

Sense of Belonging in a Safe Place

I decided to focus on the term “place” and what it meant to me. I decided to find the meaning of it by exploring and letting LiLa make me find my own definition. There was some kind of levelled understanding of a landscape through the project, which led me to find my own meaning and purpose of a place through myself and others. The meaning gradually grew on me, and it finally shaped my own version.

The meaning of “place” and how it can be perceived differently by others caught my attention at the start of LiLa as I was questioning my connection to a landscape as a place. I was not only trying to learn about a particular landscape, but I was trying to understand and discover my role in nature as an artist and as an individual. This discovery was about how I interacted with the landscape and in what ways I created art with it. I have always sought something familiar from my past and childhood in this new environment of the High Coast to feel my connection again. At this stage, my learning was all about the layers of place and wishing to understand how others associate with it. How does a landscape become special to a person and become memorable for some people? What was the story behind everyone’s perception of places, and how could I achieve a similar connection? These were the questions in my mind as LiLa proceeded.

Safe Place

With proceeding to plan my workshop called Uncanny Landscape/Uncanny Self in LiLa, I started to think about what would be familiar and unfamiliar for the participants of the workshop since, according to Royle (2003), uncanny means something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context. This would raise the question of what the “familiar” would be to the participants of the workshop within the context of LiLa and the landscape.

The term “safe place” first came up during this process with the need to define the familiar. The safe place would mean some part of the landscape where it in a way resonates with you, your background, past, feelings and imagination. Ingold (1993) describes this as “A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there” (p. 155). There is no necessity to have any specific qualities to fulfil the needs of the literal meaning of safe, but it is something that evolves into safe with the involvement of the person and his or her own perception of what is familiar. A ‘safe place’ and ‘the self’ blend and create a personal, unique perspective on a place that a person finds memorable. Therefore, the meaning of it would be linked to the self, the mind of the individuals, where it became totally familiar to be



Figures 1, 2, 3, 4: My documentation of my safe places.
 Images: Ezgi Tanrıverdi, 2023.

turned upside down in the next stage to proceed onto the uncanny context.

It is not easy to describe why I see these parts of nature as safe, but it is about how I feel when I first encounter them. Just like in these images, the feelings I have are the same as during my childhood when I saw a very tiny pond and did not know how the pond happened to be there. A tiny water pond that looks like a gate to different worlds. And a rock standing on its own,

like it is a sacred place elevated from the ground. These feelings are very much associated with my imagination, as seeing these small details carries a secret message that encourages me to be a part of it and find out about it.

Place, People and Imagination:

During the workshop, participants were asked to find a spot in the forest that they defined as a safe place with their senses and minds. Furthermore, they created their experiences of immersing themselves in this place by sculpting wax figures whilst expressing their thoughts. Everyone's view on what is safe and how they reached their familiar place in the forest was different from each other. As the workshop facilitator who had yet to define what was familiar with this new landscape, I started to change my approach after hearing participants' thoughts about the concept, which led me to find my own safe places during the fieldwork where I could define it as safe, homely and familiar even though I was in a completely new environment.

Torrel (2017) explained this approach of varieties within a place as follows: "The place can be huge and abstract, tiny and incredibly specific. It can be anything and anywhere, indoors and outdoors. A neutral place for me can be an awkward place for you" (p. 15). In my view, in the beginning, I was focused on the fact that this place was totally new to me in a physical way, and I was confused about how to define it as a safe place. However, after hearing from other participants that their connection to their safe places comes from their past, their sense and feelings or some sort of connection that they had during the immersive experience in the forest shifted my own mind into seeing what a safe place could be.

Torrel (2017) described this as "We identify with it, define ourselves within it, create it and consume it" (p. 17). It supports the idea that we define it by ourselves



Figures 5, 6, 7, 8: Participants sculpting their experiences in the uncanny workshop. Image: Mari Parpala, 2023.

and we make it safe in our minds regardless of how it would be perceived by others. Now, I was able to find various places that would feel close to me, which I would view as safe based on my senses, the similarities that the places carry between my memories and based on the feelings that are created by engaging with others in the landscape and my imagination that seeks to see what is beyond this landscape.

After the workshop, I started to work on my own artistic production of my thesis, where I explored the connection between the uncanny and my identity and put myself into personal discovery as an artist by utilising external uncanny outcomes. In this case, the uncanny outcomes are the visual and written materials that I collected from the workshop. In the artwork, I am combining the familiar and unfamiliar, just like the definition

of uncanny and trying to create my safe place with other people's minds and imagination.

Conclusion

The exploration of the uncanny and the safe place is complex because it is connected to every person's own experience, which turns the subject into personal in many layers. Defining what is unfamiliar and familiar in the context is a way of getting into the uncanny and finding your own definition of what is a safe place and what comes as familiar based on personal experiences. The process of perceiving a place as safe requires me and others to put something from ourselves into it. The place was in a way temporary and fast to originate a complex and intense connection to it; however, the people who experienced it, who brought something from themselves, can

make the space special, safe and familiar enough within a short period where it creates a sense of belonging.

References

- Ingold, T. (1993). The temporality of the landscape. *World Archaeology*, 25(2), 152–174.
- Royle, N. (2003). *The uncanny*. Manchester University Press.
- Torell, L. (2017). *Place to place, 9 artists reflection about site-specificity and place-related processes*. (Environment, location, site, spot, space, room). https://www.academia.edu/34410559/Place_to_place_9_artists_reflection_about_site_specificity_and_place_related_processes_Environment_Location_Site_Spot_Space_Room



Figure 9. Exploring safe and uncanny forest space. Image: Mari Parpala, 2023