

I Set Out to Track the Sun

November 8 - December 31, 2018

Risa Horowitz



Blomstrandhamna, 79.00°N, 12.23°E
2017-06-18T08:00+2





There is no line separating the earth and sky; there is no immediate distance, no perspective or contour, visibility is limited; and yet there is an extraordinarily fine topology that relies not on points or objects but rather on haecceities, on sets of relations (winds, undulations of snow or sand, the song of the sand or the creaking of the ice, the tactile qualities of both).

—Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*¹

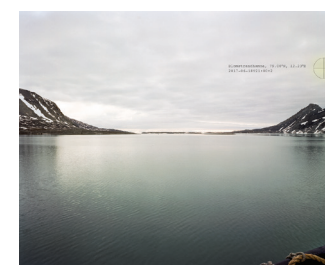
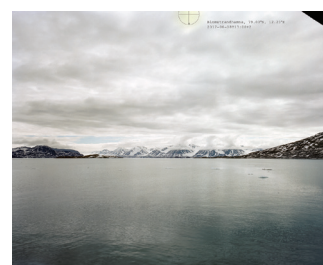
Workers, dwellers and those who visit, enjoy a unique relationship with the landscape and history of Svalbard. With *I Set Out to Track the Sun*, Risa Horowitz uses photographic works to create a unique space for viewers to become temporarily detached from their point of orientation, both politically and physically. In doing so, viewers participate with Horowitz in a journey to question what it means to be in the universe.

Since the *Earthrise* image of Bill Anders came into the public realm in 1968, humans have been afforded a planetary gaze through which existence seems confirmed, but also questions our collective significance within that hollow of vast, seemingly empty space. Horowitz's work plays to this preoccupation.

With a line of thinking somewhere between Gayatri Spivak's planetarity², through which humanity is de-centralized, and Guy Kahane's consideration of humanity's cosmic significance³, Horowitz guides us to a place where cosmic urgency is pulled into view through the consideration of the human role on Earth, framed in this 'living' space that we inhabit, where no single dominant entity exists.

In the notion of planetarity, Horowitz's series *I Set Out to Track the Sun*, brings to the fore almost untouched land alongside sets of coordinates for a day-long sun that can never fully be seen. The tracking coordinates on each image try to connect us to the undistinguishable—land to atmosphere—yet we remain apart. All the while, our interactions with the Sun's radiation are constant, co-existing and ever more visible, in the moving, shifting, and dislocating land that we try to hold together.

I Set Out to Track the Sun and *As if to track the Sun* offer two gnomonic perspectives, where gnomon refers etymologically to an attempt to know or examine, and also to an object or person that casts a shadow to indicate a place in time. There is the first-person gnomon, making a right-angle between land and sky as we look out onto various points in the Svalbard landscape; and there is the human-as-gnomon, watching the same figure move systematically with the orange buoy across the land. In this sun-tracking quest beneath an unexpectedly subdued light, the repetitive process of tracking and positioning



somehow shifts frame between transcendental and corporeal boundaries, between the biosphere and celestial sphere. The found orange buoy in *As if to track the Sun* adds another layer to this triangulation of body, sun and land—a makeshift celestial model, at the same time a remnant of territorialization of the Arctic.

Horowitz's time in the Arctic Circle on land and water, during winter and summer, were periods of both sensory overload and deprivation. The usual ebb and flow of daily life becomes overlaid with ever-present glacial history, fresh impressions in the snow, and desire for place-oriented discourse with the sun. The experience of polar night and twilight was a strong pull for Horowitz, a place to abandon normal earth interactions where darkness and light are intertwined and prolonged, intercepted by some kind of celestial discordance that is, simply, a consequence of being on the planet at an arctic latitude.

In frame after frame of snow, rock, ice, water, paling sky and sun, there is a sense of Horowitz searching for some series of haecceities—a set of defining characteristics—while asking, 'how do I use this analogous palette of natural space to express something personal, yet consider what it means for all humans to be in the universe?' In *Practicing Standing*, the artist returns to Svalbard with this question still shaping the acts of looking, watching, and listening, yet in the disorienting dark to light of the unhurried winter. From the 24-hour sun-tracking marathon, to this weeks-long winter series, the artist seems to remain in a state of perpetual push-pull with the sun, willing it to appear yet seeming disheartened when it does. Repeating these sessions of terrain examination, Horowitz edges towards becoming more of a witness than a bystander.

Existing without a cascade of uncompromising light, in the darkness of our impression upon the Earth, the gnomon orients. We see no shadow, but we know what is there, and we know we are here. Horowitz's works are specifically discontinuous, and it is this repetitive yet open-ended rhythm that guides us back to the frame of cosmic significance, and a time-based contemplation of our importance in the future of all species, all critters, of all living things.

—Rebecca Huxley

¹Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari. Trans. Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

²Kahane, Guy. "Our Cosmic Insignificance." *Nous* (Detroit, Mich.) 48.4 (2014): 745–772.

³Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Imperatives to Re-Imagine the Planetary." *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.



Born in Toronto, **Risa Horowitz** (1970) is a visual and media artist whose practice blurs boundaries between expert-amateur, hobby-work, and leisure-productivity, and pays attention to time and its presentation. In June 2017, Horowitz attended the Arctic Circle Summer Solstice Artist Residency aboard the tall ship *Antigua*, sailing around the western and northern fjords of Svalbard. Returning in winter 2018, she spent seven weeks as artist-in-residence with Galleri Svalbard.

Horowitz is based in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, where she is an associate professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Regina.
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Rebecca Huxley is an artist, researcher, and curator living in London. She is also a co-director of Lumen, an art & science collective that curate talks, exhibitions, and artist residencies on themes of astronomy and light.
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She also humbly thanks the crew of the tall ship *Antigua*, June 2017, Jan Martin, Berg, and Galleri Svalbard.