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Reading and remembering place through digital photography: exploration of an ancient site

Diane Goodman
University of Wollongong

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**Reading and Remembering Place through Digital
Photography: Exploration of an Ancient Site**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Master of Arts Research

from

University of Wollongong

by

Diane Goodman

School of Art & Design

Faculty of

Creative Arts

2010

VOLUME 1

Certification

I, Diane Goodman, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts, Research, in the School of Art & Design, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Diane Goodman

May 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A very special thank you to Professor Diana Wood Conroy for her continuous supervision and support throughout this project. It would have been impossible to complete the project without her encouragement, compassion, humour and warmth, and above all, her belief in my ability to overcome the various personal obstacles I confronted along the way. I would also like to wholeheartedly thank Dr Brogan Bunt and Jacky Redgate for their valuable guidance and special insights into the various aspects of my research.

I have been most fortunate to have many guides provide and point me towards the knowledge and information I needed to research the Paphos project.

Thank you to the staff at the Bundanon Trust who allowed me to gather the research needed to lay the foundations for this project, from 2005 to 2007.

Thank you to the University of Wollongong for the opportunity to travel to Cyprus in 2006, through funding provided by a Vice-Chancellor's Challenge Grant and the Sonic Arts Research Network. Thank you also to the 2006 *UOW Sonic Architectures Project: Mapping the Ancient Theatre Through Sound and Image* team: Diana Wood Conroy, Brogan Bunt, Ian McGrath and Stephen Ingham for sharing their expertise and skills. The UOW Creative Arts graduates Cameron Candy videotape of my mapping of

Paphos Theatre provides a valuable overview of the process and has been included in the Appendix of this project.

Thank you to Emeritus Professor J. R. Green, Dr Smadar Gabrieli and Dr Craig Barker of The Department of Archaeology, University of Sydney for their positive and enthusiastic contribution to my experiences at Paphos and for their guidance and direction that helped inform my understanding of the archaeological process. Thank you also to the archaeologists and University of Sydney archaeology students on site who patiently answered my thousands of questions.

A special thank you to Kerry Platt, the dig site surveyor at Paphos, who used his laser theodolite to track and guide my every step as I mapped Paphos Theatre over two days. I am truly grateful for his efforts and for those of his volunteer assistant, Joseph Stockreiter. Thank you also to Geoff Stennett, the site architect, who generously made available his archaeological plan.

My experiences at Paphos would not have been as deep and rewarding if it wasn't for the inspirational dialogue of historical, cultural and mythological facts and information provided by my Supervisor, Professor Diana Wood Conroy. I thank her for this and for the amazing pilgrimage she organised for a small group of our team. During a memorable day's walk, we followed the ancient pilgrims' route through the streets of old Paphos, across orchards and fields, alongside highways and foodstalls to pay homage at the ancient sanctuary of Aphrodite, set high on the hilltop of the ancient city of Marion, now Kouklia.

I must also thank my two wonderful sons, Alexander and Ruslan Epoff, for their patience and support during the five years they have endured me working on the project. Thank you also to Nick Epoff who encouraged me during the early years of research, and to Kerry Short who has provided me with the love, space and time to see it through to completion. Thank you to my wonderful parents, Joan and Ross Goodman, both of whom passed away during this project and whose unlimited love and faith in me has inspired the closing of this door, so that another may open. And last, but most importantly, thank you to my big sister Julie Edwards who has always encouraged me to follow and achieve my dreams.

ABSTRACT

This research considers digital photography as an innovative tool that invokes a partnership between scientific (outer) and artistic (inner) modes of enquiry to reveal new ways of reading site, remembering place and interpreting presence. Digital photographic processes are both systematic and fluid, facilitate play, improvisation and new ways of perceiving the world. The work explores the capacity to stitch, layer, blend, variegate, transform and recontextualise photographic images and provides new possibilities for artists to explore imagination and memory, through the merging of art and digital photographic technology. My research focuses on the site of an ancient Greco Roman Theatre, an archaeological excavation at Paphos, Cyprus and asks: how do the processes of digital photography transform artistic practice to represent a contemporary understanding of being-in-place? By examining the digital photographs of key artists, Nancy Burson, Phillip George, Idris Khan, and Bernd and Hilla Becher, I demonstrate the innovative practice of digital photography in crossing discipline boundaries.

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INTRODUCTION

“The photography of the future can explore and delineate universes where multiple principles are at work, and where existence is both solid and illusory”. Ritchin¹

Encompassing deep levels of enquiry and research, Reading and Remembering Place recognizes the multiplicity and temporality of the material culture of the ground, to facilitate a visual aesthetic arising from digital photographic processes through the visual stitching, superimposition, juxtaposition and blending of both vertical and horizontal layers of past and contemporary presence. The nature of digital photography is quite different to analogue, through its potential and capacity for spontaneous change and mutability. The stitched mapped image of Paphos Theatre comprises over 2,000 separate photographs. The digital assemblage is not dependent upon a solid substratum for effecting change and manipulating the photographic record, a primary requirement for my project. Change is an inherent characteristic of an archaeological site, and although the archaeological photographer employs intricate photographic systems for documenting the changes as revealed through layers of excavated material culture, other equally significant changes become evident through daily engagement and immersion with the ground and its material culture. Digital photographic processes afford a dynamic reading of the ground and its changes, at micro

¹ Fred Ritchin, *After Photography* (London: Norton & Company, Inc, 2009). 181.

and macro levels, and allow imaginative play with the “record of the visually real”.²

² Mauren Cheryn Turim describes how digitization allows ‘capricious play’ with visual truth, due to its potential to manipulate disparate materials and its lack of a trace of process, meaning specifically, its lack of a photographic plate or negative that “collects traces of images”. She refers to its potential to manipulate photographs as if they were drawings. Maureen Cheryn Turim, “Artisanal Prefigurations of the Digital: Animating Realities, Collage Effects, and Theories of Image Manipulation,” *Wide Angle* 21.1 (1999): 52.