

Rolf Nowotny

Dementia

David Dale Gallery, Glasgow

06 April - 11 May 2019

135 metres south of the gallery, the Camlachie burn comes up for air for the last time. The burn then flows under Brook Street, the street named after the stream, before tracing its subterranean route 1.5 kilometres west, meeting the Molendinar shortly before it falls into the Clyde¹. The Molendinar, as

the birthplace of the city² may have a more documented history, though the Camlachie has its own importance particularly to the area in which the gallery is situated, and its proximity to our own stream make it a relevant initial subject.

Starting its journey 30 kilometres

1 The Camlachie, on its flow towards the Molendinar, passes the bottom of Charlotte Street at Glasgow Green. On 18th November 1795, David Dale – after whom the gallery is named, resided at the bottom of this street. On the morning of the 18th, during the preparations for a large dinner party for distinguished guests, the Camlachie burst its banks and flooded his kitchen, extinguishing the fires and putting a halt to proceedings. The servants, before escaping, thankfully had the wherewithal to rescue the dinner, which was then completed at a kind neighbour's house. Dale's sixteen year old daughter, mounted on the back of a porter, descended into the fully submerged wine cellar to identify the appropriate bins, and apparently the evening was a great success.

The Camlachie overflowed due to its meeting with the Molendinar not being

large enough to accommodate the large flow that day from the Molendinar, which caused a flow back to raise the levels of the Camlachie.

Old Glasgow and Its Environs, Historical and Topographical, by Robert Reid, D. Robertson, 1864, pp. 119–121

2 “On its [the Molendinar] banks was planted the germ from which Glasgow sprang: and we cannot doubt that the saintly Ninian when he came awandering to the Clyde Valley in the fourth century, established his cell by the Molendinar because of the placid beauty he found. There Kentigern, we know, had his cell overlooking the ‘Mellendonor,’ and the stately cathedral of Glasgow was doubtless reared on or near this saintly spot.”

Glasgow Rivers and Their Streams: Their Legends and Their Lore, by T.C.F. Brothie, James Maclehose & Sons, 1914, p. 139

east, the Camlachie passed through the village of Mile-End, where the gallery now stands. The Camlachie, now culverted for 85% of its length “and answers the purposes of the common sewer”³, was not always hidden from view, and “at one time, however, it presented a scene of rare sylvan beauty”⁴. Theodore Brotchie, writing in 1914, goes on to describe

“A century ago The Camlachie Burn, from Carntyne down to the Green, was fringed with ash trees, which afforded a pleasant and a shady retreat to the citizens who resorted there ... the waters were pellucid and abounded in silver eels”.⁵

This scene didn’t last, as is the case in most urban developments. David Watson, the minister for St. Clement’s church on Brook Street, explained his first encounter with the area as “...for anything less romantic than Mile-End as I first saw it in December 1886 could not be imagined. It was grim and forbidding in the extreme.”⁶ Currently, the land around the Camlachie is neither sylvan beauty, nor forbidding in the extreme, instead sitting somewhere between the two. Industrial areas don’t go in much for

nostalgia - Watson’s church⁷ is now used to store football stewards’s high-viz vests - and like large parts of the city, have lived in the present for a long time. Our area in particular, with a permanent population in double figures – down from the 9000 Watson reported in 1903⁸, doesn’t have too many residents who can be custodians of its past, or advocate for its future. Brotchie, writing of the other culverted stream, the Molendinar, wrote “We may bury it from sight, but its memories linger forever amongst us.”⁹ I think Brotchie may have been over-reaching with this statement, even if it was expressed in regret. The evidence and history, still flow under our feet, but largely forgotten, or without the capacity for memory.

It is through this that the waters in the gallery and that just south of us are linked. Both define aspects of dementia. Flows hidden from view isolated and insulated, and memories forgotten. One an imagined falsehood, the other buried and inarticulate. The culvert is an appropriate metaphor for the cognitive function of one who

7 Watson describes St. Clements as “...internally one of the most beautiful in the East End”

Ibid, p. 66

8 *A Mile-End Chronicle: Being a Souvenir of the Semi-Jubilee of St. Clement’s Parish Church Glasgow*, by Rev. David Watson, R. Robertson, 1903, p.9

9 T.C.F. Brotchie, p. 139

3 Ibid, p.142

4 Ibid, p.142

5 Ibid, p.142

6 *Chords of Memory*, by Rev. David Watson, William Blackwood & Sons, 1936, p. 65

suffers from Dementia. And, it is this illness which initiated the body of work which developed into the current exhibition. The exhibition, however, is not an objective view of this illness. It is informed, but develops on from, the emotional and personal interactions and relationships that one has when a relative suffers from this illness. The initial point for the exhibition was Nowotony's wish to express, and consider, the feelings brought on by his grandmother's decline into dementia. The constructed environment, positions the artist and visitor into the imagined context of this illness. There are fleeting memories, which dissolve under scrutiny, or possibly weren't memories to begin with. The installation considers the isolation of the condition, the remoteness, the confusion, and the sense of the uncanny. It is undertaken, not with a sense of authority, but as an attempt at understanding and sympathising. Familial relationships, often difficult, are reified within a building or structure. Memories, and the shifting nature of them, live within objects and places. These objects and places, however, rarely remain static. And with the change and development of a place or object, memories, and the relationships they define, also warp – never truly lost, but also not still, porous to external influence.

Dementia is a degenerative condition, as could our civil redevelopment be characterised. The culverted stream of our metaphor was widened and

shortcutted to the Clyde in 2010¹⁰, as too the ventricles of an affected brain. The machine which tunnelled this was decorated as a snarling beast, it's jaws open towards it's prospective hole, the zoomorphism illustrating the progression of the condition.

Rolf Nowotny (b. 1978) lives and works in Copenhagen. *Dementia* is his first exhibition in the UK. Recent exhibitions include: *Deeper Than Inside*, High Art, Paris, FR (2019); *What Slick Rock Broke Open*, Museo Pietro Canonica, Rome, IT (2018); *Alienation Momentum*, 9th Nordic Biennial for Contemporary Art, Moss, NO (2017); *CONKLOACA*, Christian Andersen, Copenhagen, DK (2016). Upcoming exhibitions include, *Iwillmedievalfutureyou7*, Sonje Art Center, Seoul, KO and *Future Primitive*, Gossamer Fog, London, UK (both 2019). Nowotny is represented by Christian Andersen and is the founder of the exhibition space Fauna.

Text by Max Slaven

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