

“The territory in question must be able to exist in any region on the surface of the globe; therefore we must study under what conditions it remains inaccessible, not only to ships, airplanes or other vehicles, but even to the eye. I mean that it might be possible, theoretically, for it to exist in the middle of this table without our having the slightest inkling.”

—René Daumal, *Mount Analogue*

Though by diverse means, the four artists whose work is part of the series *Apparent Positions* explore the notion of transfigured space. Complicating and subverting, variously, the construct of landscape and the Romantic tradition; the institution of the map; and the relationship of the built to the unbuilt, their films summon the notion of the plurality of place, of a meta-landscape; and beyond that, of the active site, loaded, both defining and defined by interaction with its occupants and would-be occupiers.

The title of the series invokes the phenomenon of parallax, wherein objects assume differing positions relative to that of the eye. Though a problem for astronomers and mathematicians, travellers and photographers alike, a parallax error could perhaps present, as the French writer René Daumal demonstrates in *Mount Analogue*, a margin of freedom; a zone of uncertainty in which change can be effected and co-ordinates altered unseen.

A number of artists and writers have stalked this territory. The Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges’ fictions revolve around worlds imagined, particularly those that exist as a synthesis of concept and object, that are conjured entirely by thought or word, or in time rather than space. In *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, the planet Tlön, a literary invention which is discussed by the author himself both inside and outside of the fiction in a dizzying *mise-en-abîme*, takes the place, gradually, of the real world; in *The Garden of Forking Paths*, an apocryphal labyrinth exists in time, rather than space, and the characters’ journeys crosses terrain both literal and literary.

Borges’ sometime collaborator and friend Adolfo Bioy Casares explores simultaneity, memory and memorialisation, and the notion of a terrain which encompasses both the physical and metaphysical in a similar way in the novella *The Invention of Morel*. The two suns, withered vegetation and rehearsed, repetitious behaviour of the inhabitants of Morel’s remote island speak not only of the troubled relationship between object and subject, observer and observed, but of the image itself — and though a digression from the theme here, the premise of the triumph of the copy pre-dates Jean Baudrillard’s treatise *Simulacra and Simulation*, which explores similar territory, by some forty years.

Beyond the image, this invokes representation, particularly that of space; and the disquieting sense of parallax which haunts not only the works of Borges, Bioy Casares and Daumal but the works in *Apparent Positions* is that of the disjuncture between map and mapped — geographic, linguistic or political. Borges’ *On Exactitude in Science* proposes a 1:1 map, an absurdity which exposes the ambition of the cartographic to influence, if not conquer, that which it represents: if the map becomes all, there are no longer any apparent positions, only absolute ones. The process of objectivisation or empiricisation needed to force the world to conform to the geometry of the map arguably alters the terrain itself (in the Occupied Territories, literally so, with a drawn line become a concrete wall), yet space is mutable, slippery, layered, and, as *Mount Analogue*, and famously Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* suggest, able to evade even the objective, vanquishing command of Man.

A P P A R E N T P O S I T I O N S

Beatrice Gibson: *Agatha*
17 November - 9 December 2012

“What I can name cannot really prick me,” Roland Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida*, positing that the photographic image, ironically, is activated not by its sense of verisimilitude but precisely the opposite: the presence of the indefinable, the unnameable. An image which is entirely explained and explainable — in which meaning exists in a closed loop — is sterile, dead; a mere simulacrum. If arguing for a metaphysics of the photographic image might seem a precarious proposition, though, this will to locate the ineffable has a more immediate adversary: that of language.¹ Once a thing is named, it is forever fixed: “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.”² It can never be another; never be unnamed.

Beatrice Gibson’s work circles this process of becoming, of naming, via word and voice: voice modulated by place, place formed by speech. Her latest work, ‘Agatha’, is based on a dream dreamed by radical British composer Cornelius Cardew of a planet without speech; a society and space unspoken. Aside from functioning as a playful philosophical speculation, the landscape of the dream — unbound, unscripted — offers a corollary for Cardew’s artistic method, which was predicated on improvisation and collective endeavour, on the associative and collaborative, and sought to undermine the authority of the score—even the composer.

Cornelius Cardew is present across much of Gibson’s work. ‘if the route’: *The Great Learning* quotes the composer’s own *The Great Learning* (which itself refers to Confucius’ text of the same name) in a work which circles London taxi drivers’ assimilation of ‘The Knowledge’, a series of songlines in which the city is spoken into being; and her ambitious, multi-nodal project *The Tiger’s Mind* applies Cardew’s compositional method directly as a means of producing a film.³ But beyond Cardew himself lies a deep interest in the limit of voice and word, responding to, among others, Jorge Luis Borges, his compatriot Adolfo Bioy Casares, and B.S. Johnson, who challenged the chronologous in a concrete sense with unbound volumes the reader themselves must organise.⁴

Yet where Cardew’s method was novel, the dream is ancient, dreamed endlessly in a return; a reiterative fantasy, the great yearning of all those bound by word. It is perhaps the basis of every dream, imagined as it is at arm’s length from the cautionary logic, the literalism of the conscious mind: the unpicking of singular meaning, the loosening of the mould. A throwing-off of nouns and an awakening to a freer, plural state. A nounless world, like the planet Tlön in Borges’ *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, allows for a multiplicity of meanings, of explanations for why the world is, to be given voice. Tlön, itself imagined by a imaginary country, Uqbar — or at least one which exists only in language, in codices — is written into being to become a material reality and, the author surmises, the only reality in years to come.

“The inability to remember is itself perhaps a memory,” John Berger writes in and our faces, my heart, brief as photos. “One lived with the experience of namelessness: there were certain elemental forces — heat, cold, pain, sweetness — which were recognizable. As also a few persons. But there were no verbs and no nouns. Even the first pronoun was a growing conviction rather than a fact, and because of this lack, memories (as distinct from a certain functioning of memory) did not exist. Once one lived in a seamless experience of wordlessness. Wordlessness means that everything is continuous. The later dream of an ideal language, a language which says all simultaneously, perhaps begins with the memory of this state without memories.”⁵

Indeed, the only way that language could hope to match the experience of namelessness, to locate an ‘ideal language’, as Berger suggests, is by conferring a unique name on each and every thing: a proposition which Borges makes in *Funes the Memorious*, in which the boy Funes, unable to forget, refers to a proposition of John Locke’s for a total language as a possible system to structure his hypermnnesia, but regards even this to be unsatisfactory as it fails to take into account the influence of time upon objects.

The narrator in *Agatha* has to navigate the dream-landscape by means other than speech, gradually attuning himself to variables and properties as esoteric as colour-changing and pace-quickenings. The landscape, which should be negated by the absence of words, is instead activated by a new set of causal relationships with fluid parameters: a manifestation, effectively, of Cardew’s *Treatise* (1963 – 67), which asked for a free interpretation of its graphic score, creating a unique instance with every new iteration, and forming a whole from a set of relative positions as opposed to a single absolute one. His use of alternative notation, like that of John Cage or Morton Feldman, does musically what Borges proposes linguistically: it shrugs off the mantle of its imposed language and allows the encoded to exist alongside the uncoded, and the unencodable, and the decisive alongside the aleatory. In short, it proposes a freer system of exchange between concept and object, as does the world in *Agatha*.

Adam Pugh

1. Albeit one with numerable historical precedents in iconographic and ritual images and objects

2. Gertrude Stein, *Sacred Emily* (although arguably this could be read in a different context, that of the (extra-linguistic) essence of things)

3. *The Tiger’s Mind* runs at The Showroom, London, from 14 November 2012 – 12 January 2013. See theshowroom.org for details.

4. Others who work similarly to trouble the word in time and the word in space are not specifically invoked here but bear comparison: Tom Phillips’ treated novel *A Humument* and Raymond Queneau’s *Exercises in Style*, among others

5. John Berger, *and our faces, my heart, brief as photos*, pp. 31-32

Beatrice Gibson

Beatrice Gibson (b.1978) is an artist and filmmaker based in London. Investigating the utterances that form people and place, Gibson’s practice explores voice, speech, collective production and the problems of their representation. Employing the score as a paradigm for their production, Gibson’s film scripts are developed through open-ended compositional structures that are, to varying degrees, given over to a collective apparatus. Subsequent material is then edited into a form of notation to be restaged. The resulting films, meticulous and formal portraits of existing landscapes and the voices that inhabit them, work to complicate the notion of the document.

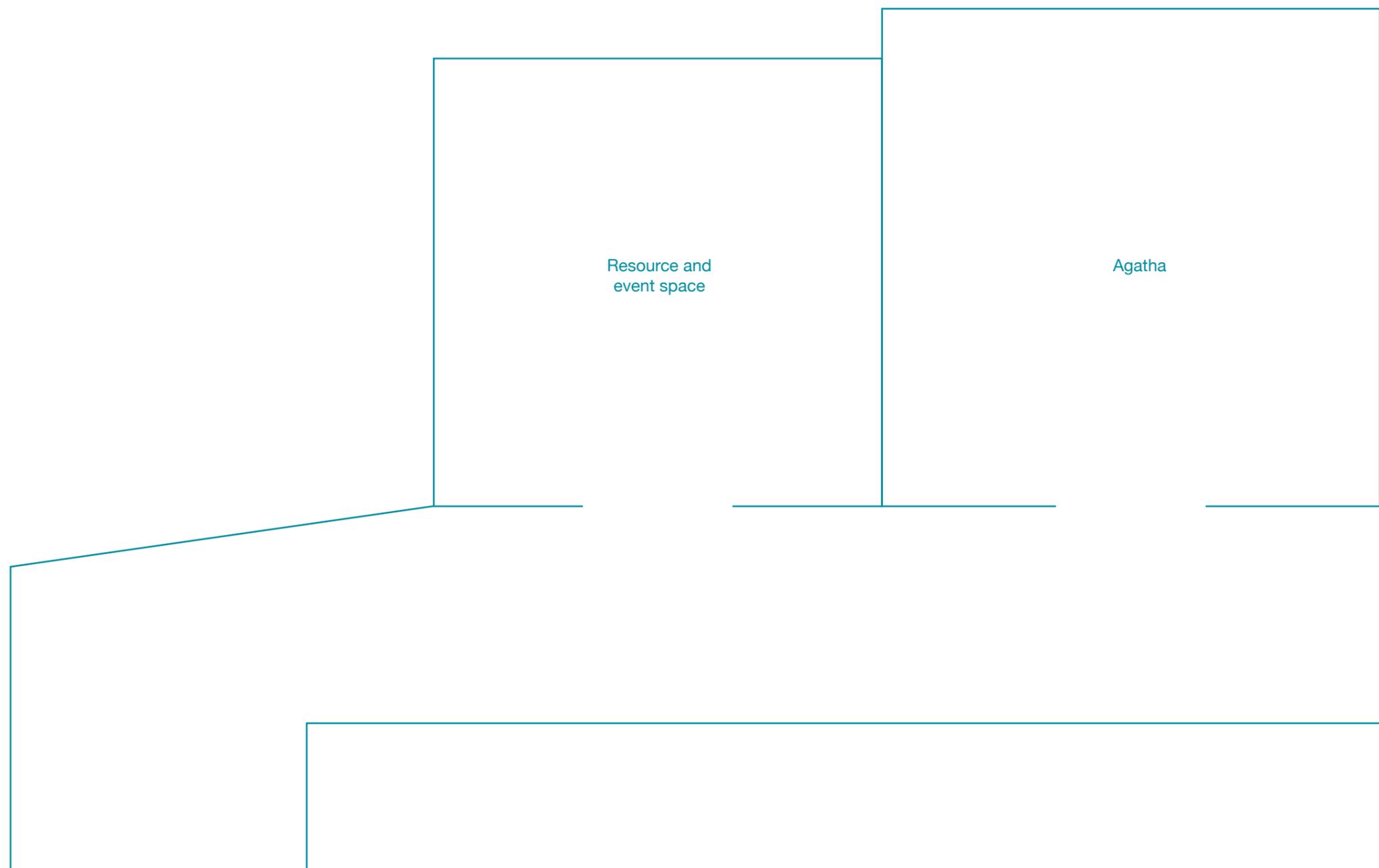
Apparent Positions runs from 20 October 2012 to 10 February 2013, with work by Aglaia Konrad, Beatrice Gibson, Cyprien Gaillard and Marine Hugonnier. An overview of the series is available separately.

Curated by Adam Pugh
Exhibition design and build: Rob Filby, Paul Kuzemczak and Thomas Salt

Part of the ‘Changing Landscapes’ programme at the Sainsbury Centre.

Changing Landscapes project curator:
Veronica Sekules

Thanks to Anna Mustonen and Rebecca Gremmo, Max Wigram Gallery; Silvia Batschun, Sprüth Magers Berlin; Marie Logie, Auguste Orts; Gil Leung and Ben Cook, LUX; and all artists



Agatha

Beatrice Gibson, UK, 2012 14'
HD Video, colour, sound

Beatrice Gibson's latest film *Agatha* is a psychosexual sci-fi about a planet without speech. Based on a dream of the radical British composer Cornelius Cardew, its narrator, ambiguous in gender and function, weaves us slowly through a mental and physical landscape, observing and chronicling a space beyond words. Without language to describe it, the space itself is unavoidably altered, and the film invites an appraisal of the relationship between word and land; between the physical and conceptual, the signified and signifier: once it is named, it *is*.

Events in the gallery

Discussion and screening with Beatrice Gibson

Thursday 29 November, 6pm
Free admission

Artist and filmmaker Beatrice Gibson discusses her work in the context of the Apparent Positions series at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. The event includes a screening of Gibson's film *A Necessary Music*.

Apartment House perform Cornelius Cardew

Thursday 6 December, 6.30pm

Norwich-based ensemble Apartment House (Simon Limbrick, Sebastian Lexer and Anton Lukoszevieve) perform Cornelius Cardew's *Treatise* and *Octet '61*.

See separate publicity for more details of both events.

Resource and event space

The resource and event space is a cumulative archive, expanding with each exhibition in the Apparent Positions series. It includes publications relating to each artist, and doubles as an event space for talks and performances.

Publications

Carrara

Aglaia Konrad (text by Angelika Stepken)
ROMA Publications, 2011, 136pp.
287 x 216mm
ISBN 978-907745966-9

Desert Cities

Aglaia Konrad (ed. Christoph Keller; texts by Brigitte Franzen, Miles Glendinning)
JRP Ringier, 2008, 236pp.
310 x 230mm
ISBN 978-390582959-4

Elasticity

Aglaia Konrad (texts by Daniel Kurjakovic, Antonio Guzman, Eran Schaerf)
NAI010 Publishers, 2003, 248pp.
269 x 200mm
ISBN 978-905662273-2

Iconicity

Aglaia Konrad (text by Willem Oorebeek)
Walther König, 2005, 224pp.
258 x 166mm
ISBN 978-3865600004-2

Common Ground

ed. Adam Pugh, with contributions by Beatrice Gibson, Alex Waterman, Will Holder, Luke Fowler et al.
AURORA, 2009, 188pp.
200 x 130mm
ISBN 978-0-9553822-3-9

The Tiger's Mind

Beatrice Gibson
Sternberg Press, 2012, 144pp.
ISBN 978-3-943365-50-4

