



Kevin Newark – Commission proposal

The objective for my proposal is to document photographically the occurrence of aircraft condensation trails, commonly described as contrails or vapour trails¹. I am interested in mapping these temporal traces for two main reasons: firstly, because I think they are aesthetically complex in character, and secondly because they hold our imaginative gaze, familiar yet startling in their picturesque appearance. Either way, I'm more interested in exploring environmental aesthetics than environmental politics.

One element of this proposal concerns the imaginative portion that contributes towards our understanding of visual process. Visual perception is a complex process involving fundamentals of our mental life: cognition certainly, but also memory and even desire. Time and space are collapsed in the modern, space-conquering technology called air travel, while (similarly) photography's congealed realism has a distilling function on time. Photography negates the "gradual unfolding gesture"² found in the plastic arts by fixing all the elements within a scene at an exact moment. This compression of time and space is both photography's undoing and its grace. Photographs remain static illusions of the past, though as John Berger elegantly reminds us "memory is a field where different times can co-exist"³.

The practical project will take the form of a pseudo-scientific field trip with my findings assembled over a period of several months. Inherent in it is a push-pull agenda between the objective empiricism of nineteenth century positivism and (as it were) a kind of metaphysical re-staging of the evidential. My photographic technique will involve enlarging and de-saturating small areas of the negative so the grain of the photograph is clearly visible. The grainy appearance of this process will not only reference the popular, imaginative phenomena of the sky found in UFO photography from 1870 to the present, but will seize something of the non-materiality of these out-of-reach phenomena, presenting them as documentary evidence. The results of my photo-study will seem almost neo-Impressionist and pointillist in appearance, thus in an oblique fashion extending the gesture of photography beyond its habitual congealed realism.

As an intrepid positivist researcher I will collate specialised meteorological information, utilize intercontinental flight path data and scheduled flight information available on the Internet to aid the planning and implementation of my photographic study. The field trip will consist of upwards of thirty mini-trips lasting between a few hours to an entire day to locations I have found suitable for viewing congested high-altitude traffic. In the course of these excursions I will use forty to fifty rolls of film, from which I expect to make an edit of approximately ten photographs to be mounted in 50cm x 50cm frames. My final edit of work will be informed by the methodology developed from the research phase. The knowledge and theory extracted from this study will allow me to enter a critical dialogue between the contradictory aesthetics of pollution, the scenic beauty of the sky and philosophy of the picturesque.

Such a study presents an opportunity for a shift away from my current object-obsessed practice while retaining important thematic continuity in temporal, spatial and environmental themes. Time and space, explored in the subject matter of my earlier work, would now be developed on a very different plane, so to speak, as would ideas concerning movement and form. The shift in scale from the implied space of East London canals to the limitless (agoraphobic?) canvas of the sky presents an exciting challenge to my methods of working. Again, nature, artifice, the external world will figure as with my earlier work, though manifesting itself in a different visual code.

Summary

Something magical yet quotidian is implied by air travel, which also resonates in the conspicuous beauty of these vapour traces. Aside from obvious modernist associations with speed and technology they possess a romantic, abstracted appeal that presents the possibility of finding transcendence in their fleeting presence. By memorialising these anonymous journeys I anticipate achieving something metaphysical and evanescent that could be read as a wider metaphor for transition and memory as well as an objective photographic trace of a journey. In essence, I aim to situate this proposed work at the interdisciplinary juncture of art and science mediated in the sensuous and seductive form of the sky, while highlighting, the detrimental artifice of airline vapour trails.

¹ Aircraft jet engines only emit these puffy crystallized clouds above thirty-three thousand feet. The effect we see from the ground is the water vapour from the engine exhaust crystallizing as it is injected into the freezing temperatures found at these altitudes. The crystals subsequently evaporate into the atmosphere. The speed at which this happens depends on several meteorological variables. They are environmentally damaging on two fronts, contributing to both global warming (the greenhouse effect) and also global dimming (solar irradiance). Paradoxically, the intercontinental jumbo jets that fly at these altitudes are doing so to save energy as the thinner air found in the middle and upper stratosphere allows less fuel to be burned to propel the mass of the aeroplane.

² Virilio, P. (1994) *The Vision Machine*. (translated by Julie Rose) London: British Film Institute. Originally published as 'La Machine de Vision', Editions Galilée 1988.

³ Berger, J. (1982) *Another Way of Telling*. (with Jean Mohr) London: Pantheon

Kevin Newark - Curriculum Vitae

Education

- 2006 MA Photography London College of Communication (London)
1998 BA Hons (first class) Photography in the Arts S.I.H.E.

Selected Group & Solo Exhibitions

- 2008 *Pavilion Commissions Programme 2008*, National Media Museum (Bradford) – September
2007/08 *Jerwood Photography Awards*, Jerwood Space (London) and Millais Gallery (Southampton)
2007 *Photomeetings*, Abbaye de Neumünster (Luxembourg)
The Overlooked, The Globe Gallery (London)
MAP Reading, Galerie Fachbereich Gestaltung (Bielefeld)
The Universe in a Handkerchief, Gallery Yujiro (London)
2005 *Family Archives Lost and Found* with PARC (London)

Awards

- 2007 Jerwood Photography Award Winner

Residencies & Commissions

- 2008 *Pavilion Commissions Programme 2008*, Pavilion Commission (Leeds)
1998 Commissioned photography project for Swansea City Football Club

Published Work

- 2007 Portfolio Magazine Number 46 November
2006 Fieldstudy Magazine Number 8 November
2006 *The Universe in a Handkerchief* (exhibition catalogue) October

Collections

Various private collections