Between Species/Between Spaces

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Published by Punctum Books

Sullivan, Kendra, et al.
Between Species/Between Spaces: Art and Science on the Outer Cape.

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When Thoreau walked from Eastham to Province-town in 1849, he followed a path along a coastline that has long since vanished. Is it fair to say then that the Cape Cod that Thoreau knew no longer exists? As we pored over photographs from the early 1900s in the National Park Service office in Truro, MA one afternoon, we remarked that much we saw was familiar but so much had changed. The area we had come to know as the piney forest of Wellfleet appeared in photos as barren stretches of dune, the result of the deforestation that occurred within the first forty years of European settlement. The forest had been regrown over the intervening century. Similarly, areas of beach had been washed out only to be rebuilt again. Then there were the dramatic scenes of entire villages

― Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod*
being hauled back from the edge of dunes. It is commonplace to refer to the Cape as a place of continual change. Indeed, three feet of the Cape’s sandy coast is swept out to sea each year on average, and in some places, as much as eight feet of the coastline can be lost. Yet these very regular conditions of change are themselves now subject to new, previously unanticipated alterations, as anthropogenic climate change ushered in a new and unprecedented era of sea level rise, strange weather patterns, unexplained bird and marine mammal death, and disease vectors that threatened humans and non-humans, and an entire way of life. Encountering the site as artistic researchers, we were intrigued by the question that haunts many artists struggling to come to terms with climate change: how can we depict or create a reliable study of a place that is undergoing near constant transition?

In November of 2016, we were invited by Peter McMahon to take part in a research residency at the Cape Cod Modern Houses in Wellfleet, on a theme of art and science collaboration. It is not known to most casual tourists to the Cape that in any given year, over three-dozen independent research projects are being run by the National Park Service station inside the National Seashore. These projects bring researchers to stay on the Cape from all over the US and abroad. Some of the projects have long durations, envisioned and carried out over decades, dependent on grants and government funding. This was, in fact, the main subject of our conversation during our first meeting with Peter, over dinner at the Wicked Oyster in Wellfleet. It was Thanksgiving weekend, and little else
was open in that corner of the Outer Cape. The darkness of Wellfleet in the off-season was intensified by an existential sentiment of darkness encroaching on us after the 2016 election, and the dis-ease echoed in our talk that night, and in the deep red glasses of wine we shared in the quiet bar.

Earlier, we’d spent the day tailing a group of students and staff from Harvard’s Department of Visual and Environmental Studies program, as Peter invited us along for a speed tour through CCMHT’s three restored properties and the Kohlberg house, a small a-frame that Peter hoped to take a lease on later that year. Our conversation turned from politics to climate change to art to architecture to conservation and to the future of the National Seashore under a new federal regime whose hostility to science and the arts in equal measure gave us pause. It felt like a good time to grow alliances between the arts and sciences.

We stayed the night at Weidlinger House, and awoke to a startling light reflecting off the pond, along with wild turkeys in the driveway, a tailless raccoon trapped in a garbage bin under the house who needed rescuing, and a quiet morning lulled by the sound of the winter waves pummeling nearby Cahoon Hollow Beach. Wellfleet in the off season had already, almost instantly, become one of our favorite places in the world. We enthusiastically planned a return in January to meet Mark Adams, the NPS cartographer and sedimentary geologist who is also a painter and a poet, and who would become our spirit guide to navigating an art and science collaboration with the NPS. Mark handed us a thumb drive which
included a PDF of the book he illustrated and co-authored with Graham Giese and Jeffress Williams for the US Geological Survey: *Coastal Landforms and Processes at the Cape Cod National Seashore, Massachusetts*. This, along with Peter’s *Cape Cod Modern: Midcentury Architecture and Community on the Outer Cape*, were our trusted field guides to the place.

On the drive back to Brooklyn, the idea for our project expanded from a single performance or exhibition into something that would allow us a longer duration in which to work. Peter was incredibly supportive of this idea, as he was of extending the invitation to Jean Barberis, Josh Edwards, Marie Lorenz, Katherine McLeod, Nancy Nowacek, Jeff Williams, Lynn Xu, and Marina Zurkow. Following in the spirit of interdisciplinary collaboration of CCMHT’s Bauhaus expats, each artist would be invited to pair with a researcher at the NPS and to construct a new research project.

At the start of the residency in early May, we shared Weidlinger House, Kugel/Gips, and Hatch, basking in family-style meals at night and sunset cocktails at on the ample porches. We opened the doors of these houses to researchers and scientists we would meet through the NPS including whale spotters and rescu-

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We are writing this during a government shutdown, on the day the EPA has supposedly run out of money, the NEA surely not far behind. Online we see signs posted on the doors of temporarily closed NPS visitors centers around the country. This is the third shutdown in the same number of years. The “nonessential” services provided by scientists or artists are put on hold. Any time sensitive projects will no doubt face setbacks and delays. Art and science. The act of communicating in concentric circles. The reverberations between the known world and the unknown and intuited world.
ers, naturalists, biologists, geologists, and other researchers from the National Seashore. We passed the days hiking and writing and painting and recording sounds and digging in the dirt. We soon met Sophia Fox and her intrepid interns, Bill Burke, the NPS curator and archivist, and Stormy Mayo and Laura Ludwig at the Center for Coastal Studies (CCS). We visited the NPS archives and found documents of the ongoing quest to understand some truth of this place in the form of bound records of studies and theories of change. We met Gwen and her husband, the wave counters who for 15 years had been measuring the angle and attack of waves offshore the Truro NPS station in a refashioning of the historic coastal survey by Henry Marinden, and to study the effect of climate change-related sea level rise on coastal erosion. In the research projects we encountered at the NPS, we witnessed a spirit of exploration and inquiry, a messiness in process, peppered with a serious enjoyment of nature that being in a place as breathtakingly beautiful as the Outer Cape can not help but produce.

This same spirit of inquiry and serious fun that seems at the heart of the NPS research station can be found in the artwork produced by our collaborator-residents over four separate visits from early 2017 through the spring of 2018. During these stays, the artists and scientists shared ideas and dinners, walked the beaches and wooded trails, exchanged tools and methodologies, and learned about each other’s work. The exchange culminated in an exhibition at Kugel/Gips house in Wellfleet, and a public talk at the Salt
Pond Visitor Center in Eastham in May, 2018.

For the residency, Marina Zurkow spent time in dialogue with Stormy Mayo and devised the series of right whale banners that were exhibited on the front of Kugel/Gips house in Wellfleet and now hang in the offices of the CCS. Zurkow’s banners pay tribute to a few of the recently lost whales and memorialize a species in decline. Marie Lorenz shadowed the work of NPS researcher Sophia Fox, who is leading the multi-year study of the restoration of the Herring River that once flowed through Wellfleet Harbor and Truro. The ongoing Herring River Restoration Project is the largest tidal restoration project in New England, and covers over 1,000 acres of degraded estuarine habitat. Jeff Williams composed a series of drawings that trace the way one of the modern houses, Weidlinger House, captures and casts light on the surrounding regenerated forests. They are a sketch of the incremental change we take for granted as the Earth moves around the Sun. Mark Adams’s paintings and diaristic writing explores the role of observation and audience in scientific and artistic creation. His mylar paintings are in conversation with his lifelong research on coastal ecologies and reveal a host of hidden relationships between creatures. Nancy Nowacek discovered a link between the chemical composition of microplastic particles, their behavior in nature, and tongue twisters (“She sells PVC shells…”). Joining advocacy to art production, in an ensuing performance Nowacek invites us to adopt ocean plastics (as “PETs”) by organizing community beach cleanups. Jean Barberis led us on a culinary
journey of regional delicacies and wild-foraged dinners, one of which is reproduced herein. Lynn Xu authored a series of poems and a slideshow on oceanographic themes, drawing on her time staying at the Hatch House. Joshua Edwards took a series of walks that would have followed in Thoreau’s footsteps if the shoreline had not been so radically altered in between the two poets’ peregrinations. Our own work, taking a final form of a video and sound recordings, formed in conversation with Laura Ludwig, Mark Adams and Bill Burke of the NPS, and poet and naturalist Elizabeth Bradfield, and delved into the aesthetics of the presentation of science knowledge, drawing on the NPS archive as source material.

This book presents a record of the residency and the exhibition, but more broadly we hope it reveals the closeness of the artistic and scientific processes, as ways of seeing and ways of exploring this site of great change and great wonder that is the Outer Cape.

— New York, December 2018

The curators acknowledge that the lands that this residency and exhibition are being held on are the original homelands of the Mashpee Wampanoag, Aquinnah Wampanoag, Nipmuc, and Massachusetts tribal nations. They acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory, and honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land on which they have been invited to assemble this group of artists and scientists. They pay respect to the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe in particular, which is based on Cape Cod and has inhabited present-day Massachusetts and Eastern Rhode Island for more than 12,000 years.
Marie Lorenz, Sketches of Weidlinger House, 2017