'haptic' experience of a portrayed environment that film can provide. I have chosen Coolorta, a small alternative community in the West of Ireland, for the location of my research. This is where I lived as a child. I ask whether or not it is possible to represent a place such as Coolorta without this representation becoming a 'fixed' view insensitive to the complex interaction of artist and community. The three lens-based practice sub-projects produced as elements of this research, respectively titled *Autowalks*, *Moving Stills*, and *Turlough Swim*, explore the boundary between empirical and phenomenal forms of research, in their investigation of such formal elements of lens-based practice [as] 'walking photography,' 'slow filmmaking,' 'the close up,' and the 'point of view shot.' The cinematic approach which I adopted evolved over the course of the project, from one employing what could be called an 'ocularcentric' perspective (which privileges sight above other senses) to one which engages with the haptic and phenomenological filmmaking sensibilities and which seeks to explore the intersubjective experience involved in the relationship between the spectator, subject, and filmmaker. I was to discover certain critical difficulties in adopting this approach, as retrospection in relationship to a community of origin can be prone to a certain nostalgia and this can produce a romantic view of the past. Yet I would argue visiting this melancholia can be a motivating force in the creation of artwork which addresses place and belonging.