

Christopher Mollon: The Work, The North & Intervention Nathan Walker

*The work is to discover your work
And then with all
your heart To give yourself to it*

- Dhammapada – The sayings of the Buddha,
'Yourself', trans. Thomas Byrom, Boston,
Shambhala, 1993, p. 45.

I don't usually write like this, I usually write like I think, non-linear connections that look like book titles, sound like book titles and should be book titles. I don't usually write linear description. However, 'Home' was a linear performance of actions by emerging artist Christopher Mollon and in this case his meticulous, dedicated and regimented work over 9 hours has encouraged me to work harder in sticking to the task, of writing and of working.

We arrive early, 8:30am, Chris has already begun, he's wearing an orange boiler suit, its not a boiler suit but could be mistaken for one. The suit is a one-piece florescent garment of clothing and just to be clear the suit is not a Guantanamo Bay jumpsuit but an item of clothing relating to the sea and the landscape of the liminal place between land and not-land – This Jumpsuit is more for appearing than disappearing. Chris is wearing the orange one-piece suit, boots and ear warmers than are worn like a hat, it too is a one-piece garment, dark blue and to be clear is definitely not ear-muffs (although technically its doing that job). Chris is walking mostly along a stretch of riverside in York that, because of recent flooding, is thick with wet mud underfoot and therefore free of tourists and residents.

Chris is performing a durational action (9 hours) along a stretch of riverside (York's Ouse) the public footpath is actually rather embarrassingly called 'Judi Dench Walk' but luckily Chris is performing below this path, at the waters edge, so we'll call it riverside. He has situated his belongings, a chair and a series of objects at one end of this stretch of riverside, behind a small unremarkable beige tower, not uncommon in York. The area is a cobbled stone drive that slopes towards the river slightly and allows access to the riverside from Marygate. We will call this area point 'A'. At the other end of his path is Lendal Bridge which he stands in the shadow of and that we will call point 'B'. Chris is walking, repeatedly, between these two points for the duration of the performance. Watching Chris from the bridge allows him to disappear behind the unremarkable beige tower only to re-appear to walk the length of this riverside toward the bridge. On doing this Chris often performs a

small task at the bridge side.

From this angle on Lendal Bridge we can watch Chris like we are reading, our eyes move along a line and back, like his is writing and unwriting each time he walks from A – B and B – A.

In essence his walking is the performance and his action is in walking and is walking. Within this action there are micro-actions, tasks that follow a score, alterations to make the task of walking less monotonous. We can also consider these alterations as rites of passage that somehow the properties and actualities, exactitudes and multitude of variations on this task are literally, physically and magically transformative. The micro-actions happen only ever at point A or B the walk between the two is approximately 5 mins, making each micro-action always separate from anything other than walking. This creates a space, a pace, a time within the performance, similar to other meditative practices, the performance has its own time and witnessing it transforms the viewers space.

Chris is from Scarborough, his work relates to the landscape of his home, to its objects and its vocabulary, this is visible through his use of materials, buckets, sand, stones, soil, water, etc but also marked by the regular (but not often) sound of the Scarborough train pulling into and out of York train station and crossing the Ouse on its way. It is almost as if this is a visual and sonic reminder to Chris of his home, the sound that travels down the river.

There is an intensely moving quality to watching this young artist work. Similar to those people who take it upon themselves to perform a particular public service, self-employed workers, Chris has given himself a job for the day – within an easily definable timeframe (from dawn until dusk). He works on walking and performing small acts, within an autobiographical vocabulary of space and materials, accessible to the viewer somehow simply because he is working. In his actions we see the material conditions of peoples lives, production, distribution and redistribution, the qualities and principles of work. He has a world to win:

He stands at point B holding a pile of rocks from the Sea He stands at point B rhythmically swinging yellow buckets He washes and cleans rocks He carries water in one bucket and sand in another He redistributes the sand between two buckets He creates a small Cairn of his collected stones He walks barefoot He cleans his feet.

The performance ends gently, subtly but with urgency as Chris swings a black bucket in a semi-circle motion, and as it reaches the highest point in front of him he pushes forward allowing gravity to aid the crashing of the rocks against the surface of the bucket. Light is fading. The rocks echo, resonate and re-sound along the river in both directions.

As I remember this careful ending I am moved to think of the small crowd of friends, family and colleagues, members of the public and residents from their houses and flats watching this man make the

sound of work ring across water. This is a performance of the work, the North and of intervention.

Writer Information

Nathan Walker is an artist based in York, he is co-founder of OUI Performance and is currently Lecturer in Performance at York St John University.

Citation

Walker, N. (2011) 'Christopher Mollon: The Work, The North & Intervention'

External Links

<http://www.ouiperformance.org.uk/vn-02>

<http://www.christophermollon.com/>