

Walking (in)visible lines: archaeologies in between

Daniel Lee og Antonia Thomas

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Papay Gyro Nights er en festival for videokunst, lydkunst, eksperimentell film, musikk og arkitektur. Festivalen avholdes hvert år på øya Papa Westray, Orkenøyene, Skottland.

papaygyronights.
papawestray.org

Our intention is to take you on a journey, or rather a walk, through some recent collaborations and projects. The journey is also a real walk undertaken on the 7th February 2015, revisiting the places of these earlier encounters. We are both archaeologists living in Orkney interested in creative and experimental archaeological practice.

This is perhaps not archaeology as you may have encountered it before. It does not involve excavation, in the literal sense of depth and dirt, it does not even necessarily involve the past, in any tangible meaning. It foregrounds the archaeologists as actors, enactors and performers. It situates itself in the present as the past has gone; we can now only tell its stories. This is a Contemporary Archaeology; an archaeology of the present or very recent past; an archaeology that seeks to find new forms of practice. This is an archaeology that starts now, and follows material and narratives into the future. The places, photographs and objects in our story are tangible and real enough. They are there to be found. Time, however, is non-linear and recursive.

Some of this text draws on notes written during our walks and encounters, some is from memory at various junctures; the passage of time enables the blurring and blending of realities. In particular, this journey charts lines - single and multiple, meshed and rhizomatic, real and imaginary - between people, places and objects. These lines have been segmented and spliced into a single narrative connecting all of the fragments and gathering them up into some kind of whole.

Most of our fragments derive from a year as *Archaeologists in Residence* at Papay Gyro Nights contemporary art festival¹, held each year at the time of the first full moon in February - the time of the Gyros - on the island of Papa Westray, aka Papay. Walking, mapping, collecting and collaborating formed the bulk of our archaeologies with the festival and co-participants. This process was developmental and experimental, and set out new trajectories, ones that are still being pursued now. During this, collaboration with photographer Tonje Bøe Birkeland and her Characters commenced with a walk around the north end of Papay. Tonje enacts a series of fictional female early 20th-century personalities - travellers and explorers - taking on their appearance, practice and their life as her own. These characters are photographed using a 1970s medium format camera. Tonje's characters are fictional, but the more they become enacted, the more they brush with reality. Until recently, her character was Luelle Magdalon Lumière (1873-1973), a stereo photographer.

In *FLETTVERK*², we becomes 'I' in a collective narrative formed by all four of us: Daniel, Antonia, Tonje and Luelle.

2

Flettverk is a Norwegian word for a product created by the braiding or interlacing of different parts.



Papa Westray 10. oktober 1946,
Sortie CPE/SCOT/UK/88
Med tillatelse fra Orkney Sites
and Monuments Record Office

7th February 2015

I rose early and had breakfast. The family were still asleep. I packed a small rucksack and set off into the grey rain. Showers were forecast, and the first few were heavy. They drove into my face from the west as I headed to the shore. This was my chance, I wasn't going to let this opportunity go. I wasn't sure when it would come round again. I was going to walk around the whole island, in one go, without stopping. This was to be some kind of finale to everything, but perhaps also a beginning.

This required some planning. Walking around the whole perimeter would be hard enough, and I needed to set some things up the previous night. Before the performance, I slipped out the back and placed Base GPS 1, a small basic handheld receiver, on a shelf by the door in the shed at Tredwell (festival workshop and studio), located in the southern part of the island. Batteries full, taking points, ready, waiting. 'Base' means that this device stays still, receiving signals as I move.

At first light, Base GPS 2 was placed, by the wall at Aalster; a small modern bungalow in the centre of the island. Fresh batteries, turned on and taking points. This was one of the most recent sites in Papa Westray, created only the night before when the house played host for the set of the next Incoherent Cinema, production by French film maker Bertrand Mandico. A party was held in the living room, with props and dry ice smoke, all caught on 16mm film. This morning, only a few props were visible through the window.

I walked up the road past the red doors of Holland Farm and down the track to Knap of Howar, Papay's pair of Neolithic houses on the west coast sunk into the ground like giant footprints. A corner of the chain link fence which surrounds the site was chosen as the marker for the start of the walk.

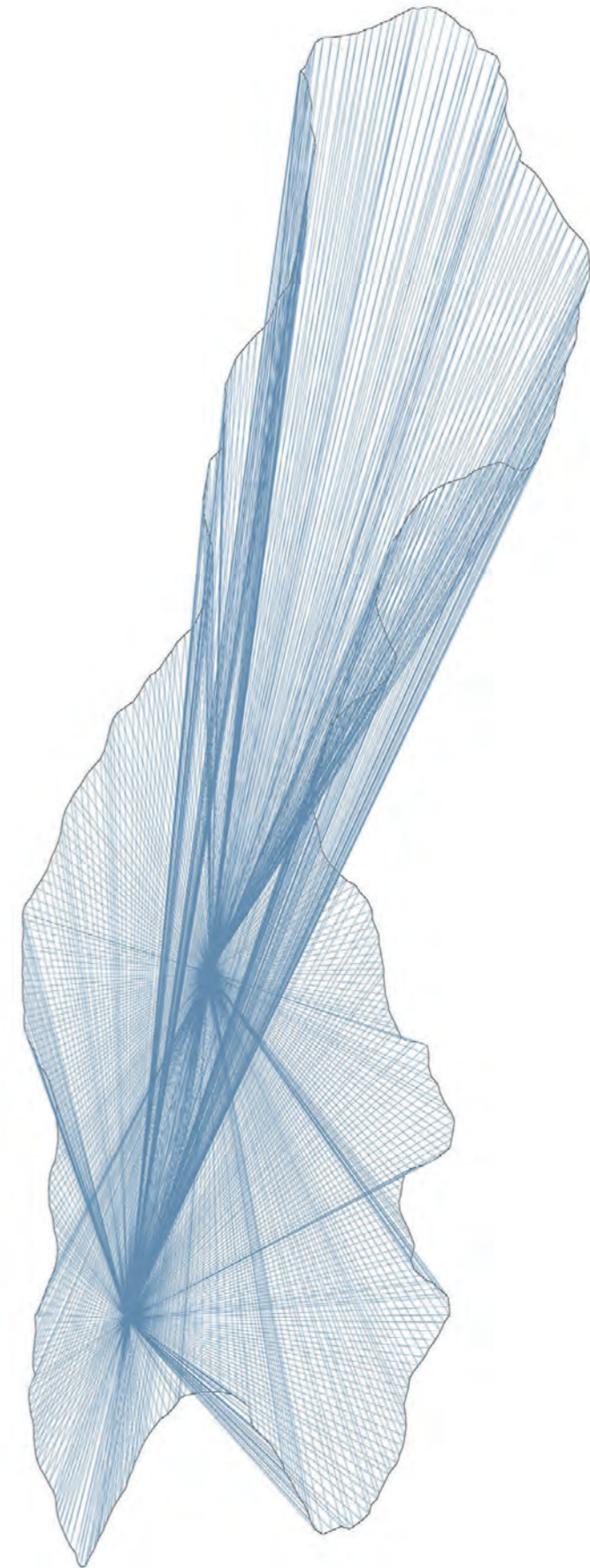
Time check, 8:07 am. Head North.

Walkover

Walkover surveys are used by archaeologists to assess, map and characterise archaeological sites in a given area. They are low-tech and use basic equipment: a handheld GPS receiver, camera, scale, paper record sheets and experience. On Papay, the walkover survey was used as the sole methodology to foreground walking as praxis. This was an archaeology of surface survey; one removed from the usual archaeological tropes of depth and excavation.³

The residency at Papay Gyro Nights started with a walk, and developed from there. There were few rules, but one was to investigate archaeologies with artists and participants. Another was to include only modern and recent sites, such as beach litter, but especially those sites that were created during the festival, such as events and workshops. The residency explored process, where walks led the way to the development of new forms of practice. Another idea was to make new maps using alternative cartographies of festival journeys and places. These were recorded using basic handheld GPS and the tracks were combined. The festival was mapped and remapped, each time involving more participants and festival goers. This process involved the recording of new transitory and ephemeral places and material, resulting in new trajectories for these things, and the residency.

³
Rodney Harrison,
"Surface Assemblages:
Towards an Archaeology
in and of the Present."
Archaeological Dialogues
18(2), 2011, side 141-161



Encircling the island,
Linjer skapt av GPS-signaler.

4
Etter britiske 'National Grid'
koordinater.



Foul Craig

Assemblage north (places):

Ernies Pow HY 49460/547051⁴ -

A slender spear-like pool on the north-west rocky shore.

Geo of the Cletts HY 49499/55424 -

Ancient folds in the sandstone strata eroded into caves and billowing cliffs.

Haas of Habrahellia HY 49885/55741 -

Vast rock fall scarred tabular cliffs at the northern point.

Foul Craig HY 50823/54561 -

Guano stench drifts up from the bird festooned cliff ledges.

Character

Luelle Magdalon Lumière, a stereo photographer, reaches the peak of her career around 1913. Luelle is a restless, yet strong woman that never settles. In her earlier years she wanders among the mountains of western Norway. Later she gets aboard a ship and travels west to the enormous urbanity of New York, the frontiers of Brooklyn and the boardwalks of Coney Island. One day she leaves to travel back north, first to Orkney - travelling forth, driven by mystery, illusion and magic, from one island, one independent reality, to the next.

The Lady on the Shore

The photograph showed a woman, wearing a long skirt and a white blouse. She held a hat in her hand. She was standing on a shore, the characteristic Orkney coastline of flagstone shelves and steps. It must be summer, not only because of her light dress, but because of the gentle sea, and the thrift spilling over the rock. Beyond, the horizon shows a lone farmhouse sitting abreast a typical Orkney headland: rounded and gentle, the open sea beyond. There was a track close to the coastline, and the rock-face appeared to have been quarried; the landscape was picturesque, yet functional, but she didn't seem to have noticed. The focus of the woman's gaze is not exactly clear. She is not quite looking out to sea, yet she is not looking at the camera either. Who was she? What was she doing there? She didn't seem to be local, not from a local farmstead anyway, but where had she come from? Who was behind the camera?

I had found the photograph amongst a heap of books, pictures and ephemera in the book and print sale at the Orkney Auction Mart in Kirkwall: a large sepia print that immediately caught my eye. Item 297 (Collection 18), an unframed photograph, unlabelled but described in the catalogue as 'Lady on the Shore'. There was something so familiar about the woman, and about the view.

Mystery Coastline

I put the photograph on the Orkney Image Archive website for help in identifying the location and asked the forum members:

I got this photo print from the Mart earlier on this year - does anyone know who the lady is, or where the picture was taken? I think it looks Edwardian, but is very mysterious! Does anyone recognise the coastline? Thanks!

Foto 1:
The Lady on the Shore

Foto 2:
Tonje Bøe Birkeland
Plate # 14 Birsay



Only two people replied:

I don't recognize it at all but it looks like it could have been used to quarry flagstones at one time. Just a thought.

This picture was taken below the Northside in Birsay looking eastwards towards Crustan and the Burnmouth of Swannay. The date would be about right or maybe before WW1. It is interesting as the photo shows a quarry with a road up to the top of the shore. This was a source of good building stone for houses in the vicinity. Very little of the road can be seen today, having suffered badly from coastal erosion. As to the identity of the lady I would guess she was a visitor as not many females in the Northside at that time would have dressed so fine and worn a hat!⁵

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www.orkneycommunities.
co.uk/imagelibrary/picture/
number27271.asp
Dato: 15. august 2015



Assemblage east (sites):

Bonfire HY 49692/51943 -
Opening ceremony of Papay Gyro Nights festival 2013.

Kelp store HY 49724/51936 -
Kelp ash store for the boom-bust industry of the lairds.

Broken wind turbine HY 49663/51965 -
The wind blew too hard.

Film set HY 49873/50745 -
Wooden house that was built and burnt.

Bål fra åpningssermonien til
Papay Gyro Nights 2014.

Geo of the Clett

I knew exactly where the place was. I had seen all of the photographs, maps and tracks. I could picture the tabular rock tipping into the sea looking down the west side of the island. My walk hugged the west shore to the north end of Papay. The air was mild and close with a fine mist, Westray barely visible. Ernie's Pow, a flat calm pool on the shore edge, submerged each day with the tide. A large sloping rock separating it from the sea. I had been here before. My imagined route drew me on to the place; I think I can see it as the beach cliff rises further north. Following a spur out to the newly risen cliffs I can see the gullley, with folded rock billowing and then ending abruptly with the drop. I sense everything converge: my previous walk re-tracing the route, the photograph with her on the cliff top looking south across the tabular shore with sunlight glaring into the lens, and the carving in the weathered stone where I had pictured it. Lines carved into stone.



Assemblage south (things):

Aluminium kettle
HY 49228/49686

Child's dummy
HY 49169/49704

Rubber Glove
HY 49148/49704

Child's red plastic rake
HY 49217/49689

Copper plate
HY 49104/49703

Tractor tyre
HY 49145/49700

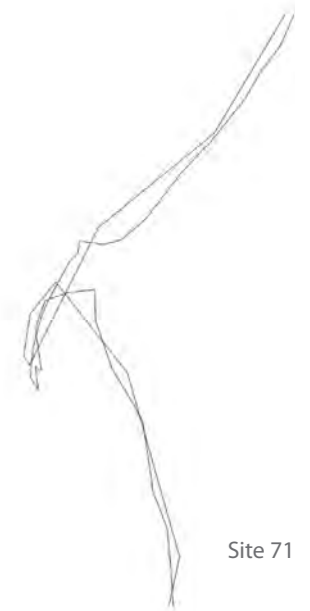


Luelle hugger initialene sine
inn i fjellet på Site 71, Geo of
the Cletts, Papa Westray.

Site 71

At last, the light was right. A fine day. I set off to the North End with dummy and chisel, camera and tripod. A well-worn path through heather, peat and bog. Past Bronze Age burial sites and the ruins of 20th-century farming. At the North End, the coastal landscape opened up: familiar rock formations and geos, salt spray and sea birds. There was a vertical edge above the cliff, a fine-grained flagstone. Room to sit and carve. This place had been visited before. The Atlantic waves crashed below, fulmars glided above. Chip, chip, hammer; blow away the dust. Switch hands. Chip, chip, hammer; blow away the dust. I lose myself in the rhythm of stone-carving. Slow and meditative, a human tempo against a geological backdrop of deep time. Letters start to develop from the rock.

It was finished - LL, a mark of Luelle Lumière. Site 71 had emerged. For a moment, I forget the difference between archaeologist and photographer, real and imagined, past and present. Different timescales intersect like a double-exposure, over-layered and written through the rock. Clean carved lines disrupt the textured surface. This practice has tradition in Orkney. Some places have palimpsests of carved letters; naming stones for lovers, quarrymen and tourists. Standing stones textured with names and dates where for centuries passers-by have made their mark.



Site 71

Multiple lines

When you walk and map repeatedly, you start to see lines in the landscape. A body moving through space in one direction, and at the same time connecting with other places with lines. In the morning, having set all my GPS running, I glance across the landscape between sites and draw in the line. Joining up places, with my body and actions as the hub. The lines are there at the time - in the making - just invisible to others. Walking is drawing; the line and the memories are all that survive. Actions are drawn in later when the data is transferred to a laptop screen.

You can draw lines with others. All carrying GPS at the same time. Walking the same spaces, the same corridors. Through repeated journeys individual maps emerge. Constructing the Fire Shelter – cutting plywood, drilling holes, threading rope. Building the sauna – making a frame, adapting an oil drum and filling it with Estonian rocks. Artist in residence studio - collecting beach litter, painting plastic, marking lines. Archaeologist in residence – following materials, following people, mapping island.

I'm used to carrying one of these GPS around in my pocket. Switch it on and go, download at the end of the day and relive your journeys. From highly abstract lines, the line walker can recall each moment, each convergence, each pause, each circle. It is more than just a line. Like any familiar practice, once in action you know what you are going to get, what you can draw with your body.

Some of those who carried a GPS thought they were being watched, their movements followed by an authority or a conspiracy somewhere else. The eyes in Medium Earth Orbit. Perhaps they could see the lines as well, or imagine others, or just sense that they were there? But the lines are passive. You take the line for a walk⁶, the line does not control you. With time it changes the way you think about space. With time, it changes the way you walk. With time, you are following the lines.

Geo of the Clett

I was able to walk straight up to it - LL – as if it was carved yesterday. I ran my fingers through the letters. Lines carved in the rock. Somehow, it acted as a pivot: memories, people and place enmeshed. It seemed like she was standing with me gazing out across the sea. A scene I was remembering through the photograph. She was closer to the edge than I dared, gazing across the sea to Westray, hands clasped, heel raised. Waves crashing onto the sloping rocky shore below.

I followed the west coast to this spot. Loose flagstones underfoot, hurled there by mountainous seas. Time lapsed; North End Time. The photograph was real, the carving wasn't; or was it the other way around? How many times would I find myself in this place?

Assemblage west (things):

Yellow fish box
HY 48444/50848

Green fish box
HY 48445/50822

Red fish box
HY 48445/50822

Creel boat wreck
HY 48528/48929



6
Paul Klee,
Pedagogical Sketchbook.
Introduction and translation
by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy. New
York / Washington: Praeger
Publishers 1972, side 16

The Lady on the Shore

I had a copy of the photo in my pocket. Parking near the fisherman's nousts, I walked past the whale bone sculpture along the shore to the east. Northside, but where? I'd walked this way before, but not this far, and not in this direction. The distant headland started to look familiar. A gentle whaleback headland arched and ending at the vertical cliff. More distant headlands began to align. I was near the spot, I had to be. Each geo reached - check the photo. Black skerries near the shore exposed by a different tide, but approaching the same form.

Photograph and landscape match. A low cliff, a deep geo leading to a cave, the broad low sea stack. This is what she was looking at while she stood there on the cliff edge; the deep cleft leading to the open sea. Waves crashing into the unseen cave below and retreating. This is what she would have heard.

The rock edge had retreated slightly. Whole blocks hewn from the cliff. Now, the surface was slippery underfoot, but it was February, not the summer. No flowering thrift today. As the tide drops, the smoothed iron remains of a wreck are visible between the beach slabs.

Hyperobject

Lines have led me to objects, strewn along the shore as fringes of a more gargantuan hyperobject that engulfs the Earth's oceans⁷. This was only one small edge of this vast marine litter object, but something tangible that could be investigated. I was only interested in the modern material: plastic, aluminium, timber, paper. Some objects I collected, logged, labelled and collated. Others were left in situ, labelled, photographed and abandoned. Left to be found again. Details were inscribed in permanent marker - Site Number, Coordinates. This inscription of the actual artefact referenced outdated traditions of labelling, now frowned upon as an imposition to the object. Some pieces of the collated assemblage were reused by artists: painted, marked, covered, nailed. Artefact into sculpture. Sculpture into artefact. Redistributed into the landscape.

7th February 2015

Rounding Vest Ness and turning north. The final walk up the west side of the island. Recent storms had smashed the wrecked creel boat into smaller pieces than last time and shifted its position on the shore.

*North-westerly winds had stiffened and blew salt spray into my face. Fulmars surfed effortlessly the strong updraft from the low beach cliff. Walking was tough and my legs were tired. Nearly there. This was a well-trodden path and a familiar walk, first made several years before. I could picture the end and imagine the shape of the shore. Rounding the brae, the fence came into view, the post set in concrete on the coastal defences for the Knap of Howar. **Back to the beginning, reaching the end.***

Time check: 11:59.

Gathering all the fragments, encircling the island, 3 hours 52 mins.

Acknowledgements: Ivanov and Chan - Papay Gyro Nights art festival, Tonje Bøe Birkeland, Brendan Colvert. Thanks to Ola Sendstad and the FLETTVERK project.

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Timothy Morton,
Hyperobjects. Philosophy and
Ecology after the End of the
World. Minneapolis / London:
University of Minnesota Press
2013

Daniel Lee og Antonia
Thomas er arkeologer på
The Archaeology Institute,
Orkney College, University
of the Highlands and Islands

Følg prosjektene deres på:
archaeologistsinresidence.wordpress.com