

**9th Annual British Association of Film, Televisions and Screen Studies (BAFTSS)
Conference: Time and the Body in Film, Television and Screen Studies
7 to 9 April 2021**

Hosted by University of Southampton Centre for International Film Research (CIFR), UK

Dr Kayla Parker

University of Plymouth, UK

Flow and Cadence: Landscape Film-making in the Laira Estuary

My presentation is about an ongoing practice research film project, which is intimately concerned with materiality and affects of temporality and place. It includes two 35mm direct animation films, *Flow*, made last year, and *Cadence*, a work-in-progress. These short films are part of an ongoing exploration of the upper River Plym estuary, known as the Laira, on the southwest coast of Britain, in collaboration with the film-maker and sound artist, Stuart Moore.

The Laira estuary is a ria, a drowned river valley. It's an area that has been inhabited by humans for at least 14,000 years, possibly longer. Since the time of these early inhabitants, the sea level has risen as the planet warmed and the glaciers and polar ice sheets melted. The whole of the Laira is now a flood warning zone when high tides coincide with a rush of water from the River Plym after heavy rain.

It is a landscape hollowed out by extensive quarrying during the 19th century, to provide infill for the new land created through embankments of the estuary's many creeks, channels, bays and inlets, and for Plymouth Breakwater. In the 1970s, a further stretch of reclaimed land was established to relocate a boat yard whose water frontage had been displaced by a road improvement scheme. More recently, a path for cycling and walking was created.

Over the centuries, discharges from the mining works on nearby Dartmoor to the north have silted up the estuarine channel so it is now only navigable by small boats at high tide – the mud is nearly 30 metres deep in certain places.

Dual carriageways run along three sides of the Laira. Its wide, ragged waterfront edges have been reclaimed – embanked, filled in and built upon – and the transition zones of water and land – the marshes and swamps – have

been drained and the land trimmed and smoothed for human use, including recreation and bird watching.

The two short films, *Flow*, and *Cadence*, are made using a technique known as direct animation.

For *Flow*, I collected common wildflowers and small plants from the verges along a path on a narrow strip of reclaimed land as I walked during late summer and autumn, and when I was back in the studio, I smoothed them onto the surface of a strip clear 35mm leader – this is normally used for spacing during film editing.

The film images are copied frame-by-frame via photographic processes using a DSLR or 4K video camera and can then be presented as a digital version. The original artwork cannot be projected through mechanical means, due to the lateral distortion that occurs once the botanical material has been applied to the film surface.

During the production of direct animation, the animator enjoys a close connection to her 'ingredients', and may be 'immersed' in the material processes of film-making for prolonged periods of time.

Such methods of animation foreground the haptic, as the animator's fingers touch the physical substance from which the illusion of animated movement will derive.

This is in contrast to professional industry practices, in which the artwork is protected from direct contact with the animator's skin, to prevent its contamination with fingerprints, impressions of fingernails, residues of sweat, and smears of dirt - in effect, to remove any indexical trace of human corporeal presence during the making process. Thus, direct animation may be considered to be first and foremost an embodied method of animation-making.

The sound design is an original musical composition by Stuart, improvised to the stream of floral moving images and mixed with audio field recordings made at the location.

For the next film, *Cadence*, shown as a work in progress, I collected common wildflowers and small plants from the verge during walks along the path beside the Laira during the summer.

My practice research methods evolve from *écriture féminine*, a body-centred practice proposed by Luce Irigaray¹ and Hélène Cixous² as a strategy of resistance for rupturing and subverting patriarchal structures.

The films, *Flow* and *Cadence*, may be considered in this context to be my unconscious 'making its presence felt', by taking form in the 'real' world through the practice of animation. The methodology is process-based and predicated on there being no conscious aim either before or during making, excepting a purposeful awareness of composing 'something new', a haptic response perhaps aligned to the Orcadian film-maker Margaret Tait's poetic mode of 'stalking the image'.³

For Elizabeth Grosz, Sigmund Freud's conception of the human unconscious displaces consciousness from the centre of subjectivity, and that it becomes an alternative site "where thinking, wishing and desiring take place" without the conscious mind being aware of its existence or the events that occur within it (1989: 19).

Through repeated corporeal engagements with this landscape, the body becomes a site of transformation. Orienting my body's materiality and its sensorium to the environment, the river becomes a film and the film then embodies my experience of this river.

Kayla Parker's 10-minute video essay presentation, '*Flow and Cadence: Landscape Film-making in the Laira Estuary*', recorded for the BAFTSS 2021 conference, is available on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zavv6obtgoA>

Essay introduction and video essay copyright © Kayla Parker 2021, all rights reserved.

¹ *Speculum of the Other Women*, 1974.

² *Laugh of the Medusa*, 1975.

³ The Orcadian film-poet often quoted the poet Lorca's notion of "stalking the image" (Tait in Smith, 2004: 26) to explain her own position. Her work explored the lyrical potency of the everyday, and sought to reveal the transcendence of the 'ordinary' she intuited through her deep connection to the things, places and people she loved. Smith, A. (2004) 'The Margaret Tait Years' in *Subjects and sequences: a Margaret Tait reader*, edited by Peter Todd and Benjamin Cook, pp. 7–27. London: LUX.