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"Meet me at the 'Island of Idleness'"; a journey to elsewhere and beyond

- And where is that?

- I can't remember. Look at the map.

- It's not on the map.

- But, I am quite sure that I've been there once…

"There was only one rule in the game: to resist the possibility of bringing him back."

A Journey that Wasn't, Pierre Huyghe (2005)

On a quest for a singular creature, wishing for a unique encounter, artist Pierre Huyghe departed for his expedition to Antarctica a few years ago. The myth of meeting the white penguin, a real albino, followed him in his journey. During a five-day crossing in a storm, through the largest ice desert in the world, he encountered a new island. The result of global warming, the island did not exist before. Its formation was slow, idle; and its appearance sudden and unknown until then. He officially charted the island and named it: *Isla Iciosidad* or *Island of Idleness*. An unknown island that in order "…to make it appear in the public realm one had to pass through specific systems of representation, an official map."[1]

Hence, the topography of the *Island of Idleness* was performed in music form in Central Park ice rink. The coordinates of the island's landscape became notes to be shed in space. Part of the journey and the performance was filmed in the *A Journey that Wasn't.* In this film, a lonely albino penguin makes his performance for the first time. But as the artist notes that the documentation of the journey was never of any interest to him and his only aspiration was the construction of an image that prolongs and verifies the initial narrative into the now, the question arises: Did Pierre Huyghe really encounter the mythical creature?

In parallel to the film, an object is created by the translation of the journey's data by R&Sie(n) architects. An artificial island made of honeycomb aluminium and created through parametric scripting, has emerged at the centre of a gallery space. Small openings in the walls of the gallery allow only visual contact with the installation. The artificial island is isolated. The invisibility of the real island, as a product of memory, is replaced by the fragmented visibility of the artificial island. The inaccessible (due to the severe physical conditions) *Island of Idleness* becomes only visibly accessible through its simulacrum. And in this way, the 'unaccommodated' natural island opens up to its fictional accommodation.

The installation is elastically stretched by liquid counterweight "… in unstable balance…" as François Roche notes. This means that the form of the structure changes every time a new balance is established. Similarly, the real island is being constantly transformed by the melting of the ice. Keeping in mind chaos theory for dynamic systems, one could imagine that the quantity of melted ice of the 'Idleness Island' redefines the counterweight of the artificial island in the gallery. Therefore, the form of the installation's structure changes as the topography of the island is being redefined, even if "in the near future, this island should disappear from the map and leave a question mark on its existence."[2]

In this precarious environment, the albino who, in some cultures, is thought to have magical powers, reappears. In this case, however, the lonely penguin is an animatronic robot. If the albino penguin does reside at the

'Island of Idleness,' then his mechanical brother inhabits the new artificial island. The two islands exist in parallel but without the one being a veracious representation of the other. These two equivalents create zones of ambiguity and space for unique scenarios: a territory to be discovered and reformed, a critical zone.

But one may wonder, "What is the scenario?" Francois Roche answers: "A constantly mutating sequence of possibilities." And, he adds: "The unfolding scenarios it follows to manipulate our reality are becoming true transformation tools and paradoxically strategic levers to grasp the wobbling of our post digital societies, our choked mass media culture."[3] Pierre Huyghe affirms this position: "I am fascinated by this idea of reality being so unbelievable that to tell it the right way, you must tell it as a fiction."[4] And by doing so they (R&Sie) achieve to surmount the level of mere mimesis, which is static, and arrive to 'diegesis', which incorporates the time factor and adequately corresponds to our 'liquid' times.[5] Thus, explorer and storyteller, author, and producer, meet at a 'Terra Incognita', the land of our times.

Representation is a 'heterochronia' but the story remains one about a new island and a lonely penguin. Likely, there is another...or many. It doesn't matter. What matters is the narrative.

- *Terra Incognita/Isla Iciosidad* is a project by artist Pierre Huyghe and R&Sie(n) architects, exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art de la Ville de Paris and Tate Modern during the spring and summer of 2006.

References

[1] Pierre Huyghe, *Space Explorer*, interview with Tom Morton, <u>Frieze</u>, Issue 100.

[2] Francois Roche, *(Science) Fiction & Mass Culture Crisis,* 15/09/2006 < <u>http://www.new-territories.com/roche%20text.htm</u>>.

[3] Francois Roche, *(Science) Fiction & Mass Culture Crisis,* 15/09/2006 < <u>http://www.new-territories.com/roche%20text.htm</u>>.

[4] Nicolas Bourriaud on Pierre Huyghe, *The reversibility of the real*, <u>TATE ETC</u>, Issue 7 / Summer 2006, p.82.

[5] Zygmunt Bauman has replaced the concepts of 'modernity' and 'post modernity' with the terms 'solid' and 'liquid' or 'late' modernity respectively. Late modernity is defined by the privatisation of ambivalence and the increasing feelings of uncertainty. It is a kind of chaotic continuation of modernity. For further details, please see: Z. Bauman, <u>Liquid Modernity</u>. (Malden: Polity Press, 2000).