

Borderline Picturesque & the Recounting Prospect:

Workshop led by Edward Clydesdale Thomson

2nd June 2012, 13:00 - 16:00

(It was a clear, cold winter's day. The sunbeams of summer were long past, and snowflakes had fallen thickly on the banks of Red River. Charley sat on a lump of blue ice, his head drooping and his eyes bent on the snow at his feet with an expression of deep disconsolation.

Kate reclined at Charley's side, looking wistfully up in his expressive face, as if to read the thoughts that were chasing each other through his mind, like the ever-varying clouds that floated in the winter sky above.

“It won't do sister Kate,”) *¹

(A picture of Northern Norway had been imprinted in my mind long before even considering working in Tromsø. Infinitely deep fjords and rugged snow covered mountains, a masculine landscape straight out of every mystery adventure I'd eagerly devoured throughout my childhood. The Scanorama in-flight magazine I flicked through on the flight to Tromsø confirmed this image, advocating it as a lifestyle. Seductive imagery of radiant couples clad in high performance fabrics out challenging the wilderness. Framed by the rotating airport doors my first gaze upon Tromsø was met by an iridescent sunset carved into by a jagged mountainous silhouette.) *²

(A flat plain stretches to a distant, level horizon at the boundary of the land and a grey sky. A man stands as he regards a circular hollowed mound on the gravel and small rocks of the plain. Lichen and moss define the edges of the mound intermittently and outline its crater-like shape. The man has his right hand in his pocket as he looks at the feature, which is about 150 centimetres higher than the flat surface of the plain. Inside the circle of the crater the sunken surface is composed mainly of small rocks and gravel. The man has a soft cloth cap with snow goggles perched above the brim, and his weather-beaten, unshaven face has a bushy moustache. His jersey is a paler colour and made of chunky wool in a cable stitch. It is caught at the waist by a rough cloth band tied in front. His trousers are wrinkled, dust and dirt patches on the shapeless thick material. He wears ankle boots laced high. Behind him the man's shadow stretches into the plain in the light of a low sun. The plain is dotted here and there with patches of snow, some of which mirror the circularity of the crater, but which are wider than the crater's two metres.) *³

(The movement of my description from the landscape to the individual, and back and forth between them as details are introduced, seems to say something about how the photograph impacts upon my thought. The evidence of the description is that the landscape dominates and defines the man and that they are of equal, balanced importance in the interpretation of this picture. Mostly, this effect is intuitively created, rather than a linking to a conscious decision about what meaning the picture is conveying.

I am, therefore, portraying here a challenge often doomed to failure. Although I attempt to keep my written language sparse and lean, it often defies my attempts to

strip it of all but the basic connotations, and, no matter how much we search for the neutral, the very act of searching implies its own values.) *⁴

(So how do you find an image? It's not as if you lost one and look for it now, is it? Usually it's rather a case of: you find it as you come across it. When that happens, what is it that comes across in the image? Well, first of all a sense of having found something. Yes, but what is it that gives you that sense? Is it a moment of recognition? Perhaps. Then what is it that you recognise? Something you once knew and forgot you knew, and which, now that you see it again, you remember you forgot... It's a very powerful feeling, a sense of homecoming, of returning to a place you had once maybe known very well but, with the passing of time, stopped relating to the way you did. So what the image gets across when you come across it is: you. It takes you across the gulf that time opened up, and transports you back to where your passage may have begun. And that is quite something.) *⁵

*¹ R M Ballantyne, The young fur traders, Ward, Lock & Son London, 1856

*² Edward Clydesdale Thomson, Diary entry, summer 2008

*³ Bob Robinson, audio description for 'Borderline Picturesque & the Recounting Prospect, 2010

*⁴ Bob Robinson, PORTRAYING THE WORLD THROUGH NEUTRAL EYES, 2012

*⁵ Jan Verwoert, Description, 2012