

Justin Barton and Mark Fisher

Outsights (Interview)

ROBIN MACKAY: In *On Vanishing Land*, a piece you have described as an ‘audio essay’, but also as ‘sonic fiction’, you’ve chosen consciously to use sound alone, with no visual accompaniment. The piece focuses on evoking a particular area—the Suffolk coastline—and explores the concept of the ‘eerie’ through involvements with the literature, film, and music that this place has inspired, or which are called up by the conceptual figures of the beach, the eroded coastline, and other features of that particular landscape. What links these three things—the use of sound, the interest in place, and the eerie?

JUSTIN BARTON: There’s a whole process of abstracting out space in order to get to space. It’s not that amazing things aren’t done in very subtle ways in film. It’s just that something is afforded as a possibility by working solely with sound. The thing about sound is that it obviously cuts away the visual, but then you have the opportunity to work with both music and voice, two whole dimensions of sound. And that gets you to the space that is beyond visual space.

If you’re thinking that there’s a whole other way of thinking space, which might be something more along the lines of what Deleuze and Guattari are calling the Body without Organs [BwO]; that is, if you’re thinking that what’s really at stake when talking about an area of Suffolk coastline or London or anywhere, is something beyond the visual, something that is not just a world of the visual but is a world of energies, percepts, dreamings, intent, feeling—if you’re thinking that that’s what space is in depth—then sound has a great power to take you to the BwO. In an early essay, in 1963, Deleuze says it’s the Ariadne’s thread that leads you out of the labyrinth—music, sound—that’s what takes you out. If you think about being, say, in some wilderness at night, you have the spatiality of sound around you. You’re in a forest—there’s the sound of movements, cries, insects, crepitant sounds. You’re focused on the micro-timbre of what you’re hearing because you want to know the intent of what you’re hearing. Because some of it might actually be dangerous—if you were in a wilderness,

for instance. So you have a spatiality around you which is fundamental, utter absolute spatiality, it's a spatiality which you experience deeply as a spatiality of intent: What is the intent of that cry, of that sound—what is behind that eerie sense of something that might be following you, something that might be interested in you, or at least focussed on you?

So obviously sound affords you this opportunity to go to some extraordinary place—this area of Suffolk involved in OVL—and to go straight through, through voice, through music, to try to get to the other space, the space beyond space.

MARK FISHER: I think what Justin said reveals one route out into the eerie, and why the eerie became a preoccupation. I should say that, like most of the things we ended up engaging with in OVL, the eerie wasn't a conscious preexisting preoccupation. I mean, I sort of like the word eerie, and, in so far as I'd thought about it, which wasn't a great deal, I'd always had strong positive associations with the eerie. But I hadn't conceptualized it, and I hadn't realised the extent to which probably some of the most powerful things in film, fiction, music, etc. that had really changed things for me could be classified as eerie. And I think that it is possibly easier to get quickly to the eerie with sound than with image. Because, as Justin said, there is that acousmatic problem about the separation of a sound from a source; and when we started looking into the eerie, one of the first examples in the dictionary is an 'eerie cry', or whatever; and I think that's something that most people can relate to very quickly in the sense of the eerie: being out in an unfamiliar space and hearing a sound and not knowing the intent or the nature of the being, if any, that caused that sound.

Another side to this for me was simply the fact that this whole space of the so-called audio essay just seemed very underexplored. There's a certain lineage, with people like Glenn Gould, *The Idea of North*, and various other things. But nothing quite like *London Under London*—the project that preceded OVL—had ever existed before, even though the capacity for people to make this sort of thing was very widespread, with sampling technology and so on becoming ubiquitous on computers. But there's still this kind of generic slaving, somehow, where, if you've got sampling software, that means you make music. And I guess also in the last ten years or so, music has got increasingly caught up in repetition. So it seemed that there was this whole other space to do with the use of sound

and the relation between sound and music which was wide open, and for which there were very few precursors. So that's part of why we did it, I think.

RM: The combination of the soundscape in the piece with the spoken voice adds another level of complexity, of course. And going back to what Justin was saying about the experience of being in a place and hearing sounds and wondering about their intent, it's very striking that this is neither an ambient soundscape nor a field recording—it doesn't have a direct indexical relation to the place. *OVL* is a lot more complex than that, involving contributions from a number of musicians as well as your own reading of the text and excerpts from interviews with others. So this begs the question of how this format affects what we mean by *place*: If it is to be understood as somehow indexing a place, then the piece seems to invoke a complex proposition about what 'place' is, and to do so through a heterogeneous set of (technical and cultural) memory-devices, rather than simply being an empirical recording of a place.

JB: I think it's important to see a place both in terms of what abuts onto it, which actually is an expression of something utterly beyond it—as with Felixstowe container port, for instance; and also in terms of its dreamings, its virtual-real worlds, its fictions. In this case, the work of M.R. James, for instance. Also, its semi-dreaming sonic works, its musical works, like Eno's *On Land*. So a place then very much becomes an expression of forces beyond it, maybe in some cases aeonic forces, maybe also forces within it that are profoundly enigmatic, like the travellers or Romany people we met on the way—we don't have any idea who they were, really, or to what kind of world they belong. So it's important to see whatever kind of place you're talking about as connected up to a whole real-abstract world, but also to see it in terms of the kinds of dreaming it's produced.

RM: And that's maybe something that images would have obstructed, by locking place down into a depicted physical space. What's apparent about using sound is that it allows the discursive aspect to shift—sometimes subtly, sometimes abruptly—from one register to another, and to achieve this very dense layering of different times, of different works, works which are sometimes directly

connected to the place itself, inspired by the Suffolk coastline, but sometimes also connections that seem serendipitous, as when you talk about *The Swimmer* or *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, correspondences that bring various works and sensations into a dense superposition.

JB: Evidently, with film, you can do things using montage, cutting things in, all sorts of subtle techniques. But I think there are times when it can be particularly valuable to employ a method which gets you to the outside of whatever ordinary-world zone you're talking about, along with the conventions for seeing it—in this case, it's capitalism, at the start. And the danger with images is that they are there with their buildings, with their trees, with their rocks, with their concrete things—it's not so easy to get through to the outside of all of that, which is precisely a mode of intent that is utterly other than capitalism. And the critique-freak tendency is to go off in all sorts of negative comparative directions and just stay locked in the vicinity of capitalism. It was fundamental when we managed to get Elizabeth Walling—Gazelle Twin—as a contributor. Because her eerily beautiful high-line music, her singing, produces this very powerful, dispassionate, disturbingly beautiful effect of a counterpart or beyond of capitalism. So that, at that stage, it's a very real abstract process going on. There's a sense of the absolute outside with her voice, the outside that's obviously fundamental to the whole thing, that's evoked through *Picnic at Hanging Rock* at the end, which is obviously about women escaping. So her voice there carries a very powerful charge that takes you to the outside of capitalism.

MF: I think that leads back to the question of why the focus is on the eerie, rather than the gothic, or whatever. And why in fact we shifted things from James. Because there's that critique tendency; but there's also the gothicization tendency, where affects that belong to the eerie get captured into a certain kind of gothic or post-Christian or actually Christian worldview, as with James. But we felt that the Eno album *On Land* was certainly eerie, and that there were traces—more than traces, strong impressions—of all kinds of nonhuman forces and sentiences in it. Some of those would be threatening to human beings, but many of them weren't.

So what we wanted to get to was this positive sense of the eerie, really—positive, but not reassuring or comforting. It involves a kind of evacuation of ordinary subjectivity, and that's why there's this association with dreaming: there's a certain kind of dream which is not a nightmare, it's not an urgency dream, but it's one where you're at the limits of your ordinary subjectivity, or beyond those limits; and that's the work that *Picnic* did: this sense of an abstract space including certain elements that are repeated in a certain way, an abstract space that is instantiated in particular physical spaces, but that isn't locked to them, meant that we could put *Picnic* next to James in a way that wasn't just an arbitrary juxtaposition—it was about what was at stake in *Picnic* that is blocked by James: escape, a positive sense of escape into the unknown. *Picnic* is extraordinarily powerful because it maintains that sense of the eerie right to the very end. What tends to happen with works that have traces of the eerie, or what can happen, is that the eerie becomes dissipated at a certain point, renaturalized. Whereas what happens with *Picnic*—in both the novel and the film, and I would argue even in the extended version of the novel (there was a chapter in the novel which was not included in the final version and which was cut from the film), is that it maintains this eeriness throughout; that you go over one threshold into the unknown, but it doesn't become a new home; that you're then explorers in this unknown and there are then further thresholds of the unknown which are infinite; in fact, there's an inexhaustibility of the unknown. And I think that's the peculiar power of that text, really, that resonated back into OVL.

JB: And the powerful thing that was added to the film, which is just a last element added to an incredible, spectacular text by Joan Lindsay, as Mark has described it, is just the very beginning, which is in fact Poe: *we're a dream, all that we see and all that we seem is a dream, a dream within a dream*. The vital thing is that you have to think about that in terms of what we're talking about, the unknown, which is that we're a dream within a dream, and it's very dangerous out there; there's one dream beyond the next, and they're all very dangerous—this is not at all safe, this exploration into the eerie.

MF: But the thing is, the dream we're in is not very safe either.

JB: Far from being safe, it's a world of the most hideous predation.

RM: There's something here about the eerie not being correlated in any way with us, is that right? The eerie doesn't care about us, it's not there 'for' us or waiting for us.

JB: The affect of the eerie is precisely the affect of an attention—or possible attention—that might be malevolent, might be positive, might be totally indifferent.

RM: In this feeling out of the non-territory of the eerie, this refining process of what the eerie is that goes on throughout the piece, you were talking about how *Picnic* was 'blocked' by James, so there's a dialectic or a movement in-between these sources. It's not so much a superposition of things that share the same intensities, but more of an evolving dynamic; which makes me think that what you might mean by 'audio essay' might be a type of thinking that can't happen outside of that space. That the thinking is actually going on through this 'peri-auditory' process.

MF: Well, that's certainly what happened because, as I said, none of the major positions that we adopted in this essay existed prior to the essay. Virtually maybe, but not actually. So that just reinforces the point.

One thing I'd like to pick up is this thing about dreaming and forces and feedback and place. Something that Andy Sharp (English Heretic), who worked with us on this, is very keen on developing as a practice is going to places that have already been filmed, or that already have associations with literary or filmic works, going there yourself, and your response adding another layer to it. Rather than this endless distantiation, this meta-distance, it's more that your own dreamings become added to all the existing dreamings. And a part of that is grasping what was at stake in those dreamings anyway.

We conflate for the purposes of narrative some of the things that happened. I think when we did the walk we weren't even particularly aware of *On Land* being on that terrain, even though it's an album that had meant a lot to me. But I think it's just a more intense form of what happens when one engages with

any form of criticism that's worthwhile, really, which is that the piece that you're working with becomes more intense and transformed by your work on it. It's not that one is adding stuff on that's not there—it's that the focus can draw elements of it out that were previously occluded. It's a kind of attentional magic.

JB: To what extent were we being written by that landscape, by those dreamings, to what extent is the process coming into being because we were there...?

RM: That is perhaps where the fiction element comes in: the walk happened, it was the germ of *ovL*, and yet it seems that what happens in the piece is that you retro-fictionalise the walk by imbuing it with all the resources that you discovered afterwards: 'So *that's* what happened when we took that walk...!'

MF: Exactly. It's very important to formulate it as you did: fictionalization isn't falsification, it's actually discovering what was happening. All of those things, whether it be James, *Picnic*, Eno, are making contact with this abstract space that is triggered by the actual space, as it were. The fact that we didn't know about Eno at the time didn't mean that we weren't responding to some of the same intensities, the same terrain, on the abstract as well as physical level, that Eno was dealing with.

RM: How did the collaboration with the other participants happen, how did that unfold, and how aware were they of what was going on, since it all seems to fit together perfectly?

MF: There were people we knew personally, who'd probably got a better sense of where it was going to go, people like Aled Rees, who'd worked on *LUL*, and actually was one of the few people to provide original music for that piece, because most of that was sampled. But most of the other musicians I just contacted, on the basis that I thought that their work was already in that space somewhat, and then I gave them a brief, really quite brief—a paragraph or so—description of what we were trying to do, the sense of the eerie we were trying to move towards; sometimes I met with them, and I showed them a scrapbook-type blog where I put up some photos, so they could get some sort of sense of the space.

So I think in lots of ways it was the same sort of thing we were talking about with the writers—the fact that these artists were already working in that abstract space in the sounds that they were producing meant that it came together fairly easily in terms of a solid consistency, because the consistency was coming partly from the nature of sounds but also from the nature of the abstract space those sounds have come from and allude to.

JB: Take Pete Wiseman's music: because he had, as a musician, exactly the right tendency to produce mesmeric, serene, visionary, almost scholarly work with music. And he's a friend, and there was plenty of time to actually talk about what we were trying to do, what we were trying to evoke. And plenty of time for me to talk about the eerie, so that the positive side of the eerie could be grasped. There was a tendency for most of the music—and it was all perfect, it worked out really well—to go for a sort of jagged edge, which again and again was exactly right, but on its own, if we hadn't had anything else, it might have had a slight tendency to overemphasize the gothic side of the eerie.

In a sense, there is no word for the other side of the eerie, this dispassionate positive side of the eerie is precisely what's been edited out of the world. And Pete's music was fundamental, because it caught this emphasis on the eerie positive side. It had that positive mesmeric quality. Because I think it's really important to get this right, it's fundamental to see that with M.R. James, the problem is that you have something which is an expression of the birth of Gothic horror in the modern world. And the modern world loves gothic, it loves horror, but it absolutely has a shutdown on the opposite dimension of the eerie, because that's the way out. Basically, gothic horror just in the end plays into Christian—or Judaic or Islamic—entrapment metaphysics, with its violence of transcendent maleness. Because in the end it just frightens the hell out of people, points out that horrific things happen if you open yourself up in the direction of the unknown, and people are likely, in the end, having just frolicked around as critique-freaks in the zone of the gothic, to go precisely nowhere, and to have played into the hands of people who say, yes, there's something out there other than the material world, and be afraid, be very afraid—if you genuinely open yourself up to the unknown, you're going to go to hell to be roasted by M.R. James's demons. Which means it's the last great attempt to defend Christianity—M.R. James was a Christian,

he read his stories out at Christmas! In Cambridge, a bastion of traditional Christian values... So that incredible attempt by the religious system to defend itself by scaring people, which in fact goes on all the way through the twentieth century and is still going on as strong as ever, and which is gothic horror, has got to be fended off. Because the opposite direction is what's been edited out. It's really important to see that. Unless you get to the thought of an intent towards absolute deterritorialization—dispassionate movement towards absolute intensification, absolute freedom—you haven't seen what's at stake in all of this. And the gothic keeps you staring in completely the wrong direction, keeps you staring in the direction of the old Christian myth system.

MF: James is pretty clear about that: *A Warning to the Curious!* This is what happens to the curious... But what was also blocked in James was his own libidinal attachment to these things, clearly. This is what is repressed in the gothic. Curiosity is a pool of the unknown.

RM: So he's warning himself?

MF: Yeah, curiosity is bad, if you go to any outside, it must be coded as evil. Following on from what Justin said about Pete, I think it's also true about Elizabeth. There's an eerie dimension to Elizabeth's work, and there's something really eerie about this in retrospect. Even at the time. I was saying to Justin, we really need some other kind of thing here, some kind of female voice—and almost precisely what I had in mind was Elizabeth's work, what it would sound like. Then I was sent the John Foxx and the Maths album that featured Gazelle Twin, Elizabeth, on a couple of tracks, and I thought, this is exactly the sort of thing we need. And luckily, I texted John Foxx's manager saying, who is this Gazelle Twin, this is fantastic; and he said, oh, I manage her, if you want to involve her with any projects, let me know—so I said, I want to involve her in one right now! But the timescale of that—and this is what I mean about its being eerie—it was really late on, it was in November, and the show was starting in January. And she provided three pieces which really did tip things over.

Because it's not just a certain ambivalence about certain other pieces, which could be seen as dark gothic; but once they're the other elements of the sunlit

numinous eerie, then they can be heard in a different way, not as being about gothic terror, but as being about a certain kind of terror that is to do with being awestruck, or losing one's ordinary self. And neither of us can now imagine the piece, what it would have really been like, if Elizabeth hadn't arrived from Aion at exactly the right time!

JB: It's only once you have that sunlit, numinous, dispassionate sort of intensity floating across the top that the other things do their work in a really effective way. There are elements of all the other tracks that go in this direction, but it's only once you have Pete Wiseman, and yes, most specifically, Gazelle Twin, across the top of it all that everything really breaks free.

RM: So it's really a matter of (re)constructing the intensity of that first walk, encountering the right pieces to be able to reconstruct it and to bring it into existence. And as you say in the piece, these moments are moments we don't really 'experience'—we just have these gaps, half-memories.

JB: It was a really amazing walk, and a lot happened. It's important, when you think about the haecceity of a sunlit, solar-trance day, that what you're thinking about is the terrain, but also the planet. And the sun is not anything to do with Suffolk, it's that which is connected up to the whole planet. To get through to the full intensity of the haecceity of a preternaturally hot day in April in Suffolk, to get you to Suffolk, you really need to get to the whole planet, to get to that haecceity of the connection between the sun and the planet on that day—that's what gets you to Suffolk. You get there not just by talking about the sun, but also by bringing in the whole planet—through bringing in Australia, through bringing in *Picnic*, through getting that planetary perspective. Because it's not at all about the provincial, about the little place—Suffolk is not that at all. It's about getting to the place by getting to the whole planet.

RM: Two things that come out of this: The question of intensity, the question of the relation between 'an intensity'—a sensation, an atmosphere of a place that seems to happen all at once and to be inexpressible; and the notion of exploration of the abstract space that's implicated in that intensity. The process of

'unfolding' what is implicated within intensity is told brilliantly by David Lynch in his peculiar book on creativity and transcendental meditation, when he recounts how touching the roof of a car heated by the sun in the parking lot of the studio 'caused' the appearance of 'the Red Room [...] the backwards thing [...] and then some of the dialogue': 'The Idea tells you to build this Red Room. So you think about it. Wait a minute, you say, the walls are red, but they're not hard walls. Then you think some more [...] they're curtains. And they're not opaque, they're translucent. Then you put these curtains there, but the floor [...] it needs something [...]'). The 'Idea' is the experienced intensive state, in pure memory, that must be pursued ('when you veer off, you know it [...] this isn't like the idea said it was'), and reconstructed ('The idea is the whole thing—if you stay true to the idea, it tells you everything you need to know [...] You try some things and you make mistakes, and you rearrange, add other stuff, and then it feels the way the idea felt.')

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What I'm trying to get at is the relation between this kind of pure moment of perception and this process of explication which unpacks the abstract space implicated in it. Because what's important, I think, in OVL, is that you don't just yield to the notion that there's an inexpressible intensity that one can only try—and fail—to evoke. It's a very controlled, patient reconstruction (or retroconstruction).

JB: It's incredibly precise, what's at stake here. But I think it's important to think for a moment both about lucidity and about what stories are, what tales are—in the context of abstraction and intensities. Beyond reason, which is the lower form of intelligence, there's lucidity, which is the higher form of intelligence. And lucidity, most recurrently, and perhaps most effectively, expresses itself in the form of stories, in the form of tales, in the form of deeply, profoundly abstract tales. In fact, if a tale is genuinely the product of lucidity, it is more abstract than the products of reason. Because a tale, a magical tale, an anomalous tale, Lindsay's *Picnic*, Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Fleutiaux's *The Story of the Telescope and the Abyss*, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, Ballard's *The Drowned World*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, it's a world which consists precisely of real abstraction—it's

1. D. Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness and Creativity* (London: Michael Joseph, 2007).

a dense, very carefully bound together world of intensities, or lines of intent, abstract clusters, abstract modes.

So in fact, another myth of the modern world is that reason is the place of abstraction, and that stories are just some strange supplement which just boosts it in some way by having a narrative involved, or the story gets boosted by the abstraction. In fact, the myth is that reason is the place of maximal abstraction. Maximal abstraction is found in stories, genuine anomalous tales, and in all expressions of lucidity. So, when you're constructing a narrative, whether it's a narrative of a walk or a narrative in a more obvious sense, what's happening as it unfolds in you and through you, as it appears beneath your fingers as you're doing it, is a whole series of lineaments of intent: a whole series of real abstract modes, forces, get woven, bound together in a virtual-real construct, a crystal of space-time, something which is an abstract world of passwords, which is a password overall, in terms of breaking open whole new aspects of the world. It's a world of *outsights*—it shows you the outside, and it guides you *to* the outside.

MF: I think that highlights the difference between this and the way we ordinarily think about fictions, as just something people make up. Your example from Lynch is the entailments of the dreaming real. Nietzsche has these great lines about creativity, when there's something coming through you, and you have to follow it—we've all had these experiences, and we've all felt the lack of them at a certain point: you can make the figure of the Golem, but it won't move for you; we've all felt there are other moments when you're rushing after this set of things that just *have to* be that way. And I guess the power of entering into these kinds of fictional vortices is to lucidly find ways of doing this, so that it's not just a kind of romantic happenstance. That there's a practice one can follow that can reliably generate these kinds of intensities, actually.

RM: There's an extraordinary level of lucidity that's reached that goes beyond the creator's mind in the type of situation you were describing with Elizabeth, where you're encountering things that are exactly what you need for what you're constructing—somehow this kind of lucidity breeds or attracts coincidences. So what you're talking about here would be a kind of coincidence-engineering...

MF: Yes, because it's important that that doesn't 'just happen' to you; that there are ways of getting out there, and that it's not just a question of inspiration, although it can sometimes feel like that. I guess there is a question about the role of landscape—or terrain, I think we both prefer that word—in literature in general. Also thinking about it in terms of music, where a lot of the music that's most powerfully affected me is closely associated with terrain. And obviously that relationship is much more abstract than what we're doing, but clearly, terrain is a potentiator in that way, that can be fed back into.

JB: Exactly, because in a way the pragmatics can be described by the process of, in an exploratory way, trying to find a way of building a plane of consistency, finding a way of building something in which lucidity is to go into effect. And here what was vital was that we took the walk. We took the walk as a starting point, which meant that we were being led by terrain, by a trajectory through terrain. By something that was primarily about the terrain: it was deeply impersonal. But that of course involved Eno, M.R. James.... So in a sense there's the seed crystal: a whole process of thinking about the terrain, which obviously has this whole thing about fending off invasions, about fending off the sea. That's the starting point; the terrain; and then also, out of M.R. James in 1900, Eno somewhere in the late 70s or early 80s—from that, you ended up with a story about the history of modernism, which was fundamental in the sense that it's an essay, it's about that area of Suffolk, but it's also about a whole series of things that emerge from thinking about eighty years of modernism. So there was a way that was found of building an impersonal, desubjectifying plane that followed lines of the terrain and lines of the unknown at the level of strange movements within modernism. Its not at all that you can't be assisted by concepts, but we were never working within some superimposition or prefabrication of concepts.

MF: The extent to which it wasn't prefabricated I think even we forget. Because we now reconstruct it: we did the walk, then we did the piece. But we did the walk not because we were planning to do a piece based on the walk. We did the walk really as research for a whole other project which in a way has come out in Justin's fictional work. So there's a real sense in which the piece made itself happen rather than us deciding.

JB: Yes, when I said we took the walk as a starting point, I meant that after the walk had taken place—and this was in fact Mark's idea—we took the walk as a structure to work with in order to create something....

MF: About lucidity and the essay form: I think what the concept of lucidity gives you is also the idea that talking about what's happening, analysing what's happening, doesn't subtract from the intensity of what's occurring. Which goes once again against this romantic idea that one is swept away by these forces of unthought, as it were—to affirm that actually there's a relation between the unthought, the outside, and the capacity to reflect upon it. There's a dis-intensifying mode of reflection, but there's an intensifying mode of reflection. And I think that's what can be provided by this essay form over and above a fiction: because you can have fictional elements, but you can also talk about how those fictional elements are working. And rather than that being some kind of debunking of a magic trick, it is a demystification of the production of lucidity, you could say.

RM: Could you clarify the argument with modernism that seems to run through *OV*L?

JB: It's not an argument with modernism, it's more standing up for a free unfettered modernism that's been there all along and which is still in effect. The point that was made earlier on about the difference between Joan Lindsay (but this would also apply to Virginia Woolf) and M.R. James is that Lindsay gets you through to the free, unfettered modernism which is still fundamentally what's at stake, what everybody's trying to escape to. It's important to see that there was always a danger of things collapsing down into something which was unbelievably clever, but which, in the end, did not take you through in fundamental ways to the outside, to the eerie, to the unknown—there is nothing at all eerie about James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It is that difference that's vital. It's sensing how modernism was brought up by a stepfather called Freud rather than by its real father, who was called Nietzsche, or perhaps Lewis Carroll. It's a question of seeing, in fact, that a few people broke through to sustained lucidity, and it's a tumultuous thing to do this and then to climb up to the ramparts of modernism

and say the things that can be said if this has happened. People who do that are liable sometimes to find things very difficult. Nietzsche did it, Virginia Woolf did it. Or rather, to reach lucidity is a very extraordinary thing, and to reach lucidity is particularly difficult if it's not really backed up by lucidity explicitly in the form of philosophy.

Deleuze, I think, actually does reach precisely that, but he's so backed up with philosophy that he is not one of the 'tightrope walkers of the spirit'. So basically it's this that's at stake, it's getting out from behind the shadow of Freud and James Joyce to reach Joan Lindsay and Virginia Woolf and Nietzsche.

RM: Isn't it also connected, Mark, with what you've talked about as a 'pulp modernism'? Which is very far away from the austerity of what we think about as being involved in project of literary modernism?

MF: Yeah, I think so, because pulp or popular modernism is an alternative to postmodernism. A lot of the democratization of modernism is what's been classified as postmodernism—but I think that, in so far as that's positive, it's better thought of as a pulp or popular modernism which in a way retrospectively vindicates modernism: the fact that Virginia Woolf is available in Penguin, widely disseminated, changes it from being something that's just for the bourgeoisie. And yeah, and of course, lots of elements of what we're working with were already popular modernist—a lot of the things we worked with in LUL—*Quatermass and the Pit*, the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, *Sapphire and Steel*. And also, something we haven't talked about yet, which would be a whole other hour's conversation, which is probably the intense peak of intense cryptic modernism, Alan Garner.

JB: Absolutely, Alan Garner, but also *Sapphire and Steel*, which was the very first thing at the start of LUL. There couldn't be a better example of unfettered modernism. So yes, it's desperately important to think of people like Joan Lindsay, who's probably not thought about in the same space as people like Virginia Woolf, and to think of *Sapphire and Steel*, and also the extraordinary figures in the world of music—if you're talking about modernism, it's important to see that 1962 was

the explosion of pop modernism, and it's so fundamental to keep in mind people like Kate Bush and Patti Smith, in this discussion.

RM: What are your thoughts on OVL's uneasy relation to the contemporary art establishment which, I guess, would see itself as faithfully following through the logic of modernism? Precisely because of the kind of narrative elements you're bringing in, and because of its intensity and its affect, OVL sits very uncomfortably in the space where it was presented.

MF: Yes, it doesn't fit in at all, and certainly if either of us are described as 'artists', we both feel very uneasy for all sorts of reasons.

JB: There's a certain element of 'pet of the bourgeoisie' in the term 'artist' which is really disturbing!

MF: Particularly now, I think. But there's also the other side—that you tend to think of an artist as someone who can do things I can't do—so I can't be one! But it's more that it's really purely arbitrary and accidental that this ended up in an art assemblage. We had produced it off our own bat, with all kinds of other resources that we were fortunate to have. We produced LUL for Resonance FM, and a natural home for what we're doing in all sorts of ways would be radio, not the art world at all. But it just so happens that a series of contingencies led to it being played in an art institution. And that brought out certain things that wouldn't have come out if it had been a radio piece: the fact of the ritualistic dimension of going to a space, sitting down, and listening to something that demands your attention for forty-five minutes, and won't work unless you're absorbed in it. I think that not only formed a contrast with a kind of affect-lite feel of lots of things in contemporary art, but also the wider world now, where attention is constantly besieged, obstructed, etc. So from our point of view there was a definite benefit in its having been installed in that way. But there's no necessary relationship to the art world, I don't think.

JB: It's strange what's called the art world, where do you draw the line? Because if you think of some particularly good electronic dance music festival which

happens to have a tent which is playing anomalous, weird things through the night, it always seemed to me that, for OVL to be played at 4AM to people out of their heads, but in a very dispassionate focussed sober way, was the utterly perfect way for it to be heard, or just for people to be listening to it in the same circumstances in their front rooms. But of course that's not at all what people have in mind when they talk about the art world: the art world isn't at all people out of their heads at 4AM.

MF: I think there's almost a deliberate removal of affect in many pieces of contemporary art now: what *makes* it art is that you don't feel anything in relation to it. We're encouraged to feel that we're Neanderthals if we still think that art should create feelings and affects, that it should have aesthetic texture, content, etc—that's not sophisticated. Lots of tendencies in the contemporary art world are exactly against those things. But I'm happy to be Neanderthal if that's the case, to be honest.

JB: But I think in a way the art world likes its products, it makes its money out of its products, and it produces an attitude whereby all they actually encounter is this world of products. And the eerie is always about hearing something which is an expression beyond that world. You should get that strange feeling of 'what forces has that emerged out of?' Listening to Raime, one of the contributors, doing their music, at the gallery, one of the things that took place there, I was very struck by their music and I felt like I was hearing it as coming from some place of dereliction, from a strange world of forces, dark but bright, semi-collapsed, semi-chaotic, a place arriving because of some black, energetic way of seeing the cosmos. It's always a question of the world that's giving expression, of the whole world out of which the artwork has emerged. The art world doesn't in itself conduct you toward hearing the eerie cries of forces beyond the product, the forces that have found expression within it.

Finally, it's important to focus on the unknown: you said, Robin, isn't it always a question of reaching the eerie in *any* place, in *any* room, not just in some particularly conducive zone like the strange Suffolk coastline area? And I think that's right—it's always about being aware of the unknown around you. And finally, having got to the *spatium* that reveals itself through sound as a world of

intent, you need, at last, on your own, with the light on, in the ordinary world, to see the visual as *also* a world of strange cries emerging from who knows what, all around you. All of the people around you and all the space around you is a strange world of cries coming from an utterly unknown dark space beyond. So that, in the end, you get to the world of intent, the world of strange cries, in your front room, in the street...and maybe if you have or are encountering enough sheer intensity, in some art studio space! If you're lucky!

RM: This brings us to the submerged theme that runs through the whole piece: that of glimpsing the eerie outside of *capitalism* in the container port at Felixstowe—the idea that there's this screened-off zone where we can see behind the banal glamour of the world, this assembly-line distribution hub which would allow us somehow to peep over the fence of the world we're in. One of the interviews that you include, in excerpts, in *OVL*, is Dan Fox talking about the eerie experience of actually being physically in that world, of being on a container ship.

So, the relation between Felixstowe being a real place where this stuff really happens—as against the idea that Capitalism generates a global, virtual nonspace in which we're all sitting around using wifi in airports which could be anywhere, which is such a widespread idea—against this, *OVL* shows us that in a sense what's 'beyond'—at least, what's beyond this consensual dream of contemporary nomadism—is not something weird, disembodied and immaterial, but the moving around of massive amounts of physical stuff.

JB: The physical ganglions of capitalism the size of several cathedrals...!

MF: We really wanted to present the whole interview with Dan Fox as a separate piece because he goes into this in quite a lot of depth. The interview with Dan is itself a kind of tale, about a six-week voyage he took just because he wanted to, and has not really discussed with anyone else or done any work on the basis of. Certainly, it was exactly talking about that dumb materiality of capitalism, and the contrast between the sheer frenzy of communication for us, and the weird monastic nature of life for people who make that possible. They only get news once or twice a week on those ships! So there's this absolute flip where

what allows this so-called immaterial communication is this supermaterial floating monastery.

JB: The sort of thing that makes this possible—this frenetic world of blocked dumbed-down high-speed activity—is this slowness taking place on the ocean.

MF: And a certain sort of silence as well, which is not just audio silence. We often describe the docks as silent. Actually one of the first times we went to Felixstowe we got off the train in the evening and we went straight down to Landguard Point and could see the docks there. And yes, you're taken to the back end of capitalism, that's the thing. What it often reminds me of when I visit the docks is the end of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the 1978 remake, when you see the kind of slow impersonal work of the pods, just building their propagation systems. And the silence is not a physical silence—it's actually quite noisy. It's a silence to do with a lack of the sight of human beings. We found out subsequently that you're not allowed to walk around there because it's too dangerous. So the impression you get when you look at it is of machinery performing its work without the agency of human beings. And in some sense that tells you what really is going on, you know? What really is going on: that *it had got away with something*. And the thing it had got away with, in a lot of ways, was us.

RM: This leads to the question of what role site or place or terrain can play in some kind of resistance. And it seemed to me that the piece presented a very different perspective on that question than contemporary art, which often presents site as a locus of resistance by trying to reconstruct it as something wholesome, rescuing site from the anonymity of globalization, burrowing into its quirky histories and re-presenting them—the artist parachuted in to champion the vital specificity of a place, who then becomes explicitly or otherwise a prosthesis of the heritage industry... Because of this very different notion of what this place is, as we've discussed, you're not rescuing it and re-presenting a physical site, but championing an abstract-real site that is accessible in different ways.

MF: Whose is the gaze for which that representation is made, that's part of the problem there. It's presumptuous, this annoys me and I often say this at art events, when you hear them bleating on about community, whilst they're all there, myself included, as transnational cosmopolitans. And you've got to affirm that: if we wanted to live in a local community, we'd have done it; we don't! So it's almost like we want the other to live in these local communities for us, while we travel round the world talking about communities. I think there are very dubious political consequences to that position. But another thing is to move beyond resistance, really. There are a lot of problems with resistance, one of which is it just traps you within the optic of the thing you're trying to get away from. This thing about going sideways into the outside, or of seeing capitalism as just one of these forces of capture—obviously a major force of capture that has occurred—but seeing it from the perspective of the outside rather than from the inside that it projects and wants to trap us into. I still think in that sense we're DeleuzoGuattarian fundamentalists, in so far as we believe that the form of late capitalism is the creation of interior neurotic subjectivity, which has never been more widely disseminated than in the age of reality TV, really—that you can't resist it, can't find an outside which is beyond it.

RM: Indeed you don't try to reclaim this area of coastline aesthetically so as to rescue it from the clutches of capitalism; you present it as a figurative and actual battleground, a liminal space, or even as the evidence of a battle that's already taken place and perhaps been lost: the tendency of contemporary culture would be to block out even the memory of that battle, or to 'manage' it away.

MF: There's a very intense location at Landguard Point where you'll see these different times, these traces of different struggles: Landguard Fort, which, like a lot of the military architecture on that coast, was only ever employed virtually, it was never actually used to actually defend the coast from invaders. Then on both sides of the peninsula you see the erosion of the coast by the sea; and then you look over and it's a pure cybergothic juxtaposition, you see the container port. And I think the port is a certain kind of non-place, but not the kind of non-place that Augé talked about: we see that kind of non-place, we experience going into retail parks, etc. But—and Justin's phrase 'unvisited

vastness' captured this—this was a different kind of non-place. Because those container ports have more in common with each other than they do with the immediate space in which they happen to be built.

RM: And they're not built to be experienced—they're not for us.

JB: It's interesting thinking about the fact that ruins are places which do not have a function. They're not places that have been designed for you to be, they've been stripped of their function. Which is something I'd put alongside what's being said about the southward container port part of the walk.

There are several other things that need to come up: one of them would be the question of what might be a component of an assemblage that would be a counterpart of this strange ganglion of the container port: a counterpart within the world of the nomadisms that are really at stake here, nomadisms in intensity, collective nomadisms of all kinds—I don't just mean the travellers, the Romany people we met toward the end. And then there is the question of resistance as movement toward the outside.

Now, the last, most deadly trap of the inside is to get you to resist *against* it. If you resist it in this way you've fallen for its last, most effective trap. So the fundamental thing of course is just to leave in the direction of the outside. And in the course of this conversation it's also important not to lock too tightly onto the container port. I think that in terms of terrain, in terms of landscape, it's important to see that there are some terrains which have a particular power to take you out towards the unknown. The good thing about ruins is that they've been stripped away from all of the normal functional things that you connect them with, and they become atmospheric. A child encountering ruins just immediately dreams up a whole world of stories, runs off into the zone and dreams up stories. They have that power. The vital thing in the end, of course, is that, instead of starting from the area around Felixstowe and Woodbridge and invoking the cosy community singularity of the place, what's really at stake is the idea that, although it's true that again and again you find places which are beyond the periphery, which are far more intrinsically intense than the centre—that is intrinsically true, the centre is the place where there's far too much gravity—although this is true, and you'll find real nomadism elements there, none of that is really the key issue.

What's really at stake is that it's a zone which has its own particular power, which is a power to take you out of ordinary reality towards the forces of the planet; so it has a power of deterritorialization which is fundamentally about reaching the global, but in the sense of the BWO. So you find a place that has that greater power of displacement, away from the plane of constricting organization with its nerve ganglions of Capitalism, towards the plane of consistency, the BWO.

And I think a last thing would be: What would you put alongside Felixstowe container port? What would be a component of the nomadic world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? Just to invoke one element which I think is quite valuable, instead of talking about the container ships and the container ports of capitalism, I think what might be quite valuable, especially as we're so much in the space of the sonic, would be to take the music reproduction device, from the record player of the time of Virginia Woolf to the jukebox that Eno heard playing rock all the time in Woodbridge, because Woodbridge was surrounded by airfields with American airmen, and there were cafés where he was blown away by rock coming from America; all the way through to the radios and ghetto-blasters and iPods on which people have listened to things and got out of their heads at four o'clock in the morning. It's valuable to think for a moment about the radio, but to strip the radio away from the sober world of the radio that plays documentaries or audio essays and to think it precisely as a component of deterritorialization. The skill of the nomads is to be imperceptible. But another skill of the nomads is to use sound in a desubjectified way: who knows what songs get sung in the nomad communities, just in that sense that a skill of the nomads is definitely sound, from Django Reinhardt to the nomad overtone singing of Mongolia. Evidently a lot of what is carried by sound-production technology is very blocked—locked down and subjectifying—but there are also components for escape, worlds of outskirts and dreamings, and worlds of sonic forces that conduct toward trance, toward the beyond of the self. And I think therefore that it's important to hold the radio-and-music-player in mind as a deterritorialized, plane-of-consistency counterpart to the container ship.

MF: That's historically true, that the development of the radio is actually very tied up with ships. Exactly the development of record players, the whole music industry is very much tied up with shipping, shipping forced the development of wireless.