Kye Wilson: Self-Perception and Site-Specific Art

By Kate Davey

> It is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked through… it is henceforth presented as a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to an unlimited discussion.[1] – Nicolas Bourriard, *Relational Aesthetics.*

Kye Wilson's rendering of the self (namely *his*-self) in and through technologies of representation results in site-specific *trompe l'oeil* video installation art that invites the viewer to participate *in*, whilst at the same time provoking an emotive response *from* the audience.

Embodying the viewer through a combination of performance and video within an installation display context, Wilson's works are unique in that they are created using an innovative use of various performance methods and filming techniques that include long takes and the filming of durational live performances. These techniques can be located in the artist's more recent inter-disciplinary site-specific works, such as *Self [Other]* (2011) and *Entrapment of the o/*Other (2011), created in collaboration with performance artist Helena Eflerová, who has been instrumental in many of Wilson's more recent creations.

Collaborating with both actors and performance artists whose practices include the Japanese Butoh style and the Stanislavskian performance method; a method that leans heavily on the integration of emotional memory and the bringing of previously felt emotions to the stage, Wilson's portfolio of work seems to encompass an exploration of himself –as both artist and human – and of the history and memory of the surrounding site. Wilson's incorporation of his own self-projection and identity as well as the physical site's identity inherently brings together the inside world (of the human body and mind), and that of the outside world (nature, history and the elements).

Nick Kaye, in *Site Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*, suggests that:

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[1] N. Bourriard, *Relational Aesthetics* (Les Presses du Reel, 2002), p 15

> If one accepts the proposition that the meanings of utterances, actions and events are affected by their 'local position', by the *situation* of which they are a part, then a work of art, too, will be defined in relation to its place and position.[2]

Wilson's work is not only defined in relation to its place in the physical world, but also in relation to Wilson's own perception of himself; generally as the female protagonist. But it is not simply Wilson's own identity that the audience experiences when viewing the work, it is their own identity and self-perception in that specific space at that specific time.

Wilson's work could be said to be on the brink of ideas aroused by the invention and progression of digital and interactive art forms produced by artists including Daniel Rozin and rAndom International. The earlier suggestion that Wilson's work provokes an emotive, contemplative and relational response from the audience runs parallel to the notion of the 'digital mirror', which allows us to consider the idea of the audience as co-creator and performer – something which is noted in Nicolas Bourriard's concept of Relational Aesthetics. Similarly, in *Windows and Mirrors: Interaction Design, Digital Art, and the Myth of Transparency,* the authors suggest that:

> Media forms are not just channels for information, they also provide experiences… Every digital artefact needs at times to be visible to its users; it needs to be both a window and a mirror.[3]

The connections with the world of interactive film – more in essence, rather than in an overtly obvious way – in installations such as *Entrapment of the o/Other* and *Self [Other]* are comparable to pieces produced by artists bridging the gap between film as something to be spectated, and film as something to become immersed within. One example is Lynette Wallworth's *Evolution of Fearless;* an exhibition which took place in the University of Brighton's galleries in 2011 that incorporated filmed portraits of numerous women from countries including Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan. They shared their desolate stories through filmed portraits in this touch-responsive cinematic production.

Wilson's work could be contextually placed in numerous areas within the art history canon; that of installation art, site-specific art, self-portraiture, interactive art or *trompe l'oeil.* It could also be read through the eyes of many theorists; more notably perhaps, Lacan, whose "insights into the process of identification allowed film theorists to see why film was so effective in involving spectators in its narrative."[4] But it is the idea of site-specific self-perception that is perhaps the strongest. We all perceive ourselves in different ways, at different times and in different places and Wilson's work invites the viewer to bring their own memories, history and experiences to the performance. In

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[2] N. Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, place and documentation* (Routledge, 2000), p 1

[3] J. D. Bolter, D. Gromala, *Windows and Mirrors: Interaction Design, Digital Art, and the Myth of Transparency* (MIT Press, 2003), p 12

[4] T. McGowan (ed), *Lacan and Contemporary Film* (Other Press, 2004), p xi

essence the audience *become* part of the performance; a performance based on self- and site-identity.

Substantiating this thought, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill concludes: "Audiences are characterised as active, using their emotion and imagination to participate and engage with experiences as they encounter them;"[5] something that is evidenced in the audience's experience of (and integration within) Wilson's work.

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[5] E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, pedagogy, performance* (Routledge, 2007), p 37

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