

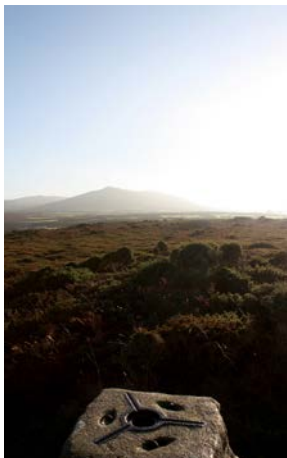
# A WALK THROUGH CORNWALL TOWARDS A METAMODERN SPIRIT OF PLACE IN THE ARTS

## INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

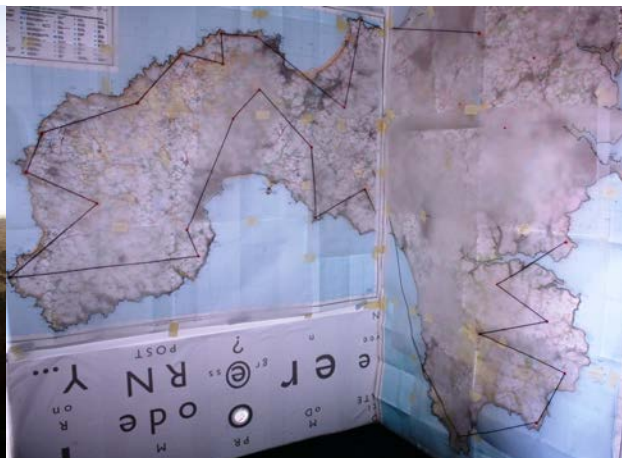
Everyone walks the South West Coastal Path (SWCP), and why not? This sublime edge of Devon and Cornwall, in constant view of the sea, is visually stunning, a continuous reminder of the UK's island existence, in some places a rocky, rugged and violent interface between terra firma and watery horizon, in others opening into gentle coves, estuaries, golden beaches and still creeks.

Previously I had cycled around the outline of Cornwall, attempting to document 'Cornishness' but knew there was a lot more to be discovered, particularly if travelling on foot, allowing time to engage with the land and the people. So in April of 2014 I decided to go deeper into the idea of place and the *Genius loci*. This time I would walk *across* and *over* instead of *around* Cornwall, taking cross sections instead of a simple outline perimeter. But I required a neutral approach to travelling through the landscape unbiased by my own or others preferences towards place.

On previous walks into the countryside, I always enjoyed finding and standing on the top of the triangulation points ('trigpoints') 3ft high concrete plinths with a solid brass ring in the top. Marking all 50 trigpoints in red on six large 1:25,000 scale explorer maps of Cornwall, I drew straight lines between the 25 trig points for west Cornwall. A circuitous route formed which seemed to include an indiscriminating palette of fields, villages, hills, moors, roads and features, as well as modest sections of the SWCP, a journey that overall might better reflect a Cornish sense of place.



Zennor Cliff Trigpoint  
(SW449391)



Planned 25 Trigpoint walking route  
(March 2014)



Typical field walking  
experience (April 2014)

## The *Genius loci*, METAMODERNISM & the ZIETGIEST

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (2007: p1091) gives 3 main definitions of the *Genius loci*:

1. The presiding god or 'Spirit of the Place'
2. In modern planning terms the 'Character of the site'
3. The body of associations connected with or inspirations derived from a place

Historically the *Genius loci* was a Roman god or spirit (*Genius*) who jealously guarded a specific location (*loci*) and its unique features. This Roman influence reappears in the UK in 1771 with the rediscovery of a 200 AD altar stone at Auchendinny inscribed *Genius Britannicae* (The Spirit of Britain). During the enlightenment period the term *Genius loci* and its translation into English as 'Spirit of Place' appears in the romantic poetry and literature of Wordsworth, Alexander Pope, S.T. Coleridge and others concerned with the description of picturesque landscape and place. In the late 20thC, use of the term became popular in architecture, particularly with Christain Norberg-Schulz, earth artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, and with alternative new age spiritualities such as Feng-Shui.

In their comprehensive history and summary of place and character in architecture, Jiven & Larkham (2003 p71) summarise that the *Genius loci* is complex and multi-layered, with many authors holding different, sometimes conflicting, views about its nature and meaning.



Panorama from top of Tren crom Hill (Neolithic, Iron age & Roman Hill Fort ), Hayle estuary Centre Left (Sept 2013)

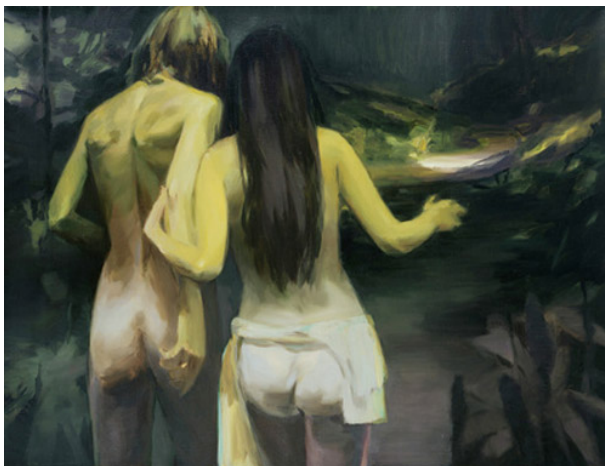
In 2008 the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) defined Spirit of place as “the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colours, odours, etc.) ...the physical and the spiritual elements giving meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place” (ICOMOS 2008). The National Trust recently used this definition to help establish conservation principles by launching a Spirit of place strategy to help guide the development of some of its properties. Today a bewildering range of material discusses and uses the term *Genius loci*, ranging from spiritualists, landscape architects, composers, poets, and artists, who were recently represented by the Lisson Gallery, showcasing the public sculpture of Ai Weiwei, Anish Kapoor, Richard Long and others at the 2014 Venice Biennale exhibition, titled: *Genius loci* (Spirit of Place)

## A SPIRIT OF PLACE OR A SENSE OF PLACE?

The large body of work on the 'Spirit of place' and a 'Sense of Place' shows that the two terms are closely associated. Use of the word 'spirit' has obvious subjective and spiritual connotations, the acknowledgement of which could be seen as the 'sixth sense', outside of the established gamut of sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell, but within the context of understanding place and its expression in the arts, its meaning is not far from the word 'sense'. For this reason in the following essay the *Genius loci* and 'Sense of Place' are synonymous. However, I propose that this Spirit of Place is a much more complex idea than currently espoused, not just a visually perfect idyll recreating a past golden age, a 'blue-sky' architectural thinking, or a tool to assign economic values to important landscapes.

### METAMODERNISM theory

Metamodernism is the proposed emerging philosophy championed by Robin van den Akker & Timotheus Vermeulen, first published in a paper at the 'Thinking in Unity Conference LMU Munich 2010. Meaning *with, between and beyond* modernism, metamodernism suggests that western culture today is in a continuous paradoxical dialogue between progress and irony; the modern utopian desire and postmodern deconstructed reality. Vermeulen & van den Akker propose that 'metamodernism could be situated epistemologically with modernism and postmodernism, ontologically between modernism and postmodernism, and historically beyond modernism and postmodernism' (Van den Akker & Vermeulen ii), 2010). Touchstone metamodernist phrases include 'maximum irony with maximum sincerity', used by Andy Holden in his 2003 'MI!MS' manifesto, and 'informed naivety', and is expressed in artworks such as Olafur Eliasson's Tate Modern 'Weather Project' sun installation (2003) recent controversial performance art by the Hollywood actor Shia le Beouf such as '#I am not sorry' (2014) and the paintings of Kaye Donachie (b1970).



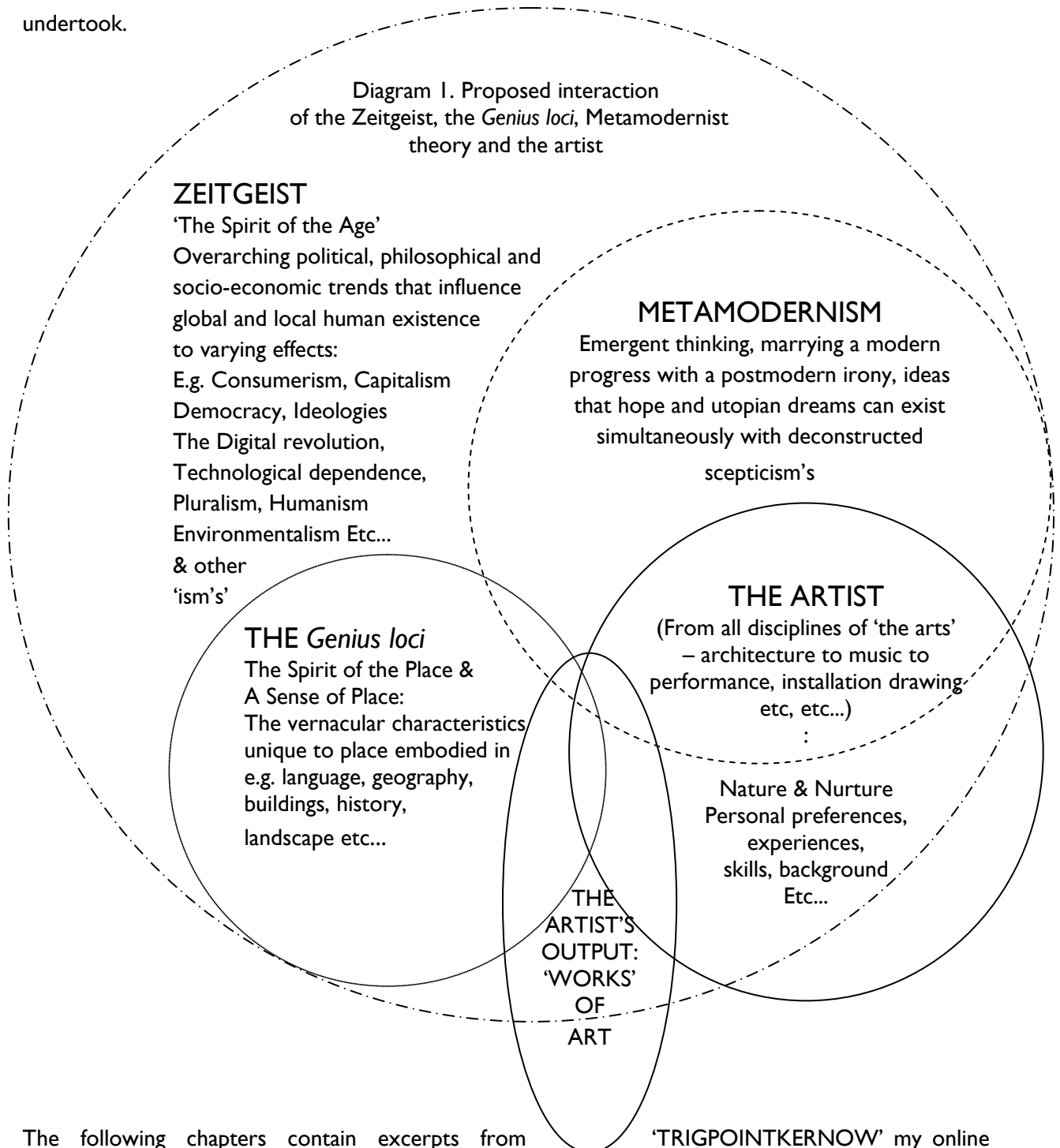
Kaye Donachie, 'Early Morning Hours of the night' (2003).  
Oil on Canvas.



Olafur Eliasson, Weather Project (2003).  
Tate Modern Installation.

## The ZEITGEIST

In his lectures on 'The Philosophy of World History' (1821-31), Hegel used the phrase 'der Geist seiner Zeit' (the spirit of his time). Now widely used, the 'Zeitgeist' describes current intellectual trends and predominant schools of thought which influence the culture and ideas of a particular time period. Today in our increasingly globalised and interconnected world, Hegel's view still has relevance, the political and economic conditions affecting the degree to which sensitivity to the Spirit of Place can be undertaken.



The following chapters contain excerpts from 'TRIGPOINTKERNOW' my online blog, and handwritten walking journal (*in italics*), embedded with explorations into philosophy, existence and the artistic expression of the *Genius loci* on 6 of the 25 walks through west Cornwall.

## I. Earth COLLECTION

### Walk No.2: Mudgeon Farm to Roskruge Beacon, Friday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014

*You know you're walking through shit don't you? I looked down into the 4 inch deep river of cattle muck I found myself wading through. It was 7pm and evening milking time for the Holstein cattle. As the machines sucked milk in through thousands of nipples from swollen udders, liquid cow shite flowed out over the concrete hard standing through the farmyard I needed to walk through... I smiled at the farm boy and sheepishly said I am a bit lost, please could you point me the best way up to the trigpoint on Roskruge Beacon?*

Back home I carefully cleaned my mud clad boots, collecting and filtering every last particle of soil and detritus from the walk through muslin, leaving a large tablespoon of soil, organic matter and grit, hopefully containing indigenous plant seeds of the places I had walked through. In October of 2013 walking barefoot from Swanpool to Maenporth along the SWCP, I collected the moist dirt that stuck between my toes, bottling up this soil sample at the end of the walk. In my studio I presented the soil in test tubes, a quasi-scientific record of place, feeling that somehow these samples represented the area I had just walked through. But do these soil samples really capture the Spirit of Place? Perhaps symbolically. What amount of cow muck remained on my boots by the time I had reached the top of Roskruge beacon? The walk covered 6 miles, so how much of the soil at the start still remained at the end? The difficulty of obtaining a sample truly representative of the journey walked is clear. Soil samples taken from boots walked over the landscape are likely to contain a majority of soil from the end of each walk, depending upon the conditions of the day, the season contributing to soil adhesion and the actual volume of soil collected in the boot treads. The appearance or not of native plant seeds within the collected samples and indeed possible germination is also in question, since flowering plants liberally dose their surroundings with seeds at differing periods throughout the year. Ultimately the soil samples are symbolic and representative of time, season and place, an existential record of the walk, regardless of conditions, and in this sense not meant to be scientific.



Filtering soil & detritus through muslin and sieve

Soil samples from 'trigpointkernow' walk no.'s 1 - 6

## EARTH COLLECTING ARTISTS

The artist Gary Simpson in his piece 'Common ground 191' (2003-2011) collected soils from 193 United Nations countries, struggling to get access into and soil out of certain places like North Korea. The project has been described as amazing and fascinating (Chang, 2010), if not slightly banal, but does use the soil symbolically to grapple with issues of sovereignty and landownership.

Gabriel Orozco's critically acclaimed and ingenious performance 'Yielding Stone' (1992), rolled a ball of plasticine, equal to his own weight, around the streets of New York collecting soil, debris and whatever would stick to the ball, 'imprinting' the city and whatever was in it onto the object.

In a related project, Tanya Kovat's 'Oceans' (2012-2014) organised over 100 volunteers to obtain water samples from all the seas and oceans of the world, collecting up and presenting the worlds waters in a gallery space.

The question of authenticity could be asked in all of these cases. Are these works unique to place and indicative of the *Genius loci*? Scientifically the substances may be traced back to the geography peculiar to the area but the work is meaningless without contextualisation, a communication to the audience of the background, method and materials. Here is the idea that the object has authority because of the subject, and the intellectualisation of dirt, water or waste, elevating objects above the ubiquitous into the revered. So are these context based works of art 'better' if understood instantly without any description, the 'voice' of the work clear, an eloquent narrative? Perhaps. There is a range of differing approaches regarding curation of such context critical works, mainly to do with the question of 'to label or not to label' and furthermore how to label.

My own Cornish Detritus strips (2013) collected every 10 miles of the 480 Cornish miles cycled, are framed in perspex panels with a map section clearly showing where the samples originated from.



Ian Guyver. 'Cornish Detritus strips x 48' (2013) displayed at Soil Culture Conference, Falmouth University, August 2014

Kovat's 'Oceans' at the Fruitmarket Gallery Edinburgh (2010) were contained in unlabelled glass vials of varying shape and size with a general written description, an unusual presentation since variety of container distracts the eye from the content (what factor decided sea in a round vial over a thin vial?) In one presentation of Simpson's Common Ground 191, a flag represented the soil inside glass tubs of each country arranged in alphabetical order, an obvious and straightforward communicate, whereas Simpson's sold samples of a blend of all the worlds soils require a brief but simple explanation.



Tanya Kovats. 'Oceans' (2013), glass vials. Fruitmarket Gallery      Gary Simpson. 'Common Ground 191' (2003-2011), labeled glass pots

Orozco's 'Yielding stone' is documented photographically showing the plasticine ball next to an urban drain cover, the shape of which is printed onto the surface, and elsewhere a close-up of the plasticine ball revealing the texture, detritus and the material 'Yielding stone' has collected. The former photograph is self-explanatory, the latter needs description, but both resonate with symbolic language, a 'voice' and a complexity greater than the other examples.



Gabriel Orozco. 'Yielding Stone' (1992), Plasticine and dust, left : in-situ photograph, right: close up revealing detail

Overall if the 'voice' of the work is clear the narrative will speak for itself on different metaphorical and physical levels, and be greater than just a naive but admirable effort to communicate clichéd ideas like world peace or shared existence...

## 2. EXISTENCE RUBBING OFF

Walk No.3: Roskruge Beacon to Roskillys Farm, Monday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014

*The woman and her inquisitive children were intrigued by my request to do a rubbing of their hung slate tile cottage wall. Bemused, they watched me as I rhythmically printed the shape of the slate tiles into my large sketchpad, the scratching noise carrying through into the kitchen where they were sitting.*

Cornish slate for roofing has been transported by sea since the 12<sup>th</sup> C (Pevsner, 2003), and this particular vertical form of slate cladding developing widely in Cornwall during the regency period. Assuming that the slate tiles were Cornish, I saw an opportunity to capture something of the place, a historic feature. Later I discovered that the famous N Cornwall Delabole slates have recently been rejected in favour of Chinese and Spanish imports. But what has this got to do with the Spirit of Place? Authenticity? The slate tiles look like the real thing but they are in fact shipped in from across the world for favourable economic reasons. The desire for the neo-vernacular aesthetic is a recent trend in architecture but generally costs a lot more. Here we see Hegel's *Zeitgeist*, the overarching global influence, meaning it is cheaper to transport a product by sea & road from the other side of the world than to obtain it from a quarry a few miles away, thus shaping the architectural expression of place.

### OBJECT RUBBING ARTISTS

Ian Howard's 'Sovereign Borders Project' (2014) is about taking rubbings in politically sensitive places like border areas and war zones e.g. the North Korean/Chinese border, where he rubs and prints the floor, dividing fences and security gates. Is something more translated onto the paper than just the object? Like Orozco's 'Yielding Stone', the *object* becomes a *subject* loaded with symbolic meaning. But is this work valuable or have any authority outside of its context, without a label?



Ian Howard. 'Changbai Mountain site work' (2012) Chinese/North Korean border



Carol Caputo work began in the 1980's when from a background in graphic design and advertising she began combining rubbings from her native NY urban surroundings into compositions. In 'Drawing Conclusions' (2006) some of the work is derived from physical place, and digitally recorded, but her work is not intentionally about place so in this sense the work could not be said to contain an element of the *Genius loci* about it. The work relies upon an abstract compositional style that echoes Wassily Klandinsky's work around and after 1913 during his time at the Bauhaus. This abstraction of Caputo's original rubbed objects reduces any inferred authority it might have to express the *Genius loci*, which has been diluted out of its original context.

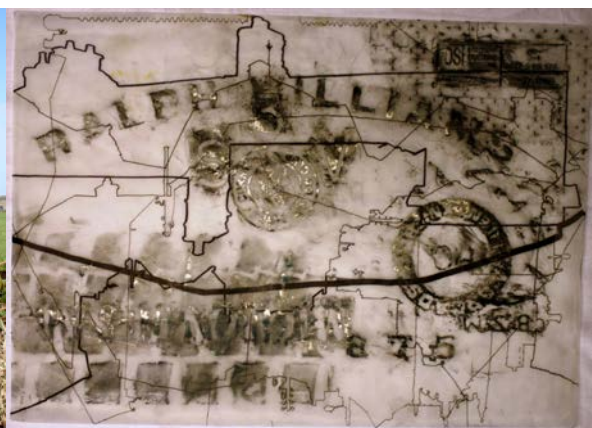
Karen Schiff's 'From Here' (2004) is a rubbing of her MFA postgraduate show space, representing the 'white cube' exhibition room including the tonal details of plaster textures, light fixings and skirting boards. The entire place has been copied and re-represented, 'place re-occupying place' in a gestural statement about art presentation. Another artist, Jennifer Price, 'inks up' complete objects, before draping over loose printing cloth from which scale printings are rolled and created. In 'Recession impressions' (2010), Price transferred a full size print of an American Dodge car onto linen, displaying the enormous mural in a political statement referencing the automotive industry crisis of 2008–2010.

In summary we can see that this universal and arguably oldest form of printmaking can be a rich source for documenting place, history and ideas, a tool to reflect what exists in its most basic form. Symbolism attached to rubbed objects and the imbued 'authority' stem from the context of the work.\* With regards to the expression of the *Genius loci*, most of the objects rubbed are man-made, mineral, the physical fabric of somewhere, and this represents place on a manufactured level, but if a Spirit of Place is also connected to its living inhabitants, particularly human, then the objects to be rubbed or 'inked up' might also be living & organic, the actual faces or parts of people, animals or plants.

\*A written journal exploration of the 'authority of the object' can be found in appendix B)



Taking a rubbing of an abandoned tractor tyre, St Just in Penwith



Ian Guyver. Layered drawing/rubbing of walk no.15: Bartinney - Carn Gluze (2014)

### 3. LANDSCAPE, SCULPTURE AND PLACE

#### Walk No.4 Roskilly's Farm to Black Head, Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014

*A small opening in the trees that flank the coastal path near Coverack opened out into a large mown grass area filled with metal sculptures by Terrence Coventry. I look at these, looking back at the setting for the work, appreciating the breathtaking scenery more than the work itself which looks saleable; familiar animals, beasts and figurative work in simple but characterful, angular, almost 'digital' forms. I slowly walk on along the SWCP and ask myself is this sculpture about landscape or place? Is it good art? Fitting to the place? Are the works site specific to the sublime nature of this setting? Do they capture the Spirit of the place? The visual setting in this instance seemed to override all other narratives and left me feeling that both Coventry's sculptures and the beautiful setting were devalued due to the awkward juxtaposition of the two against each other.*

The recently opened Tremeneheere sculpture gardens overlooking St Michaels mount and Penzance is a parkland setting of sculpture, 'experienced' works of art, and stand alone pieces. Tremeneheere combines amongst other work: Richard Long's line of grasses swaying in the wind (untitled, 2014); David Nash's charred oak basoliths quietly arranged high up in a lonely wood (Black Mound 2013); James Turrell's 'Skyspace' (2014), a modern cave framing the passing weather through a circular opening, Ken Gill's 'Skhimza' (2014); a glass waterfall crafted into a narrow granite crevice, and Tim Shaw's giant bronze statue of 'Minotaur' (2014). Here in this compelling mix of site specific, interventionist and experiential works, the *Genius loci* is well expressed, particularly by another piece; Billy Wynter's Camera obscura (2013), placed inside a circular hut which reflects the 360degree view of the immediate landscape outside onto a large oval viewing orb, and also with Turrell's 'Skyspace', but perhaps most convincingly by Long's simple stretch of grasses moved by the prevailing winds, although the choice of non-native plant I question unless a reference to 18<sup>th</sup> C plant collecting explorers is inferred.



Richard Long. 'Untitled' (2014), South American Restio Grass  
*Boloskion tetraphyllum*, with Turrell's 'Skyspace' in the midground



Terrence Coventry. Avian Forms,  
(unknown date) Coverack.

Comparing the two sculpture experiences is troublesome since Coventry appears to be selling his work, where as Tremenheere is a paid public visitor attraction. Tremenheere, a shrine to both famous artists and nature, contrasts with Coventry's free entry sculpture garden, promoting his own sculptures to be placed elsewhere in the country and thus nothing to do with the *Genius loci* of Coverack, save a clever positioning of product (garden sculpture) to a target market (generally wealthy middle-class walkers).

Does Tremenheere or Coventry reflect a metamodern philosophy or just the economic Zeitgeist of modern survival in Cornwall? What might a truly metamodern sculptural expression of Cornish place take the form of? Neither romantic nor ironic, but both? A static representation/framing of nature, like that which exists in Wynter's and Turrell's experiences? But there's no apparent postmodern irony or skepticism here at Tremenheere or at Mr Coventry's sculpture park on the SWCP cliff, just sacrifices to nature who can unpredictably and indiscriminately lash out (and back) at worshipful mankind as was seen in the damaging storms of February 2014. Perhaps a metamodern philosophy would be better represented by an all-weather, all-seasons stationary totem screen showing continuous live streamed video feeds and still frame footage from a linked explorer robot roaming the land. Randomly generated views in a gilt edged classical picture frame is fixed onto a four wheel drive lunar buggy wandering unbiased around the Cornish landscape discovering new and old narratives of existence... Maybe this is what I have already attempted by attaching a 10 second time lapse 'Gopro' camera to myself as I have walked the 170 miles around west Cornwall. Perhaps these precious and secret narratives from the *Genius loci* cannot be collected and instilled into 3-D sculpture or installation, perhaps a sense of place can only be experienced outside in a place's being, the state of its purest existence, not stolen or regurgitated for public dissipation.



Mixed narratives of existence: various selected Gopro photographic 10 second time lapse stills of 'trigpointkernow' (April – Dec 2014)

## PUBLIC SCULPTURE ARTISTS

For public sculpture expressing Cornish place, Tim Shaw's drummer boy, unveiled in Truro by Roger Taylor of Queen fame in 2009, is a large 16ft oversized man standing on a globe, striking a drum. Described by Shaw himself as 'A symbolic work that celebrates the spirit of a land and its people' and of Cornwall, 'a place whose drum beats differently to anywhere else...' (Shaw, 2011) Joseph Clarke of Millennium Gallery pointed to Shaw's work reminding us of our 'Primordial instinct' ...a defiant yet graceful balance on a ball of uncertainty representing forces greater than ourselves' (Clarke, 2011), thoughts that are conducive to both the *Genius loci* and metamodernist philosophy well versed in paradoxical phrases. Shaw symbolically used ingots of local copper and tin to form the bronze cast, also referencing Cornwall by use of the globe recalling, fishing buoys and the world to which many Cornish travelled overseas for new mining opportunities.

Contrasting Shaw's drummer boy with David Kemp's 'Tinner's Hounds', Kemp's creative genius in utilising the miners working boots from Geevor Tin Mine and creating groups of endearing and characterful canine creatures is at once convincing and humorous yet still meaningful, lacking only in scale to challenge the drummer boy for the central stage of Truro's Lemon Quay. Both works can be said to be evocative and expressive of the *Genius loci*, with the 'Hounds of Geevor' resonating louder than the 'Drummer boy' due solely to the authority of the object and the loaded context that resides powerfully within the wellington boots once worn by thousands of Cornish miners.



David Kemp. 'Tinner's Hounds', (2007)



Tim Shaw. 'Drummer Boy' (2011)

Redruth's pedestrianised high street is also home to another sculpture, starkly representational in nature and, to the artists own omission, undertaken in a 'simplest is best' (Annand, 2009) approach. 'Cornish Miner' (2008) proudly extends and extols the sacred objects of the miner; the pick, the

golden ingot of precious metal, and the tallow candles attached to his helmet, strung around his neck like an Egyptian burial broche. David Annand's 2m bronze has outstretched arms in a Christ-like pose caught and leaning confidently into the wind, but the hoped for economic salvation came only to the privileged or rare luck of a handful of Cornish 'adventurers', and this only enabled through the exploitation of the working classes hopeful for a share in the mineral bounty. High above Redruth's 'Tinnars Hounds' and 'Cornish Miner' overlooking Camborne and Pool, stands the 30ft high Basset monument atop Carn Brea hill, a stunted granite cross, a testament not to the people's request to spend the funds on a hospital for Redruth's mining community, but to the Basset family name, a name that is like dirt to locals who even today are rightly bitter of the unjust practice of the Basset empire and those of a similar ilk who powerfully controlled the land and the mines without challenge. Annand's 'Cornish Miner' was the result of a competition of 70 artists judged by Redruth Working Party's Mining Art Group and, in its final stage, art ambassador pupils from Redruth Secondary school, and so it is apt that the local people have chosen for themselves, the piece standing defiantly like a glorious battle memorial and one which the *Genius loci* arguably vindicates today, albeit in a manner lacking originality or subtlety. Annand seems to have general public art popularity since Redruth's 'Cornish Miner' has not even made it into the 31 public art pictures on his website (as of Jan 2015) which reveals a repertoire of traditional figurative work reminiscent of Terrence Coventry, but was not born or spent any significant time in Cornwall. Kemp's playful hounds however are talked of fondly by locals, testified by donated knitted scarves, body warmers and the gradual appearance of golden shine marks from over stroking the bronze doggies. Both Shaw and Kemp have been living and practising in Cornwall for over 20 years and this has clearly and inextricably informed their artistic output. In conclusion it is interesting that only 1 of the 10 aforementioned artists was born in Cornwall, Billy Wyntner, and it is therefore somehow fitting that his 'Camera obscura' is a simple mirror reflecting the Spirit of Place all around.



David Annand.  
'Cornish Miner' (2008)



Carn Brea Basset Monument (1836)



Billy Wyntner. 'Camera obscura' (2013)

\*Further explorations of architecture and sculpture can be found in appendix E) & F)

## 4. ANCESTRY & SPIRIT OF PLACE

Walk No.5 Black Head – Predannack Head – Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2014

*The Gopro camera that had been taking pictures every 10 seconds of the walk ran out of battery just as I walked into a tiny hamlet called Trerise. I had not seen a car on the narrow road cutting east-west through the centre of the Lizard in 20 minutes, but now I could hear a tractor and bouncing behind it a trailer with a poorly sheep and an old man in it. He was holding on to the rusty side with deformed hand, a thumb and a single finger looking like a claw. I said hello and half an hour later I was regretting not having recorded a very interesting conversation with a Mr Bosustow, whose DNA goes back to pre-Roman times. Amongst modern land management issues on the Lizard peninsula, carnivorous ravens attacking fattened lamb breeds and changing social trends, we spoke of Cornish Celtic heritage.*

In a 2008 report, Professor Donnelly of Oxford University concluded that the indigenous Cornish and Welsh are the most ancient and purest of the Britons, going back to pre-Norman, Saxon, even Roman times (Cornish Guardian, 2012). Having 4 farming generations who lived in the same remote village on the Lizard, Mr Bosustow's blood sample was taken for the report, confirming his ancient heritage. I was beginning to discover and uncover many layers of historical existence, tales and stories of generations of people who have existed for nearly a millennium. Surely this contributes to the Spirit of Place. But how could the arts capture this interesting narrative?



Mr Bosustow of Trerise, near St Ruan  
Major, the Lizard peninsula

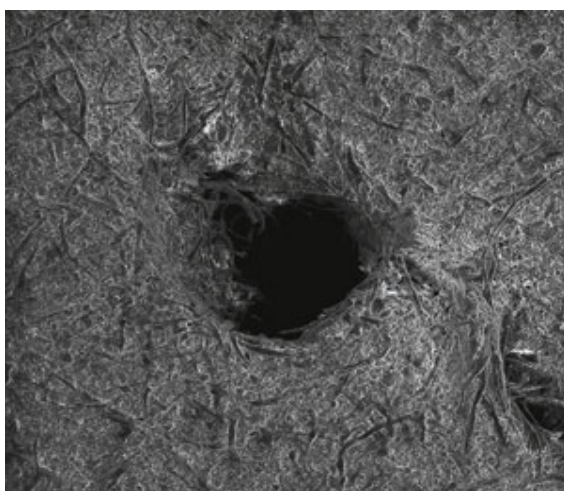
St Ruan Major Church, where some of Mr Bosustow's  
ancestors are buried

*I carried on walking from Trerise and found the ruined Church of St Ruan Major, a romantic stone shell amongst gravestones and nave where weeds grow, open to the sky along the centre aisle where pews once rested. The tower where bells rang now sang as the wind and sky whistled past overhead. I drew the outline of the church round and round in my sketchbook, rubbed Mr Bosustow's gravestones and picked a single yellow dandelion. Some discarded cast iron looked like legs and feet and later during the day I found a small Cornish*

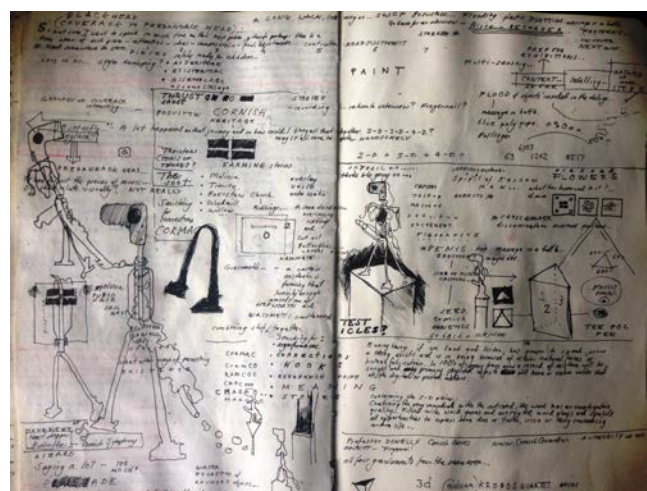
flag. A narrative was conspiring to form, and I ask myself is this the ‘Spirit of Place’ manifesting a unique vernacular representation? Perhaps it is the people who live in a place carrying the stories that really make up the *Genius loci*, influencing what ultimately happens e.g., land use, buildings, agriculture, business, discovery of minerals. If the Sense of Place is most closely related to people, then language, folklore, indigenous music and vernacular stories best represent the *Genius loci*, and all the more so if these people groups have remained in the land for centuries.

Months later I return to meet Mr Bosustow, and after kindly allowing me to have a finger nail clipping I consider that his ancient surname and the DNA represented by his hallowed piece of keratin ‘speaks’ with a profound ‘voice’.

Cornelia Parker’s piece ‘Brontëan abstract’ (2006), is an optically magnified print of a circular shaped needle hole in the embroidery cushion which Emily Bronte used in her sewing. Perhaps the needle incision was made when she was musing about ‘Wuthering Heights’, perhaps not. Here once again the authority of the object is inseparable from the context of the object (no more than a well framed electron-micrographic print) and in a similar fashion the finger nail of Mr Bosustow resounds with the same loud context. I place the toenail at the centre of a figurative sculpture piece for this section of the walked journey and feel like some sort of detective uncovering evidence. But have I tampered with the evidence by removing it from its purest setting of being? Have I added value or taken value away by doing this? Mr Bosustow’s fingernail is indeed symbolic of Cornwall, and contributes greatly to the *Genius loci* but it is quite meaningless without any explanation. This aligns with Jacque Derrida’s oft used statement ‘there is nothing outside the context’ (Derrida, 1967) a deconstructive philosophical approach that fits well with context rich works of art.



Cornelia Parker. ‘Brontëan Abstract’ (2006), (Pinhole Made by Charlotte Brontë) Silver gelatin print



Work in progress for ‘Celtic dissemination’ (2015) Ian Guyver preliminary journal compositional sketches

## 5. SOUNDS WALKING OUT OF PLACE

Walk No.12 Rogers Tower – Raginnis Head: Sat 27<sup>th</sup> Sept & Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2014

*It was a windy day walking along the thick shingle beach between Penzance and Newlyn around St Michael's bay. I recalled the same rhythmic sound quality that I had recorded back at the start of the walk as I crunched and slid through the partially rounded flint pebbles. The sudden and loud sound of the random gusts of wind contrasted well with the dual rhythms of the walking and the gentle lap and draw of the high tide*

As the walks had been gathering momentum, the idea increasingly appealed of: a) recording and taking literal sounds and people's voices from the landscape, and b) responding to place musically and acoustically. Coming to terms with the overwhelming complexity of the places walked through and experienced I could see 3 ways of expressing this soundscape made in response to the 'Genius loci':

1. Literal reproduction of existing sounds e.g. the wind, birdsong, interviews with 'found people'; Existential noises taken/stolen, then played back for listening
2. Responding creatively with instruments (widest sense of word e.g. human voice, traditional instruments, found objects\*) - generally spontaneous and improvisational in character
3. The rearranging, editing and manipulation of both 1. and 2. to create 'mash ups' of prerecorded material; a transformative interpretation of collected audio data

\*It is interesting here to remark on the use of instruments derived from certain parts of the world, unique to a particular tree for a certain type of wood or animal drum skin or blowing horn. Such instruments embody an aesthetic which is well suited to an authentic expression of place.



Recording tractor ploughing near Mousehole, West Penwith



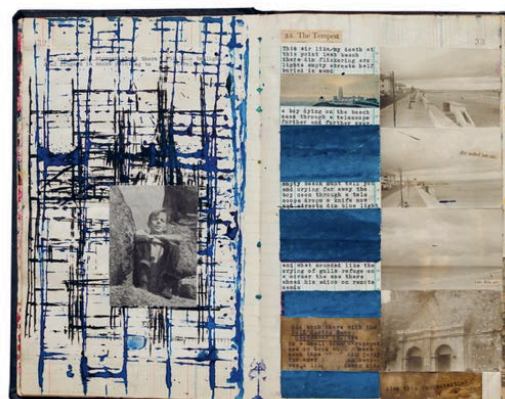
Violin improvisation, Tate St Ives amphitheatre



The 'mash up' referred to in 3. follows William S Burrough's idea used in his 'cut ups' (albeit transferred into audio) and Pierre Schaeffer's 'Musique Concrete' work of the 1940's, the mission of which was to collect 'concrete' sounds, wherever they came from, abstracting the musical values they were potentially containing" (Reydellet 1996, 10) Schaeffer developed an aesthetic using sound as the primary compositional resource. The recurring question with capturing the *Genius loci* aesthetic is one of how to present the data, the documentation, nay the *evidence*. The primary sources with reference to sound are those that are caught outside, *en plein air*, vibrations plucked from the environment and digitized. In the very process of removing the sound from its purest existential context i.e. 'being', this evidence of existence is tampered with and becomes digital data to be manipulated. Yet the sounds of this digital data are the primary compositional resource, recognisably of place, and any subsequent abstraction of these musical values contained within the concrete sounds may render the sounds of the *Genius loci* unintelligible and unrecognisable, sounding discordant and cacophonous. However, whilst the noises heard and experienced are both numerous and complex, they are arguably not chaotic, but intriguing and pleasing to the ear.



Pierre Schaeffer recording 'concrete sounds' in 1951



William Burroughs & Brion Gysin. 'Untitled scrapbook' (1976-77)

I therefore consider the technique of sound layering to neatly express the *Genius loci*, the whispered fragments of existence interplaying with one another, sometimes loud, sometimes accidental, at times directly opposed, at other times harmonised or juxtaposed. How much shall an artist or musician intervene, control or contrive a narrative through these layers? If the sediments of this profile of existence to be played back are arranged a certain way, *this* or *that* will be emphasised over *that* or *this*. In the folk music tradition, melodies and lyrics were and continue to be collected and re-arranged in a similar way. Vaughan Williams and Edward Elgar travelled through villages untouched for centuries collecting folk tunes and folklore as did Janacek through Hungary, Bartok and today countless others\*. What might be lost in translation and reinterpretation? What might be gained with new technologies?

\*Further explorations of musical *Genius loci* expressions from a metamodern mindset can be found in appendix C) & D)

## 6. WORDS FROM THE *Genius loci*

Cycle ride Day 5: Sennon Cove to Carn Galver April 17th 2013

*We had to stop our bikes on the misty tarmac road that winds its way from Zennor to St Ives. The black and white Hebridean cattle mooching along the tarmac road were ambivalent to our presence and probably to all visitors and vehicles on this lonely stretch of the A238 that twists through 4 mini mountains rising from the quiet SWCP cliffs. We badly pitched our tent in a National Trust car park and now I can't get the cattle out of my mind – some words of poetry:*

*The black and white cattle ambling across the winding road  
seem to speak of that peculiar  
CORNISHNESS,  
a harsh contrast...  
as if somehow the beasts embody the Cornish spirit,  
Wild, Surviving, in great and harsh beauty  
The sea not far,  
Together  
Somehow slightly aloof of authority  
Getting on with 'being',  
Proud, confident,  
Aware of the 'others'  
Nestling in valleys and coves  
Sheltered, the wind  
all around*

The ability of words to describe and capture place has a long distinguished history and is mixed with half-stories, legend and mystical possibilities. In this Cornish land of Arthurian legend, words can spin reality and facts far from the truth but it is perhaps the fairytales that appeal to us the most (and potentially brings in the punters for the National Trust) since there is mythological uncertainty surrounding them.

Nick Darke's historical and humorous plays set in Cornwall such as *Ting Tang Mine* (2003) and *the King of Prussia* (1980) somehow take the reader back to the old times long gone, constructing the fabric of *then*, the well researched unfamiliar turns of phrase rather like that of Shakespearian *Olde Englishe*. The Cornish language with its Celtic roots can be a rich source of historical *Genius loci* since it originates in the very distant past. Simply using old Cornish words and cultural miscellanea in the arts concerning the Spirit of Place transports the participant to the unfamiliar exoticism of another world in time.



Close up details of on location rubbings of Cornish words and place names from Trigpointkernow, 2014

The language which is unique to a place is likely to be evocative of that place since certain words and phrases evolved there. The use of indigenous words from indigenous people therefore, whether written, cut and pasted, painted, formed, recorded from interview or sung in folk or contemporary musical form represent the *Genius loci* clearly. Relph in 'Place and Placelessness' (1976:34) states: 'People are a place and a place is its people' and so perhaps the longer people remain in one place, the more the place shapes them and they are shaped by that place. However, the prevailing Zeitgeist reveals that the average person moves 8 times in a lifetime, further diluting down any unique sense of place, with experiences forgotten, narratives lost, accents softened, etc... Reasons why it is all the more pertinent to find and document human 'treasures' like Mr Bosustow, rare survivors of an increasingly dispersed diaspora.



GoPro 10-second time lapse photos of some of the different people met so far during Trigpointkernow, 2014

## 7. CONCLUDING AMBIVALENCES

Thoughts for a Metamodernist Artist concerned with the Spirit of Place:

### GO FORTH AND OSCILLATE!

The artist today would not be unaware of the postmodern distrust of capitalism, consumerism and the institutions of the media providing the weather (and forecasts) responsible for the *Zeitgeist*, but might still try to be sincere in their honorable utopian quest. Sensitive to these global conditions affecting the *Genius loci*, an artist might recognise and swing between modern enthusiasm's and postmodern ironies, between the hopeful and the melancholic, having a sincere naïveté and a knowingness, both singular and plural, total yet fragmented, pure yet strangely ambiguous. The metamodernist practitioner, by oscillating here and there, back and forth, between these apparent paradoxes and oxymoronic phenomena, negotiates and balances maturely between the modern and the postmodern.

Here *oscillation* suggests continuous movement, so if an artwork is metamodern, would it include *both* hope *and* irony? Is it possible to sit on the proverbial fence and jump from one patch of lush green grass on one side to the other patch of greener grass to graze, continuously? Isn't the 'fence' in the middle grey, and sharp to sit upon? Furthermore, how fast is this 'oscillation' and can its wild 'movement' be frozen in time and space to analyse? Is there the chance that one 'side' of the concept will be downplayed against the other? As Jacques Derrida said in Dick & Koffmans 2002 documentary 'Derrida' '...the two opposing philosophical forces are in *violent* opposition to each other and one must be subordinate to the other'... For the metamodernist artist the presence of such dualistic and potentially irreconcilable rhetoric is perhaps a reason in itself to boldly adventure into the paradoxical fray of life and existence, thus attempting to marry the Capulets to the Montagues without tragically dying in the process.

### A LAYERED PLACE AESTHETIC

'An authentic attitude to place is thus understood to be a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of place...it comes from a full awareness of places for what they are as products of man's intentions and the meaningful settings for human activities' (Relph 1976: 64)

How can this complex of the *Genius loci* be reflected generally in the arts? Cornish based examples have been discussed but an oversight is required. Overall, a multi-layered aesthetic approach emerges that begins to honour the fragments of found existence. An interconnected layering of place seems fitting to the expression of that place which is, in itself, context rich and extravagant in the quantity and detail of narratives both ordinary, natural, and super. One group appearing to seek this complex aesthetic are the Society of Layerists in Multi-Media (SLMM) who exist to '...express a holistic perspective in any style or medium. ...a way to think about creating art as a synthesis of ideas from

many sources... (Mary Nelson, SLMM founder, 2009). However, for relevance to a Sense of Place the range of work shown by members leans heavily into spiritual subjects\* without anchoring in physical place and little 'grounding' in the *Genius loci*. \*See Appendix G) for further related spiritual matters

## TWO DIMENSIONAL LAYERING

In terms of 2-D art, the familiar genres of collage, montage, text based art and printmaking in the manner of pioneers like Hannah Hoch, Kurt Schwitters, Juan Gris and more recently John Stezaker and Jesse Treece 'fit' well with this multi-layered aesthetic, as do the 'combine paintings' of Robert Rauschenberg and Frank Stella. Although these techniques are 'unoriginal', where there is *Genius loci* imbued authority in the form of context rich rubbings or found objects, the finished work might have a greater depth and sensitivity to the Spirit of Place than ever seen before.



Ian Guyver. 'Trigpointkernow Walk no. 2 - Mudgeon Farm – Roskruge Beacon, 2-D Arangement' (2014)

Layered drawing/rubbing of walk no.18: Watchcroft – Zennor Head

Recent digital techniques such as 'Layerism' developed by Emma Ferreira (2010) and others like Fashion Copious' Layered Vogue cover experiments (2010), Stephanie Jung and Florian Mueller's multilayered photography, a kind of 'cityscape ambiguation', born in Adobe Photoshop which boasts powerful manipulation of 1,000+ interconnected bitmap layers, and utilising sheets of photographic data of varying translucency placed on top of each other to create movement, dynamic visual worlds and images that float ambiguously between solidity and fluidity, perception and expression. Whilst multi-layered, they are still one-dimensional in visual subject, e.g. architecture, but are nonetheless interesting techniques offering possibilities for the expression of place on multiple subject levels e.g. combining historical narratives with topographic scenes and typography.



Fashion Copious. Vogue (2010)

Florian Mueller. 'Multivision' series, (2012)

Stephanie Jung. 'Berlin Cityscape' (2012)

### THREE DIMENSIONAL ASSEMBLY

In sculptural 3-D art the 'Assemblage' of Schwitters and Rauschenberg, framed boxes of James Cornell, 'Metamechanics' of Jean Tinguely and the 'Bricolage' concept where different un-related objects and materials combine to form a whole sits at ease with the *Genius loci*. Many artists continue to employ found objects, particularly within today's Zeitgeist of environmental awakenings, 'green' stewardship and upcycling/recycling fashions. The resulting works are constructed and presented in differing ways ranging from the quasi-museo\* approach of Mark Dion (Thames Dig, (1999), Porthmeor Studios installation (2014)), John Dahlsen and Georgina Maxwell's 'hung and plinthed' beachcombing sculptures in traditional gallery spaces (now a ubiquitous but admirable art genre) through to the public sculpture of David Kemp (e.g. Industrial Plants, Eden Project 2003) and Ha Schult's 'Trash People' (1996-2011) both of which embody metamodernist ideas of both irony and progress.



Ian Guyver. 'Trigpointkernow Walk no. 2 Mudgeon Farm – Roskruge Beacon' (2014)  
Found objects assemblage



David Kemp. 'Industrial Plants' (2003)  
Eden Project



Ian Guyver. 'Spirit of Kernow Man' (2012)  
Found objects



Ha Schult.  
'Trash person'  
(2006) Cologne,



Mark Dion. 'Thames Dig' (1999)  
Found objects presentation cabinet  
drawer



Ian Guyver, 'Trigpointkernow Walk no. 1 Rosemullion – Mudgeon Farm' (2014)  
Found objects presentation

\*Further explorations of the presentation and assemblage of found objects is cited in appendix A & B

## AUDIOSCAPE LAYERING

In the audioscape/musical world, new narratives for representing place will emerge as metamodernist philosophy fuses with orchestral and found sound composition creating dynamic, symphonic expressions of 21<sup>st</sup> C existence, richly grounded in the *Genius loci*. The layering up of found sound worlds, melodies and harmonies, from ancient and new sources rooted in and stemming from place has exciting potential for the embodied expression of the Spirit of Place.

## MULTI-DIMENSIONAL BRICOLAGE

Today, the greatest curling edge of the breaking Zeitgeist wave is the digital revolution. The availability and ubiquity of video/sound recording devices combined with the necessity of an online presence, demands artistic practitioners to provide visual experiences for followers to consume through screens. 'Multi-platform' artistic work encompasses as many disciplines as is necessary to communicate ideas, in a means to an end, multi-sensory approach. Such work is simultaneously experiential, visual, audible, musical, installed, performed, etc... and alone none of these approaches encapsulates the *Genius loci*. A grand audio-visual 'mash up' of multiple-media dimensions might best serve representations of a Spirit of Place, through metamodern rose-tinted yet cracked sunglasses; plundering the treasures of modern day place whilst seeing a deconstructivist romanticism, creating a sort of 'Merzbau bricolage' of existentialism, birthed from adventuring and returning to the land.



Layered photomontage of selected GoPro images from Trigpointkernow, 2014

## GENIUS LOCI IN A BOTTLE

The current idea of the *Genius loci* generally refers to essentially positive or neutral aspects of place, a palatable narrative excluding less pleasing aspects of place. Not that one wishes to celebrate the bad agricultural practice, people exploitation, social deprivation, litter and environmental rape etc... but since unsavoury things have and do exist in places their effect should not be ignored.

Ultimately a sense of place is probably best experienced by being there and not by objects, words or audio-visual experiences trying to recreate the unique *Genius loci*. Perhaps this is why the walking artist Hamish Fulton claims that ‘...an object cannot compete with experience...’ and, that ‘... a walk has a life of its own and does not need to be materialised into an art work...’ (Fulton, 2000). I confer. However, having said this, people do wish to be reminded of place and landscape in a romantic idealised fashion since our lives are often so far removed from it.

We require nostalgic ‘Mementoes of Place’; things, pictures, films, musical expressions, something that neatly bottles up the *Genius loci*, ready to be consumed and drunk at a later date in a processed form, far, far away from its birthplace and being. And it is the noble task of the artist to be well informed and broad-minded in their attitude to creating thoughtful, sentimental deconstructions, works of art that pay due homage to the *Genius loci*, possibly even assuaging divine wrath built up over years of idolatry to foreign gods.

