



The landscape swallows our histories

Amanda Rice & Jo Pester

Up the Hill, to See What Can Be (un)Seen, to Hear What Can Be (un)Heard

This Gate is to Be Kept Locked

When following the road up the hill, a point is reached where further progress is halted. At various spots around the perimeter of the site, signs adorn flora buttressed fence posts, gates are to be kept locked, unauthorised access restricted. This hasn't always been the case. Though Knock Iveagh has been found on private property for some time, it's a relatively recent development that it has been closed off to local foot traffic.

Located near Rathfriland in County Down, Northern Ireland, Knock Iveagh is mired in deep histories dating back to the Neolithic. The site contains a burial cairn, and is thought to have hosted significant ceremonies (1). Over long periods, this place has been a draw to many people, for a myriad of reasons. There's something to it, under its grassy surface, above it in the air, it calls out. These evocations are difficult to quantify, to categorise. Though archaeological finds have been recovered from its ground, these fragments have been largely shelved away, deemed less exemplary than those pulled from elsewhere. Perhaps it's from this line of thought, that the site is lesser somehow, that it was decided a wind turbine be placed on its land. Many local residents and activists disagree with this sentiment, and the wind turbine's location (2). Presently, the public at large find themselves locked out of visiting.

With their film 'The landscape swallows our histories', Amanda Rice and Jo Pester map the barriers at Knock Iveagh, while finding strategies of circumnavigating them conceptually, all while seeking to unearth and engage with the multiple layers of time and experience converging at the site. Shot on Super 8 film, the core images of the site itself depict partially obscured pastoral scenes, cordoned off by signs, fences, gates and hedges. A method called full frame overscan was utilised when digitising the processed film reels for editing. Through this process, the images are captured uncropped, the result of which is a subtle reflexivity. Each image foretells the next one to come, a sliver of it appears at the top of the frame, while also depicting its antecedent image at the bottom. The forward momentum of the film is evenly maintained by the sprocket hole, which despite this role in the cycle of movement, appears to vibrate in place, dancing on the spot as it is replaced by its successor. As a result of this process rendered visible in frame, from any isolated moment of the film's

exposure, the past, present, and future comingle. This view is an opening up, a shedding of the gate that crops image, time and entry points. These images lay the ground work for trespassing the physicality of the gates and fences at Knock Iveagh, engaging with the blocked site sonically, and through recovered artefacts.

Space Echo Time Machine

A trumpet sounds as 'The landscape swallows our histories' begins imageless. It emanates from the only known recording of the 'S' shaped Ard Brin trumpet in use. The serpentine artefact dates back to the Iron-age, its preservation meant only one test could be done. The trumpet hails from a site near to Knock Iveagh, and replicas of its form are depicted later on

(3). This singular recording from the artefact will re-sound throughout the film, in various permutations, re-workings combined with field recordings and other sounds, collapsing specific localities of time and space into a sonic continuum. After the trumpet's sonorous call, a light leak flashes onto the celluloid, just before the landscape is revealed, followed by the visual introduction of the Space Echo Tape Loop machine. As a recording and playback device, its knobs, dials and metal surfaces are host to a snake. In another shot lensed from above, the machine's inner workings are visible, magnetic tape squirms and wiggles through four tape heads, repeating its noises with each one passed, before looping back, like the Ouroboros eating its own tail.

Sounds from this snake shake off, reverberate out of the image, moving past it onto other shots; they weren't generated in-sync after all, nor alone. In all the particles (re) arranged on its magnetised plastic surface during the (re)recording process, the tape's material being recalls past lives of ancient organisms, while becoming host to new sonic information. The chorus of many times and places flows unmoored, and past the images of all barriers blocking access to Knock Iveagh. There's a verticality to the sound, in all its layers, that connects to the depth of the land at the site itself. Both hold multitudes and mysteries.

Peculiar Object Lessons

A stone sits in a field near Knock Iveagh, bearing witness to all manner of changes. Footage of the presumably still stone is partially veiled by golden tall grass swaying in the breeze. The next shot depicts the open top of the Space Echo Tape Loop machine, the undulating magnetic audiotape writhing about, cresting and falling like the sound waves contained within. These two shots sutured together conjures 'Stone Tape Theory,' which proposes inanimate objects can be imprinted upon by events unfolding near them, recording onto their own materiality traces of what happened at that time and place (4). Questions then arise as to how one might playback the tape, potentially understanding these traces as something forensic akin to evidence, or something more enigmatic, indeterminate, spectral. Considered another way, perhaps the recording in the stone provides some kind of answers, but the questions determining its significance remain unknown.

Taken offsite, and rendered unremarkable non-exemplary artefacts, there's a section of the film in which stone fragments of probable tools or unknown objects from Knock Iveagh are examined by hand and camera lens. It took some time for the artists to gain access due to the supposed lack lustre importance of the finds, as such little information about them was available. The original 1954 report on their excavation is incorporated into works that accompany the film, its scanned pages shifted in capture, dragging its words into patterns of illegibility (5). In the film, the editing in this sequence punctuates the artefacts with flickers of insert shots of flora and fauna from Knock Iveagh. As a hand holds up a stone with a hole at its centre from a storage tray, a cut to green foliage flashes briefly. The juxtaposition of these images, among others, is a kind of repatriation of sorts, bringing the stone objects now in stuffy storage areas back in contact with the lush green hill from which they came. Further to this, a kind of activation of these stone fragments occurs when they are back in filmic contact with the nature that once surrounded them, perhaps on some level, their playback has been restarted.

A Shift in the Wind's Direction

The penultimate shot of 'The landscape swallows our histories' shows the wind turbine to which the enclosing of Knock Iveagh can largely be credited. This mammoth propeller

toped mast is a marker for someone's green capital investment. The shot reveals the propeller head, which can be seen behind the hill, and somewhat obscured by branches and greenery in the foreground. The framing of the image is in part a result of restricted access, though it also situates the wind turbine as miniature in scale to Knock Iveagh, a suggestion of the relatively limited life expectancy of the energy harnessing apparatus in comparison to the deep time of the hill. Its blade, made from a type of plastic that will ultimately breakdown, comprised of particles of ancient flora and fauna from somewhere else. It's uncertain how long this current material form of the blade and its dialogue with the hill will continue. Wind's often change direction, figuratively and literally. The last shot, barely visible before the looping of the film, is an image of the magnetic tape unravelling in the Space Echo Tape Loop machine, obscured by grey smoke. The (after)life cycle of materials, their use and re-use, encoding and re-encoding of their traces, continues on through repetition, the seemingly endless processes of embodiment, transference, and erasure, before re-emergence again.

Erik Martinson

Citations:

1. Details related to Knock Iveagh and the production of the film obtained from an interview conducted with artists Amanda Rice and Jo Pester.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. 'Stone Tape Theory' references: 'Ghost and Ghoul', Thomas Charles Lethbridge, 1961; 'The Stone Tape', Nigel Kneale and Peter Sasdy, 1972; 'High Static, Dead Lines', Kristen Gallerneaux, 2018.
5. From an interview conducted with artists Amanda Rice and Jo Pester.

Erik Martinson Erik Martinson (Canada/Latvia) is a curator, film programmer, and writer. He is on the selection committee for Experimenta at BFI London Film Festival (2023, 2024, 2025), was on the awards jury for the European Media Arts Festival, Osnabrück (2022), and the selection jury for the biennial Videonale, Bonn (2015, 2023). Previously, he worked in Toronto at Vtape, artists' video distributor (2005-2014), and was a member of Pleasure Dome curatorial collective (2006-2014).

Amanda Rice is an artist and filmmaker based between London and Belfast. Her films are a combination of observational documentary techniques and staged scenarios with both investigative and nonlinear storytelling which explore material histories related to ecological subject matter. Amanda's films have been presented at EVA International Biennial (Ireland); Flux Factory (New York); Eastlink Gallery (Shanghai); CCA Glasgow; BFI Film Festival (London); Irish Film Institute (Dublin). Awards include, Edward Allington Memorial Prize and the Next Generation Bursary, Arts Council of Ireland. She is an MA graduate of the Slade School of Art.

Jo Pester is a research-led artist filmmaker based in Bristol, often working in a cross-disciplinary capacity with researchers and academics. Since completing an MA at the Slade School of Art, she has presented work in The Unlikely Journal For Creative Arts; Raven Row Gallery (London); Exposed Arts Projects (London); Casa da Dona Laura Gallery (Lisbon); Videosport Returns (Canada); and the BF Artist Film Festival IX (London and Lancaster). Jo was recently awarded the Developing Your Creative Practice grant from the Arts Council of England.

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2025, Super 8 film (4K digitised), 5min 9sec.

Film credits

Direction and Editing: Jo Pester and Amanda Rice

Cinematography: Jo Pester, Amanda Rice, Thomas Bennett

Sound Design: Robin Price

Additional sound design: Amanda Rice and Jo Pester

Music: John Kenny, assisted by Simon O'Dwyer

Camera Assistants: Joey Gorman, Janne Hernes, Robin Price

Super 8 Development and Digital Scanning: On8mil

Camera Provision: Rebecca Algeo

Thanks:

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Askeaton Contemporary Arts

Rod and Sue Stoneman

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