

Helen McCrorie

If play is neither inside nor outside, where is it?

13.07.19 – 06.10.19

The Gatherers

Emmie McLuskey

Comrie, West Perthshire, is situated along the lines of the Highland Fault Boundary, its banks hugging the River Earn, the small town experiences more earth tremours than anywhere else in Britain. The name Comrie translates from Gaelic to *the place where rivers meet*. The area adjacent to the village plays host to Cultybraggan Camp. The site, originally a World War Two Prisoner of War Camp has subsequently been an army training area, a Royal Observer Corp base, a nuclear monitoring post and regional government headquarters. The camp, now under the ownership of the local Development Trust, houses small businesses, community groups, an orchard and most recently a data storage centre. These two contrasting sites and their activity provide the landscape for Helen McCrorie's new film *If play is neither inside nor outside, where is it?*

Data centres are secure facilities where Internet servers are housed, row after row of identical cabinets provide storage for the world's information, collections of materials relating to governmental policy, personal email exchanges, international accounts, film streaming, pornography and military strategy, all congregate in windowless, temperature controlled units throughout the world. The centre in question at Cultybraggan is currently under construction. Situated in a concrete bunker built during the Cold War, it is almost entirely underground. The space, much like all of the other centres, presents as devoid of political, ethical or moral agenda. Lights, cables, motherboards and metal holding our innermost fears and desires. This mass of

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technical equipment uses enough energy to power a small town, concealed below the surface, its ceiling doubles up as the floor for Comrie's child led playgroup.

The choice to embed the film in the landscape of the artist's hometown and her daily practice as a mother, allows us to approach the images depicted from a position of familiarity, the camera inviting us in. The opening shot depicts a playful call and response between artist and child, we take part in an old, well known game of hide and seek. The artist's decision to depict a form of play that requires no interaction with digital space feels conscious and timely.

If play is neither inside nor outside, where is it? centres the voice of the child as authoritative. We see the camera map the movements of a group of preschool children as they explore, discover and invent ways of playing and interacting in the camp. Running, pointing, hiding, balancing, handling, all make up the vocabulary of their actions.

Simon Nicholson's *Theory of Loose Parts* observes that *'In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.'* The variables presented in Helen's film are not directly about restriction, play is situated in an outdoor environment that has an active plant, animal and architectural life. The children are not presented with variables that lead to 'no', instead they are permitted to find

ways through the ‘nos.’ The reason and logic of what might be seen as dangerous is disturbed. The joy in creating a sound, in bending a stick, in balancing on a rock, do not appear to have direct functions other than to feel good. Rather than deterring children from potentially harmful environments, the site is used as a pedagogical tool, repetitive actions and words hold an urgency in their communication, a need to repeat, changing the pace, timbre and tone to adopt multiple ways of observing. The artist privileges these moments of learning, highlighting the repetitions with her camera whilst also drawing out the haptic dimensions of communication with the film’s soundtrack. Onomatopoeic words and sounds score images of play, mirroring the processes and language of the young cast.

Through the film we see the establishing fundamentals of care, respect and inquiry, the dialogue between the site and the children acting as a conflation of contrasting ideologies, histories and futures, *a place where rivers meet*. Walter Benjamin’s book *One Way Street* states ‘... children are particularly fond of haunting any site where things are being visibly worked on. They are irresistibly drawn by the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring, or carpentry. In waste products they recognise the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them.’ The images captured by Helen bear witness to the production of new worlds created by the children. Matter and detritus leftover by adults and their discarded worlds become the implements for the children to build with. We are presented with a voiceover which offers a type of manifesto for what that world could be. A dialogue between the historic site and the children acts as an interplay across time periods, the horror of the past becoming the learning tools of the future.

Emmie McLuskey is an artist based in Glasgow. She works with other artists to produce collaborative work; this has previously taken the form of publications, events, objects, conversations and exhibitions. In 2018/19 projects included *To: my future body*, with Janice Parker, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; *The Perfect, Perfect Look* with Jude Browning and Amelia Barratt, Glasgow International Festival, Glasgow; PAC Festival, Marseille, with Sarah Fastré; and the Summer Residency Programme, Hospitalfield Arts, Arbroath. This summer Emmie will be in residence at Dogo Residenz fur Neue Kunst, Lichtensteig. Emmie was Associate Producer at Collective and has been commissioned to develop texts as part of Satellites Programme 2018.

Satellites Programme is Collective’s development programme for emergent artists and producers based in Scotland. Satellites aims to support practitioners at a pivotal point in their careers through a critical programme of retreats, workshops, studio visits and group discussions, public exhibitions, events and publishing. Artists are selected from an open submission by a new panel each year. The 2018-19 participants are Helen McCrorie, Emmie McLuskey, Kimberley O’Neill and Katie Shannon.