

Shona Illingworth  
*Lesions in the  
 Landscape 2015*  
 video



## London Round-up

### Mile End Pavilion • Furtherfield • CGP

In her 1983 book *Under the Sign of Saturn*, Susan Sontag, writing about Roland Barthes, described him as 'a body that knew how to rest'. In the Mile End Art Pavilion we are presented with an expansive account of **Rest & its Discontents**, curated by Robert Devcic. The show's subtitle claims a concern with the 'art, science and culture of rest, stress, noise and mind-wandering'; but for the viewer the show offers little rest or ease. There is no list of who the 'over 25' contributors to 'Rest' are, and nothing approaching a comprehensive press release. The exhibition documents 'Hubbub', a two-year residency programme at London's Wellcome Collection, with an accompanying book and a mini-series on BBC Radio 4. This is, therefore, a rather overloaded exposition for something so concerned with the (non?) act of taking it easy. 'Rest' requires that the visitor do rather a lot of work, implicitly expecting compliance with its pluralist display, as opposed to aspiring to a tighter thematic definition of the subject; the latter might well have provided a much more helpful conduit to critical thought.

'Rest' is also rather top-heavy with respect to fine joinery, employing wooden support structures whose impeccable neatness feels too tidy, 'scientific' and unnecessarily abstruse, like a Liam Gillick installation from which all colour has been vampirically removed. The one thing that is really conspicuous by its absence in this exhibition – notwithstanding its large anarchist billboard – is play. There are several vitrines of rest-related books scattered throughout the gallery, though the rule here is 'look but don't touch'. In contrast, with John Berson/LUSTlab's interactive *Cartographies of Rest* (all works 2016) one is required to tap a screen so as to see a flux of personalised patterns of compacted information culled from research carried out via a specially designed mobile app. The participants' 'state of being' is rendered through a splattering of digital dots and dashes, but the piece raises the question of what exactly is going on in the researchers' minds at least as much as in those of the subjects they tested.

Claudia Hammond and LUST's *Resting on the Rest Test Results* comprises six benches whose brightly coloured, gridded coverlets convey in encoded fashion the results of Hubbub's Rest Test survey in which 18,000 people from 134 countries took part. While this is again statistics smartened up as 'art', it at least exemplifies, since it is actually restful, the exhibition's central theme. The show also contains engaging works pertaining to airport noise levels (Christian Nold), scribbling and doodling (Tamarin Norwood), sound and performance (SJ Fowler), anti-work politics (Lynne Friedli, Johnny Void, Rosanne Rabinowitz) and solar power (Patrick Coyle).

In Furtherfields' tiny box of a gallery located in the middle of Finsbury Park, Steven Ball and John Conomos have staged an expansive presentation entitled **Deep Water Web**. Presentation is the right term – this multi-layered but ultimately rather limited amalgam of video projections (looped and live-streamed),

computer terminals, manipulated sound, handmade game-board, and a section of a tree and some soil is like a PowerPoint projection that has slipped its moorings and begun to manifest itself through some psychical apport. Outside in the park, strollers and cyclists sweep by, unaware that in the gallery all hell is being let loose in the form of a three-minute computer-generated rendition of London being destroyed by a massive tidal wave. The Dome, Tower Bridge and the Houses of Parliament are swamped, a screaming populace runs for high ground, then the military choppers swoop in and the loop begins again. This dramatic vignette runs on a small wall-mounted screen and depicts, with more than a nod to JG Ballard, a future world reconfigured by torrential storms and indeterminate flooding, the apocalyptic destruction of the planet no less. But the video is practically identical to those frequently included in TV science programmes, with the same shock-horror mode of address and brash musical accompaniment, which is painfully loud. A large wall-chart purports to be a game which visitors can play, but the game's 'Plasticene' (Pleistocene?) markers are not present, implying that the game is already over, contradicting the anti-global warming call to action one feels this whole 'poetic essayistic meditation', as the press release calls it, is about. Next door, four large projected images show live feeds of a calmer London and Sydney, as well as pre-recorded imagery. The volume level here is unbearable too, with the soundtracks from the two separate displays clashing with each other. But sound, it should be noted, is an economy and ecology too.

Although there might be something provocative about putting on such a doom-and-gloom drama in the middle of a sedate London park, 'Deep Water Web' is more exactly a lecture and computer interface masquerading unconvincingly as contemporary art.

There is sadness and some scientific gloomery around **Shona Illingworth's** *Lesions in the Landscape* at CGP in Southwark Park, too. This multimedia work inventively juxtaposes the experiences of an acute amnesia sufferer, Claire, with the cultural amnesia around the evacuation, carried out in 1930 but not publicly admitted for some 40 years, of St Kilda, a tiny archipelago in Scotland's Outer Hebrides which had hitherto been continuously populated for 4,000 years. Both Claire and St Kilda experienced a sudden and abrupt break in their histories and potential for future memory-production, and both are also currently under intense scientific investigation. They share, too, an extreme isolation. Taking Claire to St Kilda, Illingworth attempted to produce a visual and aural parallel to her acute memory loss, employing a highly technical, powerful mix of screen overlays and juxtapositions, and a potent ambient soundtrack. What is interesting about this project is that the Proustian issues it engages with operate across a multitude of levels, both the micro and the macro, with an implicit concern for notions of the future as a 'zone' or frontier constructed in relation to the past. There is perhaps too much unnecessary peripheral material here, but this hardly detracts from Illingworth's cogent, highly moving and impressive study. ■

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