

# ROCKSECT – PROFILING SITE PROCESSES THROUGH TRANSLATION OF DEEP FIELDWORK IN THE FLUID MARGINS OF LAND/WATER

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Rocksect expands Diedrich and Lee's collaborative research that aims to develop a *method for capturing site qualities through deep fieldwork-based empirical enquiry and interpretation* that we regard as a critical component of the conceptual design act. These journeys are termed the 'travelling transect', a concept that conveys both a scientific regard – the transect – and a more ephemeral condition of movement across time and place – the travel. Its theoretical foundation relies on a reinterpretation of Alexander von Humboldt's trans-areal and mobile empirical science. Over the past years we have conducted several travelling transects in Europe and Australia that have enabled formulation of research questions that both sharpen our methodological framework and reveal gaps to be further explored, both geographically and conceptually.

The proposal for Nordes 2015 is an expansion of the Canarysect cartographic diary first presented at Nordes 2013. The Canarysect work operates across a series of sites at scale through a curated overview of a network of places and site materials drawn, photographed, recorded and collected. The predominant concern is to reveal site atmospheres through re-presentation of the layers of information that were encountered through informed serendipity on the journey. The Rocksect project continues the transect method but now seeks to reveal site at the immediate scale where sampling through photography and video is the predominant imagery employed to reveal site processes across nature and human intervention. The idea of revealing materiality in the age of virtuality draws upon Giuliana Bruno's writing on *Surface*;

*aesthetics, materiality and media* as a companion to Humboldt's empiricism. N. Jardine et al. relate that Humboldt's exploration of the unknown resulted in the production of a *tableau physique* of his American journey, which for our situation can be translated as a means to profile all the sequences of site events encountered in a place.

In 2014 we performed a transect travel in Australia to study the human water landscapes of two distinct but interrelated site situations. Firstly the Pacific coast around Sydney and Newcastle, characterised by the overwhelming presence, even violence, of water and secondly, the arid outback in the Flinders Ranges, featuring an extreme scarcity, therefore preciousness, of water. The ever-present conditions of rock and stone topography and topology shape the presence of the land/water interface. These conditions equally also frame the human interactions, and therefore influence, on the designed landscape through negotiating landform and land processes over times of both rapid and slow change.

Challenging the anthropocentrism in the design of sustainable futures for these landscapes means challenging their conventional development projects geared on exploitation of ecologies, such as standard waterfront complexes at the coast and resource mining and water extraction in the outback. To allow for a design practice that is genuinely sensitive to the ecological complexity of these human water landscapes we promote the appreciation of site qualities, which need to be found, captured, and communicated – an artistic/curation process we propose to unfold in

this exhibition for Nordes 2015. We aim to bring the essence of the places we travelled into presence in order to either frame design OR push it back from physical intervention. Through mixed media and a constructed three-dimensional space we propose to translate the depth of landscape through abstract representation (constructed imagery) and material presence (collection), in a travelling transect's *tableau physique*.

The anthropocentric approach is easily identified in coastal rock pools the world over. Our first collaboration on the Canary Islands pools is continued on the east coast of Australia as they are now disappearing examples of human intervention at the critical edge between nature and culture; they are deemed too fragile and expensive to retain. At these intersections it is clear that human intervention challenges the natural – for example where metal stakes driven into the sandstone in the 19<sup>th</sup> century mark the bathers' territory and hold back the dangers of the nature of the sea swell. Yet there is an alchemy of reaction through weathering, staining and eroding that means that the pools are being continually remade - both through natural processes and as much affected by human interaction. Our attention regarding the arid outback pools draws parallels of use and concern for water exploitation but with more subtle interaction over much longer time scales, forms and processes.

Our photographic recording in both still and video form engages with surface and the alchemic change that occurs through the interaction of the water/land dynamics of the coastal pools. This is also the case in the inland rock pools. The proposal for Nordes 2015 takes a transareal perspective on surface materiality in order to amass a compendium of superimposed still and moving imagery for wall and floor. Rocksect focuses on stone/water materiality at our feet to reveal the very fragility that causes the ultimate erosion and drowning of the material edge. Traces and narratives of human intervention and the real and imaginary stories of the pickets and chains, steps, convicts and indigenous occupation simultaneously lie beneath and inscribe over the surface. Through constructing a photographic compendium we fashion an ecology of representation that is both spatial and textual in the form of an ordered archive or tableau.

The critical aspect of the exhibition format lies in recording of change both real and implied. Rocksect expands upon the mapping of collection, topography and scenery - as recovered in Canarysect -towards a shared diary of mapping tangible and intangible processes. For designers rock is regarded as resource to be quarried and reworked but in situ rock is site rock and requires negotiation and curation. The rock pools demonstrate both situations. This is the complexity of working much more subtly with materiality. Underpinning the research is the sense that natural water in the landscape is a magnet - both at the coast and inland - water is sublime in its various guises offering succour and danger according to changing sequences.

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