

Residing: Inhabiting a story beyond words

Last summer I moved to a house with a big garden.

This spring is the first spring we got to spend together, me and the garden.

The first lively season of getting to know one another when everything feels new and fresh.

Full of life and promise.

Every week the surprise of a new inhabitant

- Woody Nightshade, Dogwood, Violet, Mock-Orange-

Every day the desire for rain to keep my seedlings alive

- Rosemary, Lilac, Nasturtium, Marigold, Hops -

The dried up puddle in the back of the garden, now uncovering

small limbs of plastic dolls, shards of broken glass and fabrics

buried in the childhood of children who have long since reached maturity.

Generation after generation of care and neglect.

Now: dry thunders rolling above.

The elder tree bloomed two weeks earlier than the year before.

As was the case the year before that.

Cracks in the ground under the pine tree.

Wild grasses growing above the knee to keep the soil from being bare.

Exposed to sun and drought without protection,

like fragile human tissue.

Being outside I become of a place, rather than controlling it.

Being outside I feel the meaning of the notions abundance, scarcity, thriving, nourishment, decay.

How change can lead to irretrievable loss, how much is at stake,

how something inside of me becomes profoundly unsettled

when certainties like seasons, cycles shift ever so slightly.

Something in me shifts along, losing ground,

a nagging feeling that something is not quite right.

A desire for restoration,

I pile up hope in heaps

to soothe the seedlings

we are.

How do we pay attention to a story? Do we merely listen to the factual content of it? Or is it completed by other elements going on at the same time? Maybe we read between the lines, searching for what is not said yet present. Our ears might be drawn to the rhythm in which the story is told, the subtle melody of vowels and consonants, the suspense hidden in interpunction. Maybe we listen to the images produced by our own imagination, and consider the external story but a starting point of the story that inhabits us.

How to listen to the story of an ever transforming environment? How to behave in the midst of a catastrophic story concerning our very own habitat? Do we become trapped in anxiety, in paralysis or denial? Can we stretch our own capacity for listening beyond its limits, and as such create freedom for a different kind of listening? Maybe one that leaves space for a different sensation, a different experience altogether? A conscious effort to draw strength from hope through imagination?

Residing tells the story of climate change told by scientists in the language of scientific data through artistic media as sound and sculpture. By doing so, it makes the story a sensorial experience rather than an intellectual one, creating different levels of understanding and relation. *Residing* breaks the light of our perception through the prism of the senses. When we inhabit the place we live in as sensitized bodies, could it create new dimensions of relationship and understanding?

Stijn Demeulenaere

In *Waterlopen* Stijn Demeulenaere lets us listen to forgotten or invisible waterways in Brussels among which the Zenne river, parts of the canal and the Vogelzangbeek. The Zenne river is infamous for its polluted state. In the 19th century the river was sent underground in an attempt to make life in the city of Brussels more sanitary. A few centuries later the river is still in bad shape due to sewage and industrial overflow, although more awareness is slowly leading to improvement.

Through this field recording, the river becomes an entity of life and activity. Its life above and below the surface is recorded: a habitat for fish, insects, minerals, flora and human life. The perspective is turned inside out: instead of considering the river as an ornament of the city, it is portrayed as the core and beating heart of all life developed around it. While most waterways, except for the canal, have lost most of their functions in the city fabric, they still form a hotspot and backdrop for fleeting, flaunting and almost floating human interactions. More than an exact field recording, the composition adds base lines and high melodic lines to a complete portrait of the water; a tribute. Stijn references Barry Lopez' essays on the environment and the work of Ed Yong. In his book *An Immense World* Yong explores how human perception is only one way of looking onto the world, opening up dimensions of perception through the exploration of scent, electromagnetic waves and other phenomena. Because, according to Yong and with Demeulenaere in his wake:

"To perceive the world through other senses is to find splendor in familiarity, and the sacred in the mundane." (E. Yong)

Clara Levy

Clara Levy perceives the world she lives in through her sixth sense: the violin. She transforms sound recordings made in and around the city into speculative recordings performed by layers of violin. Like a painter with sound, she imagines the sound image of a specific location and documents and anticipates a possible future. The layers of music build up and deteriorate like an eroding landscape. For *Residing* she created *Fiddle recording n°1*.

The work is the result of a deep dive research into sound as a medium as well as the environment. How does a fixed recording compare to a live performance? What is the suggestive power of sound? To which extent can a sound evoke an image that is associative rather than representative? Can we listen to a violin piece and forget about the instrument altogether and instead imagine sounds that do not yet exist?

Fiddle recording n°1 is a wordplay between 'field recording' - a practice of collecting and arranging sounds which are not necessarily produced with a musical purpose- and 'fiddle', the word used in folk music to refer to the violin. For *Residing* Clara presents the work in a quadrophonic set-up that provokes a sensation of movement. How do we perceive immersive violin sounds that don't necessarily sound familiar? Can we perceive through our bodies the speculative sound of a future urbanistic environment? The practice of Clara is inscribed in the heritage of Christina Kubish who gave sound to the invisible (such as electromagnetic fields through audiowalks) and who uncovered the potential of music and sound to imagine worlds and futures unknown to our bodies.

Kevin Trappeniers

Kevin Trappeniers is fascinated by the notion of tipping points: the moments of change in the climate situation of the planet that when surpassed, repair has become impossible. He says we are collectively dealing with a challenge or even failure of the imagination: how can we think about the prevention of an ultimate tipping point as for example in the often used metaphor of a burning kitchen, when we have to deal with smaller problems or tipping points on another scale with another temporality, in the same example presented by burglars in the house and falling down the stairs, that are right in front of us and have to be dealt with first? How can we stimulate our imagination to comprehend the situation of climate change on the different levels of urgency, temporality and scale? And if at all possible, include some hope?

For *Residing* Kevin created a diptych: *Hourglass* and *Floodline*. *Hourglass* is a sculpture that shows the process of ice melting. It is a reference to melting glaciers, one of the most blatant and contemporary symptoms of an ill climate. It demonstrates to us the ice in the

symbolic shape of an hourglass, showing us not only time is running out but gives an idea of the timeline of climate change: this is not a slow progression, but an exponential one. Intuitively the tipping point comes closer and we know when the moment of no return has passed. Can we translate this same gut feeling to our own situation looking outside the window and reading the news? The work reminds of Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch* in which he placed twelve large blocks of ice, shipped from Greenland's ice sheet, in clock formation on a public square in a major city. Audiences were invited to hug the blocks of ice and were confronted with the melting process of the arctic ice.

The other panel of the diptych shows us a video of an in situ artistic intervention and an installation showing a floodline on a lightbox. *Floodline* is made out of sand and ginkgo biloba seeds distributed in several parts of the city of Brussels. This simple image invokes a multiplicity of meaning. It catapults us into the future where the sea might be reaching as far as Brussels and as such transforming the urban landscape into a marine one. It triggers our speculative imagination: how will our own habitat change in the face of climate change, in the short and long term? Then our attention is drawn to the used material: North Sea sand and ginkgo biloba seeds. The seeds offer hope. The ginkgo biloba tree is considered a living fossil: its presence on earth dates back to more than 200 million years ago. The tree even survived the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and became a symbol of hope and resilience.

Floodline is reminiscent of *Cuando la fe mueve montañas (when faith moves mountains)* by Belgian-Mexican artist Francis Alÿs in which he moved a sand dune in Peru by 10 cm with the help of 500 local volunteers. This work pointed out the dynamic of maximal effort and minimal result that mark the dynamics of historical and social change but also demystifies the efforts of social action. It is not a grand gesture of revolutionary force, it is ongoing, tedious, seemingly impossible work. Similarly and inversely, Kevin goes to work by himself. He shows on the one hand that there is still agency in the individual that is not the same as the unjust belief in individual responsibility for one's fate in life and the monofocus on revenue and efficiency forced upon us by neoliberal ideologies. The focus lies on agency and possibility rather than the paralysing hold of culpability. The seed of historical change and social mobilisation can be germinated and brought to fruition by a single person. On the other hand it shows the enormity of the phenomenon of change and how futile our individual and collective human presence on this planet seems to be. Same as moving a sand dune, it seems like an insane endeavour.

However daunting the metaphorical mountain of climate change looms before us, *Residing* does not want to feed your fear. Instead it tries to create a story that is larger and deeper, in the hope that we can relate to our habitat in a sensorial and meaningful way. It presents the qualitative story next to the quantitative version of data that show how irrefutable the situation has become, to soothe first and gently nudge its audience into action. Not out of the pressure of impending doom, but out of care and imagination.

Elisa Demarré

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