



BLACK
ROSE
BOOKS

ART SPACE ECOLOGY

Two Views—Twenty Interviews

JOHN K GRANDE

Foreword by Edward Lucie-Smith

Table of Contents

Foreword by Edward Lucie-Smith 4

Introduction by John K. Grande 6

Interviews:

Paul Walde: Requiem for a Glacier 14

Jason deCaires Taylor: Rising Waters 24

Jan-Erik Andersson: Form Follows Fun 31

Milos Sejn: Walking Past Babylon 44

Buster Simpson: It's About Habitat 51

Peter Hutchinson: With Nature in Mind 60

Lise Autogena & Joshua Portway: Environments in Conflict ... 69

Chris Booth: Sculpture in Ecolution 76

The Harrisons: How Big is Here? 88

Pilar Ovalle: Nature In Place 95

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas: Best to Love Bugs 100

David Maisel: Tapping Topography 108

Alan Sonfist: Culture Nature 116

David Mach: DISRUPTOR 129

Haesim Kim: Contemplating Nature 136

NILS-UDO: Towards Nature 144

Gyenis Tibor: Photo Actionism 153

Dennis Oppenheim: Putting the Public back into Public Art . 159

Robert Polidori: Ars Memoria 167

Henrique Oliveira: Being and Form 174

John K. Grande

A leading figure in art and ecology, John K. Grande is author of a range of books that include *Balance: Art and Nature* (Black Rose Books, 1994), *Intertwining: Landscape, Technology, Issues, Artists* (Black Rose Books, 1998), *Jouer avec le feu: Armand Vaillancourt: Sculpteur engagé* (Montreal: Lanctot, 2001), *Art Nature Dialogues* (SUNY Press, New York 2003), *Dialogues in Diversity; Art from Marginal to Mainstream* (Pari, Italy 2007).

Art in Nature (Korean edition) won the Public Book Prize from the Ministry of Culture, South Korea in 2012. Grande has published countless catalogue essays on artists in Ireland, Belgium, India, Hungary, Czech Republic, Canada, UK, Spain, Poland, Japan, Norway and the United States. Recent books include *NILS-UDO; Sur l'Eau* (Actes Sud, France, 2015), *Az érzékelés kapui / Gates of Perception* (T3, Transylvania, 2016), *Nadalian* (Paradise Art Center, Persian Gulf, Iran, 2017), *Bob Verschueren; Ecos de la Memoria* (Valencia, Spain, 2016) and *In) Formation – Alice Teichert Recent Paintings* (Hirmer Verlag, Germany, 2017).

John K. Grande's Earth Art shows, curated six times for the Royal Botanical Gardens, and for Van Dusen Gardens in Vancouver, B.C., the Pori Art Museum, Finland (2011), Meran, Italy (2014), and the Pan Am Games have won awards, including Garden Exhibition of the Year Award from the Canadian Garden Council in 2015. In 2016 John K. Grande co-curated Small Gestures at the Mucsarnok / Kunsthalle, Budapest, Hungary. He was awarded Doctor Honoris Causa, by the University of Pécs, Pécs, Hungary in 2015.

His writings have been published extensively in Artforum, Vice Versa, Art Papers, British Journal of Photography, Public Art Review, Ciel Variable, Lensculture On Paper, Arte.Es, Artichoke, Border Crossings, Public Art Review and Landscape Architecture.

Requiem for a Glacier

Paul Walde

Paul Walde is an artist, composer, and curator. Walde's body of work suggests unexpected inter-connections between landscape, identity, and technology. Recent exhibitions of his work include: Au Loin Une Île at Mains d'Œuvres in Paris, France (2018), Records and Wireframes at Dundee Contemporary Arts as part of the NEoN Festival of Digital Media in Dundee, Scotland (2017), and The View from Up Here at the Anchorage Museum and the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in Tromsø, Norway

(2016 and 2017). In 2013, he completed Requiem for a Glacier, a site-specific sound performance featuring a fifty-five-piece choir and orchestra live on the Farnham Glacier in the Purcell Mountains. Requiem for a Glacier was subsequently developed into a multichannel sound and video installation which has been the basis of solo exhibitions at WKP Kennedy Gallery in North Bay, ON (2017); L'Université Laval Art Gallery in Quebec City, QC; Art Gallery at Evergreen, Coquitlam, BC; Oxygen

Art Centre in Nelson, BC (2014); and The Langham Cultural Centre in Kaslo, BC (2013).

In 2012 he relocated to Victoria, BC, where he is Associate Professor of Visual Arts and Department Chair at the University of Victoria. Walde is a founding member of Audio Lodge, a Canadian sound art collective and EMU Experimental Music Unit a Victoria-based sound ensemble.



Dance, Alaska Variations, Dance 1,
2015–2016, Still from 3 channel 4K
video installation with quadrophonic
sound. Photo courtesy of the artist.



JKG: Can you tell me about *Requiem for a Glacier*?
It seems like an offering back to nature...

PW: Yes, the work was conceived as a premature
Requiem for the Farnham Glacier, which is still
there, but shrinking every day and is under threat
from a major ski resort development project.
The piece was written and performed for the
glacier — there was no audience. Imagining a
memorial service the piece celebrates the *Glacier*,
wishes it eternal (after) life, and discusses some
of the causes of death including the build-up of
CO₂ in the atmosphere and a history of the resort

development project culminating with the BC
Government's approval of the project in 2012.

JKG: Who did the composition?

PW: I did the composition, this was my first piece
for orchestra and vocals, and my largest piece
to date. I started working with music notation
in 2000 for my exhibition *Northern Symphony* at
V. MacDonnell Gallery in 2001, in which I com-
posed a five-movement string quartet based on
beaver-gnawed markings on a tree trunk felled in
front of my studio. With *Requiem*, I was able to

Requiem for a Glacier, 2015–2016
Still from 3 channel 4K video installation
with quadrophonic sound
Photo courtesy of the artist.

ART SPACE ECOLOGY

expand on my ideas of music and classical music as a signifier of “high culture.” This indicates to the audience that a cultural activity is taking place. By performing a site-specific work in the landscape it implies in a general sense that the landscape itself is a part of the culture. Of course Indigenous cultures have been saying this for millennia, but North American society is late to the game on this concept.

JKG: Did it involve a lot of logistics?

PW: I’ve given a one hour talk on this topic alone! I spent a year and a half working on the logistics for this project. I had help from Kiara Lynch, the curator of the Langham Cultural Centre, which was the original partnering organization for the project, and it was Kiara who first invited me to the Kootenays to do a project. The project involved close to 100 people. 55 performers, drivers, sherpas, catering, a mountaineering safety crew, and a film crew. Months of vocal rehearsals and three days of primary rehearsals with the whole group in Nelson. Logistically, we had to arrange to get everyone to this remote location which is a four-hour drive

on land into the Purcell Mountains on a logging road from Invermere. Up until two days before we went to the site, the road in was closed due to mudslides caused by global warming heating up high altitude permafrost that normally remains frozen. I had to make arrangements to feed and house this group, and ensure that nothing was left on the site, including human waste. As you can imagine, this was quite the undertaking. The piece ended up having a strong activist aspect to it and because of this many people from both sides of the Kootenays were interested in being involved. In that respect the community engagement with the work’s concept made it possible. From a mountaineering perspective, I was lucky enough to have Pat Morrow, who is the first person to climb all seven summits of the seven continents on both lists. Pat was the one who first got us into Farnham in 2012 for a site visit and put us in touch with some of the best mountaineering guides in the business. Pat also volunteered with the crew as a videographer.

JKG: For the *Tom Thomson Centennial Swim* you had choreographed swimmers and it was truly

immersed in nature (Canoe Lake), as Tom was an artist who never segregated the nature from so-called human activities...

PW: The synchronized swimmers and musicians are indicators that something cultural is taking place in the landscape, that the landscape is a site for cultural activity. In the piece, the swimming routines referred to log runs, a regular sight on Canoe Lake 100 years ago, as well as clocks and the passage of time — both forwards and backwards, with references to Canada’s 1968 Centennial. Part of the work was to confront the stark irony that Thomson’s favourite subject, the lake, was also what literally consumed him. The idea of combining a distance swimming event was a way to tempt fate and an opportunity for exploring and understanding this landscape and history through performative experience. The water was cold and a dark tea-color, currents in Canoe Lake were unpredictable between the islands; even though I’d spent several days on the lake it was easy to get disoriented — which is exactly what happened during the event. I was carried off course by strong currents and wind and ended up

very close to where Thomson's body was discovered. This was not part of the plan, the plan was to swim the shortest course from the south end of the lake to the Tom Thomson Memorial Cairn at the north end. These descriptions of the water, what it was like under the surface of things are not evident in Thomson's paintings. The swim itself represents the struggle that it takes to survive in the landscape and the formidable force that it is. The piece also attempts to highlight how young Canada and Canada's non-indigenous art history really is. It's amazing that Duchamp's Fountain was exhibited for the first time the same year as Thomson's death. The event was designed around the principle concept of travelling 100 years: starting in 2017 at one end of the lake, arriving at 1917 on the day of Thomson's death at the mid-point, and returning to 2017 by the end of the swim. A communion for Thomson took place at the mid-point, July 8th 1917, with a minute of silence which was recorded at the bottom of the lake.

JKG: Was there a musical component?

PW: There was a musical component: *Passing Through Water* was written to accompany the 3 km swim of the length of Canoe Lake. The piece was written for four brass instruments and mandolin (which is the instrument that Thomson played). The metre and time signatures are adapted from my stroke rate, and the relationship to my kick and strokes, which alternate from a 6/4 in the first half to a 4/4 in the second half. I wanted the score to be something that could have been created at any time in the past 100 years. Erik Satie's timeless work was an inspiration for this undertaking, particularly *Vexations* and the *Gnossiennes* (both c.1893). Distance swimming is a very repetitious, rhythmic, and meditative activity so this score attempts to create a work that is at once dirge-like, hypnotic, yet transformative. One of the limitations of the piece was to compose a work over 45 minutes long that could fit on marching band lyres, miniature portable music stands that clip to instruments, so that musicians could perform from canoes; this was accomplished by writing a modular score in which repeated sections and elements are interleaved sonically.



Tom Thomson Centennial Swim (2017)
documentation of a site specific event.
Photo by Andrew Wright, courtesy of the artist.



Tom Thomson Centennial Swim (2017)
documentation of a site specific event.
Photo by Andrew Wright, courtesy of the artist.

JKG: Was Murray Schafer an inspiration to you for the environmental cultural approach you have?

PW: R. Murray would be more of an antecedent than a direct influence to my work, primarily being that it has been difficult to experience much of this work first hand and recordings are not that easy to come by. That said, I do deeply respect the work he has done and continues to do especially around defining acoustic ecology and his work directly in the landscape such as the *Patria* series. However, I'm far more influenced by the work of John Cage whose thinking, concepts, and music have all been a direct influence.

JKG: How did you evolve into doing projects like *Alaska Variations*?

PW: Music and sound composition have been a part of my artistic practice since the year 2000 when I started work on Northern Symphony, an installation that featured a score for a string quartet based on beaver-gnawed markings left on a tree felled in front of my studio in Northern Ontario, Canada. In this work, classical music composition

was used as a cultural signifier in contrast to information found in nature. This approach to using standard music notation was more recently used in *Requiem for a Glacier*, a live, site-specific sound performance featuring a fifty-five-piece choir and orchestra on the Farnham Glacier in the Purcell Mountains. The *Requiem* was a four-movement oratorio derived from found texts relating to the politics of the site and climate data. Also significant to the development of *Alaska Variations* is the fact that the *Requiem* was adapted into a sound and video gallery work. This work combined performance footage with additional footage of the site and performative vignettes featuring some of the players from the initial performance.

During the past twenty years I've also worked with graphic notation, in which visual information describes the music to be played instead of standard music notation. Most of my work in this area has been in arranging information from nature directly and performing from these arrangements of materials, such as mushroom spores. In addition to this, I've been interested in verbal notation, or instructional scores, in which prose is used to give direction to the performers. This type of score

makes the most sense when the goals of the work are less musical, more conceptual, scientific or indeterminate. Over the years I've amassed a fairly large collection of these scores, which for the most part are unrealized. Indeed many are unrealizable due to their visionary nature.

Since I began my professional practice in 1994, I've used landscape as a device to discuss issues of identity, technology, and the pressures facing the environment. Global warming became a focus of this investigation in 2003 following a research trip to the Yukon during which I became aware of the issue of melting permafrost and the impact this is having on the global climate.

In 2015, at the invitation of Anchorage Museum Director Julie Decker, I visited Alaska for the first time in a preliminary visit to prepare for my Polar Lab residency the following year. During this visit I spent much of the time experimenting outside with available materials and interacting directly with the landscape. On a day trip to Matanuska Glacier with Anchorage artist Michael Conti, I became interested in the sound of our ski poles piercing the snow in an otherwise silent landscape. Walking onto exposed ice under which the water

had receded I noticed that the ski pole, when traversing the ice, could make a sonic description of the thickness and character of the ice and space under it. This was the origin of *Ice Record*, one of nine pieces in *Alaska Variations*.

Upon returning to Victoria BC, where I currently live and work, I added this score to others that I had previously written. It occurred to me then that several of these scores could be realized in Alaska and that realizing them in this environment would produce variations of these pieces that would reflect the specifics of the time and place that they were realized. As a collection they would resonate metaphorically in concert with each another, producing a sort of portrait of this environment.

In addition to the instructional scores, I wanted to revisit the approach I used for Northern Symphony using the translation of found environmental information, as well as graphic notation based on forms in nature. My subject for both approaches presented itself shortly after arriving in Anchorage in February 2016 when I visited the Glen Alps Trailhead and View Point, which is part of the Chugach State Park, but located within the city of Anchorage. I went to Glen Alps to scout locations

for potentially realizing some of the instructional scores, as I was looking for relatively quiet spaces near the city that would accommodate travelling with equipment, crew and musicians. While there I became interested in the distribution of the flora on the side of Little O'Malley peak, which according to subsequent research, is in flux due to climate change. I decided to map the existing vegetation and translate the location and size of the trees and shrubs in to standard notation, each species being represented by a group of instruments. The result was *Glen Alps*: a score written for tenor, soprano, string quartet, and percussion. Four variations of this composition were prepared for the installation and a musical theme that would help tie the disparate elements of the album together. The libretto was based on the Latin names of the flora depicted in the work.

On the initial visit to the Glen Alps, I also discovered a high concentration of moose gnawings on the trees on the trails leading to Little O'Malley. I have been working with evidential markings left by animals in the environment in my work since 1995 but hadn't revisited this branch of investigation for over a decade. Though I'd grown up in

Northern Ontario near the Great Lakes and had spent a good part of my adulthood there, I'd never seen moose gnawing to this extent, as the moose in the area use the trails for easy access to these trees. Previously in my work I'd used printmaking techniques for recording this information- relief printing and rubbings; however, in this situation the marks were too big and too inaccessible to capture in a practical manner. Some initial experiments with photography also proved impractical due to the nature of the markings, as well as the scale, height, and location, which were off-trail in deep snow. In the end I decided upon a method that I hadn't yet used in crafting a graphic score: video. Panning up and down and across the tree trunks, I was able to capture these markings and in post-production I was able to orchestrate the order in which the markings were to be played, as well as the speed and duration. While shooting the score, I imagined the voicing and techniques for realizing the score, and the work of New York cellist Alex Waterman came to mind, inspiring the outcome of the score. Waterman is not only a tremendously accomplished instrumentalist but also a musicologist with extensive knowledge and

experience with graphic notation. Alex graciously agreed to interpret the score entitled *Gnaw IX*, which revisits the titling of previous gnaw-related works from the early '90s, and which in turn were named after a Janine Antoni work of the same title. During my Polar Lab residency I decided to work on realizing a series of scores for the camera that would serve as the basis of a multi-screen sound and video installation. I started with 8 scores all written prior to the residency, five of which were realized: *5 Planes*, *Battery* (retitled *All Terrain*), *Ice Record*, *Experimental Climate Change Research No.1*, and *Dance 1*, as well as an additional variation of the *Ice Record*: *Ice Groove* and the aforementioned *Gnaw 9* and *Glen Alps*.

The score for *Glen Alps* was written while in residency and immediately recorded at Surreal Sound by Anchorage Producer Kurt Reimann, with a quickly recruited ensemble of local musicians including soloist Judy Berry of the Anchorage Opera Company. Video shoots were conducted at the former Love Church (now artist studios in Spenard) and on location at the Glen Alps Trailhead and Lookout. Four variations of the recording were created post-production and videos incorporating live

performance, performances for the camera as well as animations of the score were combined to accompany the variations. *The Glen Alps Variations* include a straight recording which is used to accompany the church shoot: a re-spatialized version which sounds as though it's in a huge cathedral which is used with the location shoot of the vocalists, a backwards version in which the animation of the score plays backwards and a final version which combines footage and audio from all of the scores into a mashup of the entire album.

Alaska Variations was an opportunity for me to realize several ideas that I'd been developing for several years, including a variety of modes of scoring, work with local artists and musicians, and the creation of a work whose focus is determined largely by its adherence to a particular time and place. The intersection of urban Alaska to the vast wilderness that surrounds it allowed for a unique glimpse into human encroachment into northern wild spaces, and the effects of our presence there and on the planet, while suggesting what is at stake in these relationships.

Requiem for a Glacier, 2012–2014
Two channel video
installation with stereosound.
Solo image courtesy of the artist.



