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KEITH LANGERGRABER received his BFA from the University of Victoria and his MFA from the University of British Columbia. He has exhibited extensively in solo and group shows in Canada, the United States, and Asia since 1995. He has received many grants and awards for his work, including being on the long list for the Sobey Award in 2009. Langergraber's work grows from an interest in social, cultural, and political change found through scrutiny of a selected site. His research allows for an understanding of the shifts that have taken place at a location over time. His exhibitions consist of the accumulation and reconstitution of information through the peeling back of layers of the vernacular landscape. Langergraber is currently teaching at Emily Carr University (BC).

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THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE LAKE

BY ANA BARAJAS

██████████ The science-fiction genre offers us a glimpse into other worlds that, because of the usage of science-based theories to explain their existence, seem entirely possible and true. Perhaps it is our collective disappointment with our immediate reality which encourages the construction of alternative visions that are more flexible and porous. It is in this parallel universe that Keith Langergraber grounds his installation *You Can't Go Home Again*. This multimedia presentation explores the construction of narrative and its effect on the notion of site through the production of a mock-documentary and fan-film, which serves as an anchor for the sculptural elements and detailed drawings that accompany it, weaving together fictional elements with theoretical research on the nature of the universe.

The film opens with a lone character dwarfed by the mountainous landscape around him. As the man walks in the distance an all-knowing voice over tells us that his name is Eton Corrasable – a man who has experienced time shifting as a result of his visit to Robert Smithson's earthwork *Spiral Jetty*. He has just finished reading *The Strange Last Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* by journalists Nicholas Tomalin and Ron Hall and is now obsessed with the story. In the book, Crowhurst enters a competition to sail around the world non-stop, but he fails at the task and covers his shortcomings by falsifying his logbook. In isolation and victim to his own unraveling mind, Crowhurst believes that he has become a cosmic being. Transforming into a cosmic being becomes Eton's goal as well, in order to understand the complexity of the universe. He travels to the Arctic to further investigate the possibility of wormholes that would support time travel and gathers enough evidence to support his search. He travels to the Cayman Islands to retrace Crowhurst's last steps. He finds his boat and, with the aid of fringe technology, connects with the existence of an underwater environment that could, in

his words, "alleviate his temporal flux."

In a film within a film, we see Eton going back to Toronto to recreate the film *Solaris*, based on the book by Stanislaw Lem, but his obsession with time travel and Crowhurst's fate pulls him out of the metanarrative. This is where both works, one science fiction and one a historical account, and scientific discoveries become intertwined. Eton travels to Pavilion Lake in British Columbia, where colonies of microbialites are actively building reef-like formations that reference architecture with features such as terraces, arches, bridges, depressions, domes and pillars. "The reefs appear to be sentient," Eton says, and claims they have been studying him as well. He believes that they are trying to access his memories to manipulate him and that they want to prevent him from becoming a cosmic being.

Anything is possible in the fictional planet *Solaris*. Lem writes the following: "No semantic system is as yet available to illustrate the behaviour of the ocean. The 'tree-mountains,' 'extensors,' 'fungoids,' 'mimoids,' 'symmetriads,' 'asymmetriads,' 'vertebrids' and 'agilus' are artificial, linguistically awkward terms, but they do give some impression of *Solaris* to anyone who has only seen the planet in blurred photographs and incomplete films."¹ Of the mimoids, he explains that the name "indicates their most astonishing characteristics, the imitation of objects, near and far, external to the ocean itself,"² and that "viewed from above, the mimoid resembles a town."³ Langergraber references these mimoid formations in three sculptural works titled *Morphological Architecture* that emerge from the floor. The sculptures are representations of the reefs as seen in the last animated section of the film. On top of each trunk-like base there is an architectural scene constructed from "kit-bashed" railway models depicting different time periods; all, including the supports, coloured a uniformed grey tone. The buildings appear to be slowly eroding, or perhaps they are being born.

The scenes are chaotic, as if a terrible wave has washed over them, and in the turbulence fully-formed ships and train cars have ended on top of these structures. Quartz crystals poke out of the landscape as if fighting for survival among the crowded terrain; they are an echo of the behaviour of the mimoids and microbiliates found in both bodies of water.

Langergraber reimagines these underwater landscapes in two sets of drawings. The first set consists of two larger pencil drawings, sectioned in four quarters and titled *The City of The Future Past 3 and 4*. These again play off Lem's vision of mimoid creation in his novel which mirrors the crumbling architecture depicted in the sculptures. Long Island City's architectural landmarks such as P.S.1 MoMA are depicted in the first drawing as architectural mash-ups of the familiar made unfamiliar, much like the morphological architecture found in the reef sculptures. In the film, the character of Eton returns to Toronto to stage the film *Solaris*, and this city becomes the subject of the second drawing. A few of its most recognizable buildings are butted against each other to create a mashed up skyline, such as the Toronto City Hall with its iconic curvature, Roy Thompson Hall and St. James Cathedral. On the ground is a small body of water and in it there seems to be a crater; another crater appears at the far edge. Could these opening be portals into parallel worlds?

The second set of drawings, titled *String Theory*, consists of seven circular cosmological propositions referencing M-theory, which posits that "our universe may be just one in an endless multiverse, a singular bubble floating in a sea of infinite bubble universes."⁴ Physicist Dr. Michio Kaku states that the heart of an electron is really a string, not a point, and would vibrate if plucked. This vibration would transform it into a neutrino; if plucked again it would turn into a quark, and so on. "The "harmonies" of the strings are the laws of physics."⁵ Langergraber uses this musical metaphor to depict a multiverse in a manner in which perhaps Eton imagined

it to be. He, being a fringe scientist, would have kept a logbook of his time travel experiences; this series points back to the notes that he may have kept in his quest for transcendence.

In the film, the narrator wonders if perhaps Crowhurst did not descend into madness after all, but witnessed a distorted reality when parallel universes collided. At the end of it, we see Eton atop a raft loaded with amateur and pseudo-scientific equipment at Pavilion Lake; he is convinced that making contact with the consciousness of the lake will lead him to the answers he has been looking for. He blasts the surface of the lake with a gamma ray burst, believing this will open up a hole in the space-time continuum through which he can exist as a cosmic being. The voice-over states that Eton Corrasable is missing and presumed drowned. The fact that this is a premise that cannot be proved or disapproved leaves the installation open for interpretation and allows for the scientific background to support the narrative. Langergraber builds a complex installation that allows for multiple readings and points of entry, with several pieces fitting together like a puzzle. The notion of a fixed universe is challenged through Eton's experiences and, as a result, the propositions posed by sci-fi culture become more tangible and plausible.

Notes:

- 1 Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris*. Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox, translators. (London; Faber and Faber, 2003) 116.
- 2 Ibid. 118.
- 3 Ibid. 119.
- 4 Michio Kaku, *Parallel Worlds: A Journey Through Creation, Higher Dimensions, and the Future of the Cosmos*. <http://www.randomhouse.ca/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9781400033720> (accessed 17 January 2012).
- 5 Michio Kaku, *Parallel Worlds: A Journey Through Creation, Higher Dimensions, and the Future of the Cosmos*. (Anchor Canada: Toronto, 2006) 197.