Title: Augury, noctilucence and de-severance: uncanniness in northerly landscapes

Uncanniness is explored at Snæfellsjökull and Ólafsfjörður in north-west Iceland. I aim to identify the uncanny as a modality by which contemporary painting positions creative output within the category of eco-criticism. Work draws on collaborative activity during two month-long artists’ residencies in this region, when we camped, hiked and lived in terrain that confounded ‘normal’ perceptions.

Uncanniness is exemplified in the literary sources, The Living Mountain (1977) by Scottish mountaineer and writer Nan Shepherd, and Under the Glacier (1972) by Icelandic Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness. I argue that both works posit an environmental philosophy that calls into question discourses of modernity and the ‘apparatus of justification’ (Monbiot 2016: 1) for catastrophic environmental degradation.

With reference to my own research and writing, I discuss the triggering of the uncanny in what Abram (1997: 81) terms, ‘an expressive, gesturing landscape, in a world that speaks’. Sources include Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Tim Ingold, David Abram, Jane Bennett, George Monbiot, Linda Weintraub.

The question arises, what can and does painting do, beyond representation in the sense of ‘window-to-the-world’? Addressing the historically-charged category of ‘landscape’ in painting, I argue that painting embodies reciprocal feeling and relationship, not process, nor necessarily a representation of place. ‘Feeling and relationship’ are ideological, culturally-informed and political.

In conclusion, uncanniness is linked to triggers and can be embodied in ways both intrinsic to a work of art, and extrinsic, in contemporaneous critical discourses.
Quoted References
