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Subterranean Cosmic Dreaming Part 2: Creating a Museum of Futurology

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Abstract

'Subterranean Cosmic Dreaming Part 2' is a film-assemblage that explores aspects of the experiences, images, and collective dreaming that unfolded in the process of creating a 'temporary wild museum of futurology' on the shores of the Thames at Shoeburyness, as part of the Estuary Festival Associated Programme 2021. As Art Psychotherapists, guided by a posthuman, new materialist perspective and trusting art as a process of inquiry we move towards deepening our understanding of materiality, time, space, and place in a process of diffraction as a form of critical consciousness (Barad, 2007).

Artwork in the form of a Film accessed on YouTube: Subterranean Cosmic Dreaming Part 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EewxNjr7w3o>

Statement

'Subterranean Cosmic Dreaming Part 2' is a film-assemblage that documents aspects of the experiences, images, and collective dreaming that unfolded in the process of creating a 'temporary wild museum of futurology' on the shores of the Thames at Shoeburyness, as part of the Estuary Festival Associated Programme 18-20 June 2021 (Estuary Festival Associated Programme, accessed 20 June 2023)

As artists, art psychotherapists, and educators, we have developed a collaborative relationship over the past 14 years while living and working along the river Thames. Guided by a posthuman, new materialist perspective, we have come to trust art as a process of inquiry to deepen our understanding of materiality, time, space, and place. This perspective, rooted in diffraction as a form of critical consciousness (Barad, 2007), leads us to embrace the entanglements and co-constitutive forces of space, time, and matter.

Barad's framework imagines that space, time, and matter are intertwined and produced together in one ongoing movement. This reframes understanding of spatiality, temporality, and materiality as co-existing forces in a continuous process

of becoming. As artists, we align ourselves with this approach, responding to the call of the wild to disrupt our usual ways of being. In these troubling times, we desire to be earthed closer in/to the cosmic unknown, while also creating trouble through our interactions with people and things. 'Subterranean Cosmic Dreaming Part 2' weaves together alternative and new lines of flight, threaded through one another in a nonlinear enfolding, as we delve into diffraction and its implications.

This film flows from our previous work, as explored in the chapter 'Subterranean Dreaming in the Intertidal Zone' (Westwood & Morris, 2021), where we creatively investigated the notion of 'found objects' in art psychotherapy. It also draws from other art activities presented in 'Crossing the Field' (Morris & Westwood, 2021), where we explored aspects of a participatory artists' event towards innovative forms of inquiry. All these forms and activities weaves in and out of each other and form part of a complex network that comprises our art-based activities and research.

To prepare for this 'assembly', we embarked on artistic explorations of the Shoebury East Beach and Gunners Park area in Southeast Essex over numerous occasions. We were drawn to this location due to its layered histories and materials that we found compelling to explore, as well as Lesley living close to the site at the time. During this preliminary phase, we gathered objects, made films and sound recordings, and created artworks from what we found. These elements were later integrated into the curation of the temporary wild museum.

To familiarize our collaborators, who came from various locations, with the site and our creative process, we shared an earlier documentary film showing this phase and the artworks produced in April-May 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHMpbDrsDKA>

We also shared knowledge about the Shoeburyness and Gunners Park area. Located at the farthest point from the source of the river Thames where it meets the North Sea, this site has a rich historical significance, characterized by fortresses, defenses, encampments, and ancient refuse sites. Archaeological artefacts found in the area provide evidence of settlements dating back to Neolithic times, Iron Age, late Bronze Age, as well as Roman, Saxon, and Danish origins. These artefacts offer insights into domestic activities such as spinning, weaving, salt manufacturing,

butchery, and cereal processing. Notable discoveries include pottery vessels from 400-200 BC, fragments of decorated porcelain, and Victorian-era clay pipes.

Inspired by a futurology perspective, we invited explorations with our collaborators, to contemplate what remnants of our civilization will remain for unborn inhabitants of the world to be? Wondering... what kind of ancestors we will be as the landscapes we make sink into the strata. We explored the concept of future fossils and the histories that may unfold for generations to come.

To facilitate this exploration, we held a series of three outdoor workshops in the vicinity of the abandoned gun pits of Gunners Park and some nearby outbuildings. One of which featured a brick built arch and this became an altar and focal point for our largest exhibit—a 'Cosmic-Eye-Nipple' piece made from shells, wire, string, and embellished with pottery fragments. The inspiration for this piece came from a glass fragment resembling an eye or nipple that we discovered on the beach. Other exhibits were positioned in various locations, including the sheltered environment of the gun pits built in the 1880s.

During the workshops, people were invited to join us in a subterranean cosmic dreaming of prehistoric futurology. Twelve individuals collaborated, with some returning for multiple sessions. They were encouraged to consider the theme and explore the area, contributing objects found on the beach that could be examined, imagined, and transformed through artistic processes. The aim was to deepen understanding of the significance of these materials and the materiality of this time and place. On the third day, we held a ritual in the form of a Social Dreaming Matrix (Lawrence, 1998) within these gun pits, involving the group of collaborators that were present.

The images and materials featured in the film were gathered over several months as we prepared for, conducted, and reviewed this collaborative art process. The film features other artworks situated and installed within the surrounding area as part of the Estuary Festival. It also incorporates the words heard and spoken during the Social Dream Matrix. We created this film with the intention of fostering connections

with our collaborators, both human and non-human, and as part of a diffractive process that intertwines with this specific time and place.

Where this takes us next is an open space...

References

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Lesley Morris is an Artist, Researcher, HCPC Art Psychotherapist and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. She taught on the MA Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths University (2009-2020) and currently works in the NHS in a Parent Infant Mental Health Service.

Jill Westwood PhD is an Artist, Researcher, HCPC Art Psychotherapist. She was Programme Convenor of the MA Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths University (2009-2020) and Course Advisor of the MA Art Therapy, Western Sydney University, Australia (1995-2007). She currently works independently as an Artist and External Examiner.