

Interactive comment on “Boundary|Time|Surface: Art and geology meet in Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland, Canada” by Sydney A. Lancaster and John W. F. Waldron

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This paper describes and illustrates what must have been a fascinating work of art to see, an ephemeral piece that lasted a very brief time. I find the artwork compelling, but I do have questions about the way in which the text is written, some of them perhaps related to the underlying philosophy, but also reflecting the difficulty I had in understanding how the art may relate to that philosophy.

I wonder why the authors state only that they intend to interrogate the human practice. Why not also look at the natural forces that created a situation where it was logical to place a system boundary? Overall, in their focus on humanity and on the interpreted

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colonialism of pioneering geologists, they gloss over the extent to which the recognition of geological boundaries in the modern world is driven by the rocks themselves, and what they tell us about the changing world. The Green Point boundary is not the same boundary that was erected by 19th century British scientists; rather, it is the outcome of 20th century international negotiation, and of collaborative efforts by people from many countries to understand past global events. Even though the process of selection of global stratotypes is discussed near the end of the paper, it may be that the overall focus on colonialism and the imposition of human will on the world is not a particularly good fit for the particular boundary to which the art was applied.

Also, how does the work interrogate this human practice? Although this is brought up various times through the paper, it is not clear to me how the work really does this. Still, it is/was a beautiful and intriguing piece of landscape art.

The authors state (lines 388-391) that “The original work and the various methods of communicating the experience of its brief existence is an ongoing project to destabilize the fantasy that humans are somehow separate from the Earth (Boetzkes, 2010, p.18), its systems and timescale – and the notion that borders, boundaries, and other forms of territoriality are somehow permanent”. This may be true for some systemic boundaries, since several of them are quite arbitrary, but there are others (the K-Pg is the most obvious example, but the O-S is another) that stand out “like a fish in a tree”. The boundaries that are placed at mass extinction horizons are, indeed, permanent - they impose themselves on the viewer, rather than the other way around.

There is a lot of information on the technical aspects of constructing the artwork, but I wonder about other things the authors might have done in addition to the recording that was carried out. Did they consider virtual reality 360 photography? This would certainly have brought the record closer to the actual piece, reducing the suggestion that documentation is an ‘edited version’ of what once existed. If VR was considered, why wasn’t it used?

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Similarly, in this modern world, why was there not a web version? Gallery exhibitions, talks, and a book are all very traditional and “niche”; an online presence could have reached (or could still reach) a much larger, global audience. It might have also generated more audience engagement and response. The video installations seem as though they could have been very effective - I wish I could have seen them. Are there any thoughts about posting these to the web?

Specific Comments

Line 35-40 - What was the island called by the Beothuk? The Beothuk name, if known, should probably take precedence over all subsequent names.

2.1 Social and cultural context - This discusses the idea of boundaries as constructs of humanity, but ignores the fact that many boundaries are also natural features. In space, boundaries between countries or territories are often rivers or coastlines. In geological time, boundaries are often placed at very distinct geological event horizons - the Cretaceous-Paleogene boundary would be the best-known example of this.

Line 140 - The way this is written, it suggests that the Silurian-Devonian boundary is still at the Ludlow Bone Bed - maybe add a word such as “initially” or “originally” to “placed at the Ludlow Bone Bed”.

Line 204 - What equipment was used for photography and videography?

Line 345-350 - In discussing our inability to truly comprehend the vast extent of geological time, it might be useful for the authors to circle back to the role of boundaries in understanding this time. Any glimmer of understanding that we now possess is largely the outcome of that exercise of defining geological periods and the boundaries between them.

Technical Corrections

Abstract, Line 29-31 - wording reads as though the public are a range of visual media

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Line 72 - Add space between “thus” and “far”

Line 87 - Try to rephrase, to tidy up usage of “which” and “that” - refer to a style guide for appropriate usage.

Line 121 - Fix punctuation - at the moment it reads as though Sedgwick’s father was elected to the Woodwardian chair.

Line 219 - Is “dissolution” the best word for what happened to the installation? It was destroyed (disarticulated and abraded), rather than dissolved.

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