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Winter growing fields:
landscape and estrangement
Andrew Langford
Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed: they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten.’

Augé (1995, p79)

Water-Growing Fields: Landscape and Estrangement by Andrew Langford

As consumers we now have a developed suspicion of buying fresh unassisted greengrocery products all year round in our supermarkets. Almería in southern Spain has established itself as a principle region for growing and exporting vegetable products throughout Europe. When choosing Spanish produce at the point of sale we might carry an erroneous picture of the local farmer needing to fight against the austere backdrop of the Andalusian mountains. The reality is that industrialisation and new growing methods have indeed altered the physical landscape and the cultural and economic composition of the region of Almería. The city of Almería is at the heart of a horticultural revolution of highly managed plastic greenhouses – calculated in 2001 to total twenty five thousand hectares built since 1970 and still expanding. The region, affectionately known as the Costa Plastica, is now clearly visible from the skies as the greenhouses converge and expand further over the rural landscape. The desert of Almería is bordered by Granada, Murcia and the Mediterranean Sea. It is a harsh, dry environment resisting real sustained habitation and, until recently, it had remained relatively impoverished and under some extent neglected. The filmmaker Sergio Leone brought the desert environment to public awareness in the late 1960s and 1970s with films such as A Fistful of Dollars, For a Few Dollars More and The Good, The Bad and The Ugly portraying a frontier land or badland so-called ‘Spaghetti (or Paella) Westerns’. A Fistful of Dollars, For a Few Dollars More and The Good, The Bad and The Ugly portray a frontier land or badland so-called ‘Spaghetti (or Paella) Westerns’.

The province is now fully conscious of the rich profits possible from eco-holidays and mass tourism, past European property speculation and the recent home phenomenon and is, therefore, awake to issues of the environment and ecology. The landscape has every distinctive story told in terms of its geology, climate, light and its physical and biological make up. It has a rich history of occupation by different civilizations – each leaving vestiges of their time with the land – most notably the Moors who governed in the south for around 700 years. As well as evidence of earlier forms of agriculture in the region there are sites of former mineral extraction that have reshaped and left distinctive marks on large tracts of the environment. In opposition to the spread of horticulture, natural parks have been established. The parks attract large numbers of visitors for their representative mammals, marvellous geology, mining, archeology, indigenous sea and land based plants and animals. They appear to come under constant threat along their borders and land and tried to exist in a highly contentious European funding opportunities, new horticultural technologies and entrepreneurship around consumer demand have rapidly transformed much of the semi-desert landscape and the region continues to attract visitors for its dramatic and experiential value – climate, natural landscape, history and heritage. In particular the development of large scale retail, business and industrial premises, is taking place. In the United States there is growing awareness of the development of what has been termed ‘edge city’ and the effect this is having on the rich history of the indigenous dwellers of Andalusia. Near the small village of Albaricoques in the east of the region stood the remains of UC Cortijo del Fraile. Inspired by a stay in the 1980s and scenes associated with the house, Federico García Lorca used it as the setting for his dark drama Blood Wedding. Lorca’s play passionately evokes love, honour and revenge within a context of strong characters and of the struggle of life and death. Their work is often and theatre segment the mythology of Almería in very different ways, yet both draw intense physical, moral and emotional associations with the landscape.

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the geography and economic and social profile of entire regions.” Superficially, the "Almerian countryside and its conurbations are assumed to share a simplified point of boundary and denotation. Among considerable consideration mental or heterogeneous complexity of geophysical interaction between areas of low-level living, commerce, industry and leisure. In the case of Almeria much of what one sees is directly affiliated with the dominant agri-business industries. Almeria’s ‘edgelands’ extend to such a degree that most villages and towns physically connect through the edgeland of greenhouses and associated services. This interfacial space conforms to Shoard’s (2002) model – it is chaotic and raw with little consideration of aesthetics, planning, design or thought about the surrounding landscape. In these spaces the derelict of urban dwelling and factory growing compete with the more natural forces and the creep of nature. The overwhelming expression is one of a seamless commitment to converting land for purely functional cost, the larger here-guarding the local landscape and its resources. The preference of farm landowners is to construct for greatest efficiency of land use and productivity. Concern for human welfare and well-being appears to have been deprioritised. The extreme working conditions give an image of intensity, exhaustion and silting of the land and its resources as well as an unsustainable form of agriculture.”

In the east, fresh countryside is organised for future mass development including the areas near El Cortijo del Fraile and the settings for the Leone films. Although some resources are being lost, the policy of wholesale transformation of the landscape persists. Of course, this policy is not without challenge, but the economic benefits from meeting the demands of supermarkets throughout the year dominate. In the rush for monetary and lifestyle gain, all signs of earlier occupation and culture are bulldozed away creating a sense of the non-place. Augé (1995) describes this phenomenon of ‘non-place’ as distinct from anthropological place. He argues: “... In this new way, becomes place-less – an environment of human displacement...” The work in this publication and associated exhibition is not the product of placelessness or post-landscape is the dissolution of fixed categories and boundaries in the environment and its culture generally. This causes anxiety and an emotional yearning for the irreplaceable and stable that encourages different forms of escapism, such as nostalgia and the romanticism of the pre-Modern.”

As more and more of the land is given over to synthetic agri-business structures, lines and lines of the landscape – which contributes to people’s sense of place and relationship with the nature around – are bulldozed away creating a longing for stable interactions and relationships with the past and a sense of place or home. What is gained from adoption of the greenhouse strategy for farmland in the short term is obvious and measurable to those who stand to profit. What is given up or lost permanently may be for the moment peripheral and the understanding of its full value will not be appreciated or missed for some considerable time.

The work in this publication and associated exhibition is not the product of an intent to positivise the environmental impact of this rural setting or to cast judgment on land strategies. Rather, it recognises the example of Almeria as one of many attempts over history and across the globe to maximise the capability of natural resources and land for profit and living improvement. The project does not seek to invoke change or its impact and its primary place is not to counterpoint the romantic and the utilitarian. The work offers personal images as a way of creating reflection on our relationship to the nature around and its value to our emotional and physical well-being. Dodds-George (2003) argues, “As
last two centuries the acceleration of our detachment from the natural world, brought about by modernity, industrialisation, the ability to channel and exploit natural resources, have contributed to improve human beings’ living conditions but the rhythms forced on us by machines and their destructive potential have also lead at every stage to much anguished debate and many guilty consciences. Below the surface we harbour repressed desires, fears and frustrations that are unfailingly expressed in many ways, not least of all art.” Through the specifics of one place and one set of personal circumstances this work aims to explore the conceptual territories beyond any single site of radical change in land use. It seeks to encourage considerations of the perpetual narrative of landscape and the many subtle and sensible ways that humans interact with it. The collection of images attempts to sit at an inter-textual point between the geographical, the political, the economic, the social and the technological.  

The research responds to the world of nature through the lens, which in certain contexts might be described as an objective tool for image making in areas such as science or forensics, but which is also used subjectively by the artist. It is aligned to the concept that in a relatively short period of time, western societies have manifested what could be described as an unnatural way of looking at and thinking about nature. The work in part explores the potential of the pseudo-topographical image and also through a range of manipulation techniques and image groupings invites consideration of the objectivity-evidence-photograph.
associates. “What does the myth of the photographer’s objectivity add to the world, where and when, how and how much, what interests does it serve.” (Lomas 1994)

In the digital or post-photographic era, photographs are not merely captured but also constructed. The notion of making images, as Lomas (1994) argued, developed around myths of images, and Bachelard’s (1964) argument, rooted in the philosophy of space enclosure; public private; natural synthetic; utopia dystopia. At the point of practice through observation, interest grew in how such critical dialectics played out on the ground and how this convention within argument and analysis might be questioned. Bachelard’s (1964) argument, rooted in the philosophy of phenomenology, and Lomas’s (1994) argument, developed around myths of images, might be questioned. Bachelard’s (1964) argument, rooted in the philosophy of phenomenology, and Lomas’s (1994) argument, developed around myths of images, and Lomax’s (1996) argument, developed around myths of images, might be questioned. Bachelard’s (1964) argument, rooted in the philosophy of

In contrast, in abandoned structures a conflict ensues across biological types in those greenhouses which are fully managed, only that which the grower requires is allowed to enter the space and anything which is detrimental to efficient growing is prohibited. This attempt at shelter, farming, small industry and mineral extraction. It could be seen as a place of35014</doc>
Andrew Langford: Biography

Qualifications
B.A.(Hons) Photography, Film and Television
M.A. Electronic Arts

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Employment
Reader in Fine Art and Design
The University of Northampton
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M.A. Fine Art Course Leader
Co Director, Centre for Practice-led Research in the Arts

Awards and Grants
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2001 Arts and Humanities Research Board grant
University College Northampton research grant
2002 Arts and Humanities Research Board grant
2003 Arts Council England grant
2004 University of Northampton research grant
2005 Arts and Humanities Research Council grant

Recent Exhibitions
1999 "Dilemmas"
Solo show, Focal Point Gallery
2001 Uncertain Terrain
Solo show, Yard Gallery
2002 Liverpool Biennale of Contemporary Art
Independent Stands
After Dark
National group exhibition, ICA Galleries
2004 Museum Gardens
Group show, Nottingham Castle Art Gallery
2005 Common Ground, Landscape and Contemporary Art, Rugby Art Gallery
2006 "Inventure"
Solo show within Format 6, Derby Photography Festival

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