



Christina Battle *the space between here and there*

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QUESTIONS FOR A HILLSIDE

Blue, black, white and wind are the major components of a northern landscape view when you're outdoors and unsheltered. A sense of flatness plays your perceptions while your legs push through the ultra-thin, freeze-dried air, even while your intellect knows that's a hill, that's a valley, that's a nearby road. Each time you blink your eyelashes to melt the fresh layer of frost, the stark light shocks your eyes, no matter how tightly your irises close.

Christina Battle's "the space between here and there (the yukon river)" starts with the phenomenological experience of standing still on the Yukon River in its coldest season. Not talking or moving, just looking. Using video footage she gathered on the frozen river in the depths of -42-degree cold, she embraces that the geography and climate are new to her. Rejecting an urge to create an "accurate" portrait of a place she barely knows, Battle collages multiple options of how the view could look if it was flattened into cutouts on a single plane. As the variations play, humor and an acceptance of the earth's scale – always well beyond human size – admits both connection and conflict in the human-landscape relationship.

The baseline footage for "the space between here and there (the yukon river)" shows a crisp-edged hillside across from Dawson City, obviously filmed with a tripod. The steadiness mutes video's default capacity to move across or through space, which shifts video's relationship with time. Instead of working to unfold ideas across minutes, Battle uses footage unfolding over time as a location for handling the image as two-dimensional.

With no human, animal or object included for measure, Battle is free to reconfigure physics and scale without distraction. She cuts her hillside view into rectangles and wedges, and combines or subtracts spaces atop copies of their own surfaces. In the early 2000s, the former Edmontonian was working with film and emphasizing the surfaces of the celluloid by exposing, scratching, layering and processing it all by hand. When HD video came along, she switched to video so she could "hone in on the conceptual," she notes.¹ The movements in "the space between" are about the geometry of the image rather than the analog slip between film frames, but the similarity is the artist's decision to leave evidence of hands at work, not machines.

In this installation, the invisible fingers shifting segments of sky/tree/stone/snow seem playful, exploring: "What happens if I put this colour against that one? What does this picture look like flipped, or with doubled horizons?" The whimsical footage loops and lets the viewer choose how long to stay with these sun-drenched shapes.

With these quizzical movements tilting on the gallery wall, there's a sudden wilt to the "authority" of the installation's third component, a loop of two Google Earth images of the same hillside. Like the artist, the lens-holders employed by Google don't quite know what to make of the Yukon view. Their software makes the landmass appear to bend away from shore, and the Yukon River's water curls in a shell-like formation never seen in three-dimensional geography.

Unlike the artist, the Google mapmakers don't allow space for genuine curiosity about the place, or even time to spend with the landscape. Battle's decision to include the digital-born photos thus brings our attention back to her videos with a new understanding: the work is deliberately non-authoritative, and decidedly makes room for personal narrative.

Part of Battle's aesthetic emerges from her observations on how collective emotions become thin and highly processed in the bath of mass-media images. Pictures of places, events, people we "should" care about blink from page to TV to handheld device to laptop at a rate that leaves emotions racing behind. So when Battle presents a landscape scene, she considers the diachronic qualities of a place – how it exists over time and through time – and displaces the insistence on the instant.

Battle adopts this strategy in her ongoing series *Mapping the Prairies Through Disaster* (started in 2012). These short videos work against the false intimacy created between (safe) viewers and (vulnerable, shocked) survivors when newscasts stream continuous footage of natural disasters. For Battle, documentary is better formed instead by combining multiple first-hand accounts and images that avoid sensationalism.

For example, though "dearfield, colorado" (2012) is as visually calm as "the space between," its sunlit rural buildings and lush greenery holds the history of natural disaster. Dearfield was an African-American settlement founded in Colorado in 1910, but as drought expanded in the 1930s, electrically charged dust storms ravaged the area's agriculture.

As the video progresses, Battle layers the countryside scene with quotes from former residents who suffered the effects of the Dust Bowl. The site of "dearfield, colorado" appears neutral now, but experiences from other times remain in the survivors' relationships with the land.

"the space between here and there (the yukon river)" expresses one person's immersion in finger-numbing Klondike beauty as a voice in a conversation, a contribution rather than a declaration. The installation extends Battle's aesthetic of using video to generate loops in time for slow absorption of story and emergence of feeling. The experiment is not about maps, but locations where impressions can pool into a personal experience.

As the experimental filmmaker (and one of Christina Battle's creative inspirations) David Rimmer once put it:

Listen to the images and try to experience them in a more direct way. Resist the temptation to explain them away. As soon as you've explained an image it's forgotten. Dead. That's the end of it. The beauty of an image is that it cannot be explained, it's ambiguous, it can hold many meanings at the same time which continue to reverberate long after the film is over.²

Meg Walker, October, 2014

Meg Walker is a Dawson City writer and visual artist gradually embracing addiction to the Yukon light.

¹ Personal email exchange with Christina Battle, September 2014.

² David Rimmer, "The Repression of the Erotic in Experimental Cinema." Reading David Rimmer, commentary on the films 1967-2014, p. 31 Eds. Mike Holbloom and Brett Kashmere, Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre 2014.



the space between here and there (the yukon river)

Christina Battle 2014

Growing up in on the edge of the prairies I always get a little on edge when surrounded by mountains. I find their scale and their three-dimensionality perplexing. Against the big blue skies of the West they appear to be strangely flat, as if cutouts of paper carefully placed in order to obstruct my view. I long to see past them.

the space between here and there (the yukon river) is an attempt to play with this sense of flatness that I experience in the mountains, to decrease the distance between me (the camera) and them (in this case the foothills along the Yukon River surrounding Dawson City) and to transform them into an active visual space.

Shot in Dawson City, Yukon Territory while an Artist in Residence at the Klondike Institute for Art and Culture (KIAC), March 2013.

the space between here and there (the yukon river) consists of multiple video projections –two large-scale mirrored projections of the same title and $64^{\circ} 03'38 30''N 139^{\circ} 26' 16.97''W$, a short animated loop of an image of the Yukon River sourced from Google earth.

Originally from Edmonton, Alberta, **CHRISTINA BATTLE** is currently based in Denver, Colorado. Her works are often inspired by the role of non-official archives, our notions of evidence and explore themes of history and counter-memory, political mythology and environmental catastrophe. A contributing editor to INCITE Journal of Experimental Media, Christina also co-curates & organizes the media arts exhibition series Nothing To See Here in Denver.