

There is Another World: Bob Matthews and Mark Monaghan

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Images above by Bob Matthews: "Wandering members of the Movement (Caravan)", 2003/4, "Wandering members of the Movement (People's Stage)" 2003 and "Wandering members of the Movement (Come Together)", 2003 _All 107 x 58 cm Archival inkjet print, edition: 5

Why are the works of other humans so hard to understand? We apprehend them trusting to our sensuality like romantics, and at the same time framed by our intellect with all the reading about meaning we do: and then at the same time nailed to the customs and taboos that we call community, and at the same time again with all our tiny superstrings vibrating with a transcendence known only to ourselves: well it's multiplicitous. It's life. No man is an island, we say. We tell each other that we are parts of a huge global family, riven by sibling rivalries and manipulative parenting, perhaps, but a family for all that. But then why are we not islands too? Islands are the visible tips of the planet's crust, a continuous undulating surface on which the ocean swirls and spills, pulled by the moon and bothered by the rotations of the globe. The ocean is not what separates us, to contradict Donne's four hundred year old metaphor; it is what connects us. It could stand for everything it could be the turbulent swell of impressions and meanings and conventions and revelations we have to swim in if we want to make sense of what anybody else does. _Confronted by the strangeness of art, we can try to make the most of this wilderness that separates and connects us. To engage with the deluge. Thoreau framed humanity and nature as the same thing. The bog of our brains and bowels was what he called the wilderness - what we land animals, perfumed and imbued with culture, now see as virtual. You need your native wits to swim in it. You need it all, perception as well as interpretation, history as well as memory. What happens when you close your eyes and think of something? No, not England - when you think of a thing: a snail maybe, or a new pin, or indeed one of these images; Try it. Once thought, the flesh of the image immediately begins to dissolve like the clarity of a dream on waking. After a few seconds a dizzy vacant space is left, and it lingers supported only by the strings of mental effort. But if you give it some movement, free it into the wilderness - and is that what a fantasy is? - The image can be sustained. The snail can move down the wall, leaving its trail and waving its stalked eyes around like an insect. And join you on the island.

Paul Shepheard London, November 2003

Paul Shepheard is an architect teacher and writer living in London. He is currently a Visiting Professor in the School of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin. He lectures worldwide and has published three books with the MIT Press. 'What is Architecture?' an essay on landscapes, buildings and machines, was published in 1994, followed by 'The Cultivated Wilderness', about landscapes, in 1997. His new book, 'Artificial Love', a story of machines and architecture, was published in July 2003.