

The Clearance at Arichonan 1848; a collection of poetry  
*reading and writing to diffraction*

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy; Creative Writing

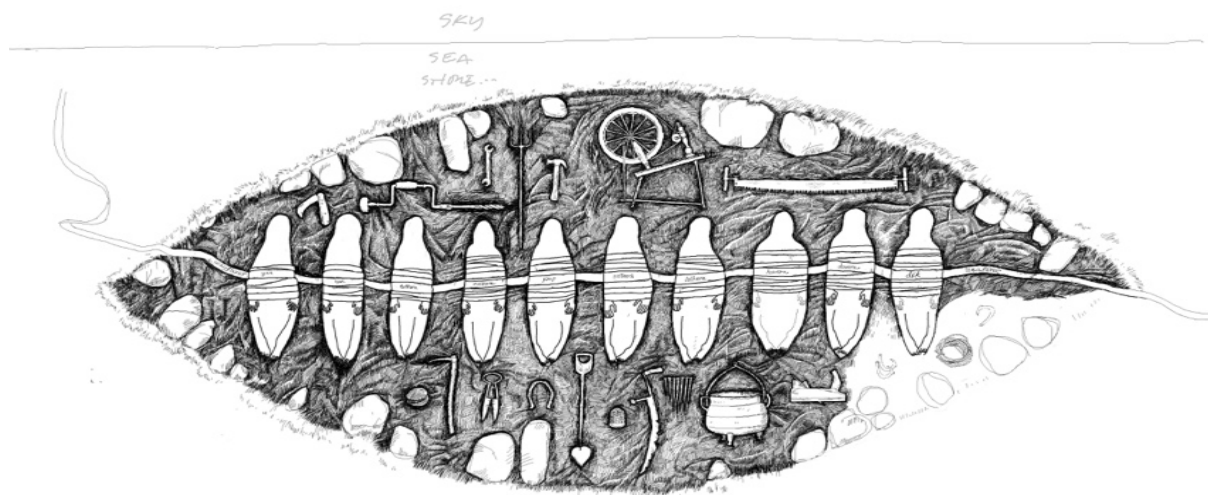
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## The Clearance at Arichonan, 1848 reading and writing to diffraction Abstract

*The Clearance at Arichonan, 1848*, is the main body of creative work for this research project, it was produced after working in collaboration with artist and lecturer in architecture, Adrian Evans, (Huddersfield University) for the *In the Open* exhibition at the Institute of Arts (IOA), Sheffield in September 2017. The collaboration encouraged personal and creative risk taking, as a means for making further experiments with writing, to consolidate effective technique and also to question previous and developing practice. The creative project is underpinned theoretically by a diffractive reading of new materialist ideas to consider an alternative ethical mode of research in relation to forming creative responses to the historical trauma and displacement of the townspeople of Arichonan.

The cleared, ruined township provides a material focus for the research and the creative writing is intended to interrogate the relationship of the self/selves with the non human through experimentation with language and form. The intention is to consider how to attempt alternative creative representations of the communications, or interactions between a currently dominating and privileged human perspective and presence in relation to the non human. Therefore, the position taken to writing is to suggest one of *immersion* or *immanence*, as a secular “falling back” (Rebecca Stott) into the natural world, as opposed to traditional transcendent, Romantic theistic perspectives. Immanence suggests a plurality of perspectives to embody relations between the human and the non human. This position is in contrast to, but not in opposition to the transcendent view which implies a single privileged subject akin to Donna Haraway’s ‘cyclopic’ eye to view landscape and the natural world as objects. This project aims to research the implications of these differing positions for writing with and through connections to the non human.



## The Clearance at Arichonan 1848

By Carole Webster

## The Clearance at Arichonan 1848

### *Part One: Arichonan soundings*

wrong tongued/whisper guessed in the summer rain

(revised version)

there is the difficulty of  
my tongue – the muscle  
of my culture over-saying yours

and now I talk my  
self into another time  
other wordings –

this the  
problem of my tongue  
if I use your voice

will I mis-say what  
you mean? Do I spin  
them in, mis-weave the

missing? A story  
theft, a myth  
borrowed - feathering

the nest to utter  
a fluttered, stuttering  
form of telling:

your joys/your griefs  
your work/your rest  
your un-noted lives/your un-marked deaths.

I will look at your  
broken homes  
your evictions told

in stones  
the roofs burned out  
the walls collapsed

all the things  
which don't make sense  
without your

place – food  
snatched from a table,  
a toy to calm

the child in  
your arms, all  
that you made and lost,

I feel unequal/unable -  
the images dis  
able – mis

placing Arichonan so  
I write cold fingered  
wrong tongued-

whisper guessed  
in the summer rain  
clothing your shadows

with versions of un  
wrapping your days  
in words two centuries away.

arrival

Arichonan  
is a place out of  
dreaming:

the stones  
are receding  
sharpnesses skinning

with moss,  
fern and  
competing lichen

territories  
fought as  
thick ink

lines - borders  
of minute  
continents

edged micron  
by micron  
defining the other

(meanwhile  
he sleeps  
head on arm

in the grass  
leaves and  
the clover

knots worked over  
by bees, the fox  
gloves tight

bright lilac  
purple open  
to the sky today

I am sitting  
on a red raincoat writing  
my way into this place

black beetle  
marks climb between quiet  
intervals of his breath).

At the centre  
the ash tree  
takes in the

higher wind  
-leaves  
as kinetic

fast cyphers  
choreographed  
against the

slower  
changes re-  
shaping the

human out  
of this  
space.

(He wakes as  
if from a  
journey; eyes

washed  
clean by  
away and

I can see it now:  
he is the boy my  
sister once knew.)

There is a  
dark thistle  
beyond, buds

shut down  
for now, thick  
stemmed, sparse

leaved, starting  
new petals mauve  
black held taut by

bent wire  
forms a design to  
entice a bee and

this is a  
remaindering of  
once before: the shuffle dance

and kicks  
in the teeth  
living - all the

voices forced  
loud pain and  
soft loves re-

purposed as  
a slow open  
hinge out

from here - a vantage  
sight to Caol Scotnish a  
holding to the eye, one

scan to an end,  
to a beginning  
heaped with

up-reached  
flanks and curves and  
to the south west

that grey perhaps-  
the drawing out  
to horizon lines.



against that house sheaved in green summer grasses

bell blow  
from the chapel  
told and telling

it is a short iron  
call cold wrung  
through the glass

less window and  
the sky scripted  
with rain; so

water work prints  
plying  
grey stone walls-

overlaid slivers  
and skived sharp  
like shoes without

soles and it  
steps light  
and shadow

against that  
house sheaved  
in green

summer grasses  
where voices their  
inter graced

notes; descended  
feathers - all we  
say is air

and our words fern/ un  
furl from mouth  
to earth to sky

the silver ones, so  
herring gathers: the finger  
ring cast in

salt a whiteness a  
kindness  
curled into

the sadness of  
you along  
straight bones,

you loved  
you wept  
you said

such words  
across and entered,  
you spelled yourself

and she read  
you utterly and  
truly the making

and the leaving  
it is all here  
in this roofless house.

the lichen territories

(From Robert Hurley's preface to Gilles Deleuze: Spinoza Practical Philosophy

are we/you  
/am I/ is  
it a territory-

a con-  
figuration of  
boundaries a

limitation  
of exist/dist-  
ance? Are we

in a field  
of forces whose  
actions wait for

experience, a  
connection of  
affections? Arne

Naess writes:  
*'Spinoza's amor  
intellectualis Dei*

*implies acts of  
understanding  
performed with*

*the maximum  
perspective  
possible.'*

a white seal skull patterned on stone and it is her story

1 away

a white seal skull  
patterned on stone and it  
is her story:

the beginning  
is always  
alone-

a taut  
man mends  
nets on a flat

bruise-day  
in the rain  
he does not

know her  
wet ink  
eyes, her

dark  
hair November  
storms. He

sees her as  
deceit  
sea shift

light and rock, a  
rope bight  
off the jetty

under  
clear water-  
he sees

slightness,  
paleness  
an indigo

taint to  
delicate twists  
of wrist, rib and

hip she  
spoke  
the turn of a

shell so  
this time is  
opening and ended:

because he  
seizes  
the weight

of her, that  
animal supple  
so smooth form

her claw  
in his  
bleeding, biting

raw, net  
bind by  
hard knots then

those  
so quiet dust  
killed words on the green hill.

## 2 a hard dry place

she pours  
soft water  
on dry flour-

licks one  
finger, a  
dab of salt

to her tongue,  
eyes closed and  
it dissolves

(green weed  
sleek alive;  
tide pulls and drift

the surface  
skin elides  
mackerel and mercury

quicks) so this  
desiccation – fire,  
wool scrape, a

baby feeds on  
slight iron  
in milk dreams but his

damp dark  
head is  
feathered if

not for this  
she would walk  
on knives and hooks, away.

### 3 return

she stands bare  
feet in  
the doorway,

hands held  
by her side-  
the hills

force out  
the last  
sun and soon

the high  
sharp stars  
will cut

her to  
nothing. So  
now the

narrow man  
in his boat  
fishes the moon

the silver  
risk, he is  
worn wire

frayed and there  
was once when he  
had loved such tin

white skin  
slipped like  
scales, closed

eyes to  
hard breaths and  
heart fault

snagged not  
any easy love but  
a cupped hand

sometimes to  
receive the  
other – a

wrapping  
of skin to  
skin against: within.

She should  
let her-  
self leave this

too warm  
closed wall house  
she hears the north

wind  
the blue-black wave  
and she will take

his lost body  
to the shore  
to return to her own.

*Part two: Achnabreck soundings cup and ring stone markings*

a cupped hand

her shoulder  
her hips-  
rim

through  
earth  
roots, rock:

hard  
beats  
by stone

down blow  
calls to  
her

a cupped  
hand  
to hold

rain, salt  
semen, milk  
warm blood

ring a  
round, with  
in rings held.



fault lines fissured.

A white cup,  
a silver ring,  
the rain:

trying to  
read the  
pattern - is

it revealed?  
The circling  
around

within - you  
have become  
a conundrum

and I think-  
have I always  
read you wrong?

Perhaps the  
fault line  
is across me,

that the  
marks are in  
plain sight and

I am the  
only one  
who interprets - incorrectly.

*Part three: Keills Chapel soundings*

and the bees, and the bees

it is only  
a sleight  
of hollow

bones and  
calcium feathers it  
is belief

caught cold  
around the  
stones - there

the season  
after season  
dance wing

beat to  
wing tip  
heart fracture

matched by  
tooth chipped flint  
and voiding space

within a  
finger tip  
to lip - hush now

you have  
become  
those lines

traced on  
hardness  
tooled/chiselled

a sword  
cartouche  
into unmanned

frailty and  
faintness  
offset griefs

mitigated by  
a tilt toe to  
heel walk a

round a path side  
story and the  
bees; and the

bees tell  
all now  
because you

are un-  
worded  
nameless in clover.

knot work patterns and the wren in the green grey willow

**angel**

she is soft edged  
, this angel pecked on stone  
-or a woman  
with heron wings

the wren – her  
vital lightening  
messages

**raven**

graven on a  
sword edge: her lowered beak  
imaging shadow  
a black sharp flight in the chapel

up and  
below but  
mostly concealed

**stag**

your strong lines- such  
sexy jaunty  
antlers- I know you:  
the life in death chase

her loud  
sweetening call  
is heard

**the tree of life**

ash – transfixed stone  
ever a trick of the light and  
shift of leaves  
down to the root.

between moments of green  
grey willow  
leaves: close binds uttering

and here

and here we start from the centre and  
thought has no beginning  
only beyond, to  
which it is connected

quickness, the  
water flow beneath  
the stone slab bridge

#### *Part four: the clearance at Arichonan 1848 soundings*

##### The Napier Commission 1883: Ross Noble writes

The Napier Commission  
(afloat on the yacht  
Lively, ran aground on

Chicken Rock at the  
approach to Stornoway harbour - rescued  
by the Mary-Ann continued

on the North Star) – stated  
the Clearances were  
'an accepted evil to

avoid a greater evil still'  
leading to the 'gradual  
dispersal of the native

population'. In 1846 the Marquis  
of Lorne (soon to be the  
Duke of Argyll) wrote:

*...the laziness, ignorance and  
intractability induced by an  
over-population subsisting on*

*potatoes, and having small  
possession of land is such as  
to increase one's dread*

*of the system... On our  
estates I am convinced  
that no such relief can be*

*given without extensive  
emigration and to this I am  
directing every effort.*

Haringey council  
earmarked a  
social housing estate for

privatisation – and a senior  
cabinet member asserts  
its worth as ‘minus fifteen million’

the cost  
of improvement to  
one thousand, three hundred homes - a

community leader  
Sam Legatt said *They think*  
*we’re what makes it worth minus*

*fifteen million. Us the plebs, the*  
*people who’ve lived here*  
*raised our families here,*

*worked here, got our*  
*memories here. We’re just*  
*a commodity to them.*

Arichonan Spring 1848: The Summons of Removing

(with reference to *Arichonan* by Heather McFarlane, 2004)

Poltalloch Estates  
notifies its tenants in  
Arichonan township

*...to flit and Remove  
themselves, their Wives  
Bairns, families, servants,*

*Subtenants, cottars, Dependents  
goods, gear... by  
Whitsunday 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1848.*

1845 *The Condition of the English Working Class*, by Friedrich Engels: cited by Aditya Chakraborty

In 1845 Friedrich  
Engels writes of the  
Manchester working class-

their oppression,  
their exploitation, their premature  
deaths as *social murder*.



The Guardian newspaper Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2017

Kensington Chelsea Tenants Management Organisation (KCTMO) stated:

*We are aware  
that concerns have been  
raised historically*

*by residents.  
We always take  
all concerns seriously and these*

*will form part  
of our forthcoming  
investigations.*

Sam Webb's report to the Home Office: half the buildings did not meet basic fire standards.  
He was told:

nothing could be done  
because too many  
people would be made homeless

(nothing could be done  
because too many  
people were poor and powerless).

David Collins of the Grenfell Tower residents' association said it:

Repeatedly reported concerns  
including fire safety and these were  
not investigated during regeneration works

(nothing was investigated-  
because poor  
people are just a commodity to them).

The Guardian newspaper Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2017: Polly Toynbee

Theresa May was too scared to meet the Grenfell survivors. She's finished

*From the 40% cuts  
to local councils,  
to the bedroom tax*

*and the housing benefit cap  
banishing people hundreds of miles  
from family and schools,*

*the people spilling  
out on to the street,  
sheltered by churches and mosques,*

*are the unwilling emblems  
of deliberate  
Conservative attacks.*

Inveraray: 17<sup>th</sup> August 1848

the Procurator Fiscal  
Duncan MacLulich  
noted 'it will

*probably be necessary  
to proceed against the  
two McMillans or other*

*parties, none of whom are  
proved... to have struck  
against the agents of the law*

*the mother seems to  
be the proper party to  
be selected out of this family,*

*and of course selection  
is necessary in this Case, it  
does not very well appear why*

*as any parties should  
have been put under charge  
beyond what were contemplated*

*on the order of 31<sup>st</sup> July'.*

Sarah MacMillan  
aged forty and

her neighbour's  
daughter, Christian were  
examined in the Gaelic

language through  
the medium of a Sworn  
Interpreter. All others

were examined in English  
and I strongly hope this  
was one more protest-

to speak their own  
tongue, to use  
their own words,

to trip up the  
court in its methods,  
to use their process against them?

My guess  
is likely because Catherine  
Campbell, Christian's

sister was duly admonished  
and thereafter judicially  
examined and interrogated in English.

Arichonan: 7<sup>th</sup> day of July, 1848

the said decree  
under the  
hand of the sheriff-clerk depute

of the county of  
Argyll and bearing  
to be signed by him

on or about the  
twenty-fourth day of May, 1848  
having been duly issued and given

forth containing warrant  
to and ordaining the  
officers of Sheriffdom to charge you

The said Catherine McLachlan or Campbell  
And the said other  
Defenders in the said Action

And you  
And their families and  
Others foresaid furth and

From the aforesaid  
houses, gardens, grass  
pasturage, arable lands and

pertinents possessed  
by you the said  
Catherine McLachlan or Campbell and

the Said other Defenders  
in the said Action respectively  
to keep, hold and detain, you

and them furth thereof, and  
to enter and possess this said  
Neill Malcolm Esquire, or others

in his name, therein and  
to maintain, uphold and  
defend them in the peaceable possession

thereof, and to cause  
Inventory to the haill goods  
and gear, so to be ejected

and if needful, to  
make gates and doors and  
other lock-fast places, open

and patent and use  
Her Majesty's keys  
for the effect.

Arichonan 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1848: the events

The said  
Catherine McLachlan or Campbell  
and the said other Defenders in the foresaid action:

of removing or  
some of them  
having failed to

give obedience to  
the foresaid charge and  
the said John Gillies

as Sheriff-office  
foresaid  
having been charged with

the execution of  
the said warrant of  
removing and

ejection- and  
you the  
said Catherine McLachlan or

Campbell having  
refused so to open  
the said door

-it was  
consequently  
broken by the

said John  
Gillies and his  
said assistants and the

said John  
Gillies along with the  
said Duncan Bain,

Archibald McKay and  
others of the  
concurrents or assistants

having thus  
obtained access into the  
said house and having

proceeded, or been  
about to proceed, to  
take an inventory of

the furniture in  
the said house with  
a view to the removal

thereof  
in terms of the  
said warrant.



Catherine Campbell McLachlan's words revived from John Gillies statement

I  
Catherine Campbell  
McLachlan

I asked John  
Gillies – by  
what right

had he  
to enter  
my house?

He read  
me their  
words from a paper.

My door was  
shut;  
I refused to open it.

Their man  
broke open  
my door;

he forced their  
entry  
into my home.

*All of which is truth.*

Taking the prisoners to Lochgilphead

In the passing  
from Bellanoch along  
the narrow wooded defiles

people crowded  
to heap stones  
upon John Gillies' men

as they  
brought their  
prisoners to Lochgilphead.

*All of which is truth.*

In the Matter of Arichonan, North Knapdale, Summer 1848

13<sup>th</sup> September, 1848

The Pannels  
indicted and  
accused at the instance of

Her Majesty's Advocate  
for Her Majesty's  
interest of the

Crimes of  
Mobbing and Rioting  
also Obstructing and

Deforcing  
Officers of the Law, as  
also the assault

as set  
forth  
in the Libel. In

respect of the  
Verdict of the  
Assize before the

recorded the  
Lords Discern and  
Adjudge –The

Said Catherine  
McLachlan or Campbell,  
Niel McMillan Junior,

Dugald McLellan  
and Mary Adam or Adams.  
Pannels to be

Imprisoned in the  
Prison of  
Inveraray for

the period of  
Eight calendar months  
from this date and

the said  
Duncan McLean to  
be imprisoned in the same prison for

the period of  
Four calendar months  
from this date

and upon the  
expiration of  
the said respective

periods of  
imprisonment  
ordain the

said Pannels  
to be set at liberty-  
T.C. Cockburn P.

5<sup>th</sup> July, 2017

when your  
clothes  
become costumes

and your  
face becomes  
a mask, then

you have  
become  
history.

(after Hilary Mantel's Reith Lectures 2017)

*Part five: migration soundings*

a bird flight and you are too young for such distance

The risk is  
calculated: the  
number held and

the cancelled  
digits touch  
the grey sea

null of  
drift and away -  
beyond those finger

tips and  
slips  
you have

failed  
to grasp  
the

transformation  
you looked for. We  
can barely

see your  
wrist bones, a  
bird flight and

you are  
too young  
for such

distance.  
I can see  
a dark

line across  
your palm  
it was your thin

mark on  
life, a shadow divide –  
your hand

on the  
cave wall  
is virtual

and every mother  
one of us would  
despair to take it:

palm to palm  
thumb to thumb  
fingerprint to fingerprint

we see, we  
feel, we know. I  
am ashamed.

a consideration of *Penitential Psalm, number 102*

for their days  
are consumed  
like smoke and

their bones  
are burned  
to charcoal and their

hearts broken and  
dried out  
like grass so

they will  
forget to  
eat their food:

do you see their  
bones press  
against their skin

as  
their voices  
cry out against you?

They are  
the deer in  
your forests, the game birds

on your estates  
and I am  
one sparrow

alone  
on that  
roof top, watching:

they have eaten  
ashes for bread,  
drank tears for water-

because of  
your actions. You  
took them and

cast them away – so  
their days were  
declining shadows.

Consider the  
words of the destitute  
and do not despise them because

their poverty is  
yours and theirs  
to own – today and yesterday.







Fuweles in the frith,  
The fishes in the flood,  
And I must waxe wood,  
Much sorw I walke  
With the best of bon and blood.

(anon)

*(Fowls in the woodland, the fish in the waters,  
And I must make woe;  
Much sorrow I walk with, for beasts of bone and blood)*

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Please note: all photographs are the author’s own, from June 2017.

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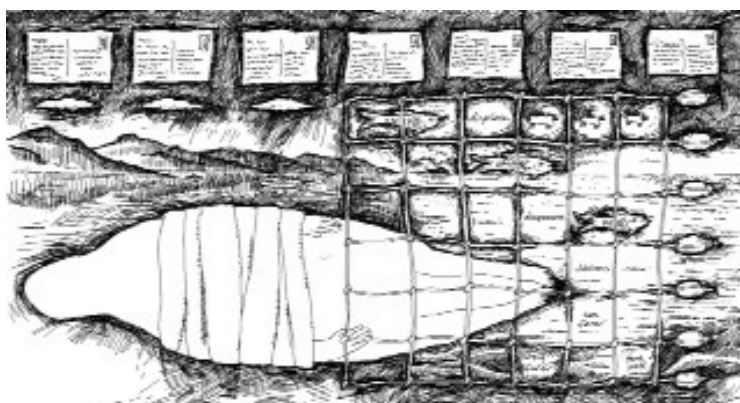
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For Stewart and Beatrix Austin-Webster

## Prologue

When I camped in Scotland with Adrian I was entirely within my (dis) comfort zone, it was all completely familiar; the loo block with quarry tiled, coin metered showers and no heating, muddy footprints and grass on the floors. Conversations with complete strangers in my nightie while brushing my teeth first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Washing up in the communal washing up area using another person's scouring pads and detergent, because you've forgotten yours. Adrian's bell tent with a tiny wood burning stove, his grandfather's primus stove, fold up chairs and evening drinks gave us a space in which to talk; a temporary home. I wrote my impressions of the day in my journal and then the next morning poems developed from observations, photographs I had taken and what I had discussed with Adrian the night before, while in the next tent someone's husband snored. It was all completely known to me. However, I stayed in a 'lodge' which seemed to be made from an offcut giant oil pipe clad inside and out in high gloss pine with the luxury of a heater, electric kettle, toaster, fridge and microwave, so it was not entirely like the good old days of camping with my family. I still had to walk to the loo block in the rain wearing walking boots and carrying an umbrella, so it was not complete luxury. This pared down existence was very helpful for reading and writing, with minimal housework and cooking duties I just had to concentrate on the work in hand.



# Introduction

## Part 1 First principles

At the beginning of my research I set out with what appeared to be fairly simple intentions. First of all, I wanted to consider creative practice in terms of developing my writing in relation to subject position, style and form. Over time I had noticed that my writing had shifted its focus to a specific interest in the non human which featured more regularly in my poems. It was becoming apparent to me that creative work could perform an important role in directing attention towards the relationship between the human and the non human at a time of rapidly changing environmental circumstances. On the basis of my reading, I encountered the view that many forms of social injustice and inequality are bound up with human exploitation of the natural environment, to produce a dynamic which also contributes to the current climate emergency. I was keen to research the implications of these co-morbid interactions, particularly with reference to creative practice. For this reason, my key interest was to research ideas about the writing subject(s) in relation to the non human, to develop my knowledge and ideas about these relationships in terms of the theoretical literature and with regard to creative process. In this section, the introduction to this project, I shall map out how I intend to address these wider research interests.

My collaboration with Adrian Evans enabled me to extend my exploration of ideas about being in the material world and my attempts at a form of writing which connects to a state of “viscous porosity” a term described by Nancy Tuana in her essay *Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina*<sup>1</sup>. Viscous porosity is a term which implies that the material environment and non-human entities interact with humans to mutual effect and affect. I encountered this view of the relationship between the human and the non human at the beginning of my research and it has continued to resonate. I have since read Karen Barad’s<sup>2</sup> conceptualisations of “entanglement” and “diffraction” as innovative theoretical approaches to account for human

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Tuana, “Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina”, in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham & London: Duke, 2007).

presence and embodiment in association with the non human. These ideas have suggested perspectives for viewing the collaboration with Adrian as a form of artistic research and as a means to account for the development of a relational writing process in response to the event of the clearance at Arichonan in 1848 and to the landscape surrounding the ruins of Arichonan in the present day.

My reading of theory is bound up with and has often become part of the creative writing itself, yet although the critical commentary is informed by my reading, it is not a conventional academic analysis or critique of any specific theoretical position other than a particular reading of the diverse literature associated with new materialism. With reference to Nancy Tuana, Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti and Karen Barad in particular, I have used elements of new materialist perspectives to produce what I conceive to be *diffractive* readings in relation to *diffractive* writings [my italics]. In this way I have arrived at an approach to writing which continues to develop and respond to new readings which overlap, interact with and against each other recursively to produce subsequent writings. I see this process at work in the collaboration with Adrian, of reading the other dialogically as repeating acts of attention, acknowledgement and interpretation. For the duration of the project we were “entangled” with Arichonan; the landscape, the events of the court case in 1848 and with each other’s ideas, as we camped in a field nearby. It was an intensive and demanding process.

The readings do not just occur at the level of printed text, but take various forms in other media; in drawing, painting, making, photography, video clips and most important of all from my perspective, *becoming* amongst and in association with the non human, of mutable intra-text: “that nature scribbles or that the flesh reads”<sup>3</sup>. I am aiming for a form of writing as embodiment, as a *vibrant*<sup>4</sup> expression of becoming or *mattering*<sup>5</sup> in and amongst the non human [my italics]. For this reason, *The Clearance at Arichonan, 1848* is a tentative part of a longer project. As a location of displacement, Arichonan accommodated makings which were bound up with nested perspectives of home. These plural, flexible conceptualisations of home, derived from Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1958) are brought sharply into focus by

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<sup>3</sup> Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter a political ecology of things* (Durham & London: Duke, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 146-53.



absence and ruination, of displaced communities unbound to landscapes through lost namings and narratives and in the present time; through setting up a momentary home, a camp for making, suggesting and creating without leaving obvious traces. Adrian's making is impermanent, it existed as a moment in time for the duration of the exhibition. Even the collection of poems which I stitched into one cohesive text was disrupted by Adrian's reading of them, to become fragments, etched as brief phrasings of text on corporeal sculpted forms. I think this approach is suited for work which attempts to respond to difference and acknowledgement in relation to the non human; my preference is for multivalent creative practice which is indirect, questing and questioning to produce less certain outcomes.

By this means my writing interacted *diffractively* with Adrian's making to create new productions and interpretations, by those who chose to interact with the piece at the exhibition. We wanted our work to be characterised by the quality or property of *becoming* "in the open", for our collaboration to suggest a series of tentative questions, sensations and affects resulting from our interactions with the post-clearance landscape of Arichonan. Throughout this critical commentary I write about and analyse the collaboration as an open-ended piece of creative research. I evaluate its effects and affects on my writing and then finally I consider how the writing continues to develop after the completion of the Arichonan project.

## Part 2 A (diffractive) review of the critical literature

This section provides a summary view of the key theories which have informed my thinking and writing during the course of this period of study. Throughout the critical commentary I refer to the 'non human' rather than to 'nature' due to the difficulties associated with the latter term regarding the traditional assumption of a dualist view which is attendant upon a Cartesian oppositional perspective applied to a (male) unified thinking subject and 'Nature'. I have not hyphenated the term because I did not want it to connote negation, but rather to invite attention to that which is categorised beyond the human. I aim to use and apply the term respectfully with due attention paid to difference, as opposed to colonising otherness through anthropomorphism.

First of all, I shall summarise the approaches which have shaped my views on the non human, which also imply alternative perspectives on (human) subjectivity, namely animism. Next I consider the influence of Donna Haraway and Karen Barad's conceptualisations of diffraction on *how* I elected to read the critical literature and why I made use of this approach for the collaboration and for writing. Finally I discuss Rosi Braidotti's use of the term *nomadism* which I read diffractively with Nancy Tuana's notion of "viscous porosity", to enable an analysis of the approach I took to writing the collection of poetry which preceded the Arichonan collection; the *book house : house book* collection. My evaluation of *book house : house book* (2015) provides a frame of reference to exemplify aspects of emergent practice, including themes and ideas which were later developed in the Arichonan project.

### Part 3 Becoming animal: Graham Harvey

What is an animal? It's a rolling conversation with the land from which it comes and of which it consists. What is a human? It's a rolling conversation with the land from which it comes and of which it consists – but a more stilted, stuttering conversation than that of most wild animals.<sup>6</sup>

Graham Harvey<sup>7</sup> distinguishes between the 'old' usages of the term animism and the 'new'. The 'old' usage refers to animism as a descriptor or label for 'primitive', 'simple' or worse still, 'savage' world views or belief systems. This is a perspective redolent of a patronising colonialist ethnographic discourse predicated on the view that animism was the "*primal* substratum on which more advanced culture or religion may be constructed".

The 'new' form of animism is associated with a perspective on 'personhood' a term which does not assume the human privilege of consciousness. Harvey discusses how current ethnographers work in dialogue with those indigenous peoples whose beliefs accommodate and attribute personhood to non human entities, thereby representing and promoting nuanced and sophisticated animist perspectives in research. The attribution of personhood

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Foster, *Being a Beast* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2016), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Graham Harvey, *Animism* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., 2005), 3.

carries with it the need to respect the non human in the way that human rights have been recognised and privileged. Such views of non human personhood have entered into ecological perspectives of the environment, to endorse notions of interrelatedness which counter older Cartesian dualisms. Harvey refers to the writer Daniel Quinn's interpretation of animism as a "view of the world as a place shared by all living beings that stands in radical contrast to a view that (falsely) only perceives exploitable environments and resources" (26). Harvey also refers to David Abram<sup>8</sup> whose writing has influenced my ideas and writing about the non human throughout my research; he usefully précis Abram's view of the relations between the human and the non human as follows; "Humans are inescapably part of the living world. Our conscious, sensuous bodies place us intimately in participative relationships" (27).

#### Part 4 Material Enchantment: Jane Bennett

Adjacent to ideas about personhood relating only to the human is that of non human nature as "more or less inert matter"<sup>9</sup>. Jane Bennett turns to, rehabilitates and proposes a notion of *enchantment* which she associates with a sense of openness to that which is unusual, delightful or disturbing in everyday life. Underlying this principle of what she describes as *material enchantment*, is a view that 'begins to articulates an ethical sensibility that is extended to nonhumans as well as to humans'(13) through ideas about the "enchancing effect of interspecies and intra-species crossings" in part derived from Deleuze and Guattari's model or rather an *assemblage* which they call the "body-without-organs". Bennett describes the *body-without-organs* as a "social creature" whose networks of "implication" surpass the social to "include alliances with nonhumans, the inorganic, the imaginary and other planes of consistency" (24).

Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage of the body-without-organs enables a "deterritorialization" of bodily experience, as a disruptor of usual habits and comportment which derive from the organising habits or *strata* of the body, as a means of making strange

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<sup>8</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, And Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 7. Subsequent page references in text.

that which is familiar. For the purposes of this discussion, Bennett explains that engagement with and as the body-without-organs enables experimentation to “induce a rehybridization, to enter into new alignments with say, animals” (27). The body-without-organs proposes a perspective which allows new connections to “things, plants, animals, tools, people, power and fragments of all these things” (24). Bennett prefers to use the term “crossings” to describe such new alignments rather than “hybridization” and she suggests that if “crossings” work as “contemporary sites of enchantment” they might ‘play a role in cultivating an ethical sensibility’ (30).

On the basis of Bennett’s conceptualisation of “everyday enchantment” as a means to encourage an “ethics of generosity”, it is possible to consider creative engagement with the human and non human in this light, as a respectful attentiveness to difference in the ‘other’. Bennett’s exposition on material enchantment is relevant to a subsequent discussion in Chapter Two regarding secular immersion and immanence in relation to creative practice with the non human.

## Part 5 Vibrant Matter: Diana Coole, Nancy Tuana

It is a short step from Bennett’s ideas about enchantment in relation to the non human to perspectives which draw from theories about “vibrant matter”. Diana Coole<sup>10</sup> considers how matter is represented in Cartesianism; that for Descartes matter is as she puts it “radically antivitalist” and lacking value or “internal qualities”. The implication for this view is that the thinking subject (cogito) is therefore entitled or at least “not forbidden” to control the material dimension which is aligned with nature. Descartes’ view is rationalist and because material or nature is seen to be predictable and therefore available to logical process, the thinking subject is enabled to make decisions and interventions relating to inert matter through deduction and rational thought. Coole comments that Cartesian thought has “set (matter) free for modernity’s secular and technoindustrial projects” (95). Coole goes on to provide a commentary on the development of a phenomenological view of matter proposed by Merleau-Ponty “If for Merleau-Ponty it is corporeality that introduces meaning or

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<sup>10</sup> Diana Coole, “The Inertia of Matter and The Generativity of Flesh” in *New Materialisms*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham & London: Duke, 2008), 94. Subsequent page references in text.

structure into matter, this is because the body literally incarnates material capacities for agency. Existence for him is an internally productive, *formative* process wherein meaning and matter are irreducibly interwoven” (101). It is this aspect that I am most interested in, as a perspective on creative production. Merleau-Ponty himself refers to Cézannes’ work which he views as pre-eminently phenomenological because he does not draw attention to the division between the creator and the created. Cézanne suspends or disrupts the usual anthropocentric perspective on objects and allows them space to “emerge”, Coole cites Merleau-Ponty’s quotation of Cézanne who stated, “the landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness” (104). Coole draws attention to the perspective that unlike Cartesianism, phenomenological thought is generative, the image of ‘folded flesh’ gives expression to the statement “There is no break at all in this circuit; it is impossible to say that nature ends here and that man or expression starts here” (104).

Another approach which ascribes agency to the non human in relation to the human is that of Nancy Tuana<sup>11</sup>. Tuana uses the phrase “viscous porosity” to articulate the theoretical basis of her thinking about relations between the human and non human, as an “interactionist ontology” which rematerializes the social and emphasises the agency of the natural. Stacy Alaimo<sup>12</sup> makes a succinct precis of Tuana’s conceptualisation of “viscous porosity” as follows:

It attends to the process of becoming in which unity is dynamic and always interactive, and agency is diffusely enacted in complex net-works of relations.

## Part 6 Making matter matter: Karen Barad

Karen Barad adds a consideration of language to the debate contesting how language and culture have been prioritised with regard to meaning and agency whereby matter is viewed as “passive and immutable”<sup>13</sup>. She contests how materiality is framed and considered within

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<sup>11</sup> Tuana, “Viscous Porosity”.

<sup>12</sup> Alaimo, *Material Feminisms*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthuman Performativity” in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 120. Subsequent page references in text.

the domain of language, thereby posing problems for those who seek to prioritise a focus on material conditions. Barad offers the term “performativity” as a means to counter what she calls the “representationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things”. She shifts the focus away from reflection, which stresses the correspondence between descriptions and reality to “matters of practices/ doings/actions” (122) to propose a turn to “questions of diffraction”. Barad explains her use of the term “performativity” which she believes “allows matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming, in its ongoing *intra-activity*” [my italics] (122). She concludes by saying “It is vitally important that we understand how matter matters” (122).

Throughout the commentary I return to elements of Barad’s conceptualisations to provide a critical context for my questions about practice and as a reference point from which to explain my thoughts about creativity in relation to the non human. Barad’s theorisation of diffraction has strongly influenced how I have read and interpreted the critical literature to form a basis for my ideas about art as research and the recursive interrelations of my reading with the creative process which I conceive of as ‘diffractive’.

Barad’s ideas have implications for perceptions of the ‘Other’ which enter into her concept of “entanglement”. It is a term which I refer to throughout this project because it accommodates the difficulties associated with anthropomorphism, whereby the differences of the non human other are elided through descriptions which use or reference human attributes. “Entanglement” as part of Barad’s agential realist account, embodies an ethical acknowledgement, or what I later refer to as the “regard” of difference which also enables a shift from a unified dominating human subject position to one which encompasses matter as a “dynamic expression/articulation of the world in its intra-active becoming. All bodies come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity - its performativity”<sup>14</sup>.

Barad’s perspective enables a view of the human and the non human which is informed by “relationality” which in turn releases the idea of a fixed creative subject position, a proposition which has had a strong effect on the direction my writing has taken both for the

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<sup>14</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 393.

Arichonan project and more recently. The following statement about the position of the subject in relation to the non human is particularly resonant and inspirational<sup>15</sup>:

Not only subjects but also objects are permeated through and with their entangled kin; the other is not just in one's skin, but in one's bones, in one's belly, in one's heart, in one's nucleus, in one's past and future. This is as true for electrons as it is for brittlestars as it is for the differentially constituted human. (393)

Part and parcel of Barad's notions of agential realism and entanglement is her use of the term "diffraction", developed from Donna Haraway's conceptualisation which she views as "an optical metaphor". Barad extends Haraway's use of the term "diffraction" to account for the indefinite nature of boundaries (described above) while "representationalist" perspectives maintain perceived boundaries via the "optics of externality". She provides what I believe to be her definitive view of diffraction<sup>16</sup>:

Diffraction is a matter of differential entanglements. Diffraction is not merely about differences, and certainly not differences in any absolute sense, but about the entangled nature of differences that matter. This is the deep significance of a diffraction pattern. Diffraction is a material practice for making a difference, for topographically reconfiguring connections. (381)

## Part 7 Diffraction Diffraction Reading for Research

Karin Murris and Vivienne Bozalek<sup>17</sup> apply Barad's theories to pedagogy for education and social studies. In a recent series of papers, they discuss how they use what they describe as a "diffractive methodology" for research and explain how they are "Rupturing conventional styles of doing research (e.g. literature review writing, collecting and analysing data)" by using "a method of diffractively reading texts through one another" (1). They emphasise that

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 393

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 381.

<sup>17</sup> Karin Murris and Vivienne Bozalek, "Diffraction diffractive readings of texts as methodology: Some propositions", *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1469-5812, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.1919.1570843 (2019). Subsequent page references in text.

a diffractive approach to critical reading and writing entails a “different kind of scholarly writing style” which is characterised by interleaving selections from a range of texts; as “propositions” selected to generate new insights. This approach is intended to avoid a conventional overarching view of the literature, for example that of a typical “literature review” which is arrived at by making comparisons and juxtapositions. Their paper suggests a diffractive reading with the aim not to “foreground any texts as foundational” but to “offer two entangled “sets” of propositions diffracted through theoretical explanations of diffraction. They conclude that taking this approach enables readings which are “affirmative, not critical”; they cite Barad (2007) who views such readings as “close respectful, responsive and response-able (enabling response) attention to the details of a text... (to) *do justice* to a text” (10).

I have drawn from Barad’s ideas about diffractive reading as a means to transform and to enable new insights into my personal creative practice. In some respects, I have used unconventional approaches in the writing of this commentary which I hope will help to produce unexpected and deeper views into the writing process. However, compared to Murris and Bozalek my approach is distinctly and necessarily diffraction ‘light’. Notably the style of writing I have selected for this introduction demonstrates some elements of diffractive reading whereby I am juxtaposing connected yet different perspectives from new materialist thinking without the conventional full exposition of a typical literature review. This is an intended approach which might or might not produce unexpected interpretations of my work or better still more searching questions about it, I do hope this is the case.

The final section of this chapter relates to the process I used to write a collection of poetry which pre-dates the collaboration with Adrian. My intention here is to focus on the practices I used before I wrote the Arichonan collection in order to demonstrate how earlier themes and ideas entered into the writing. I have situated this writing project diffractively with reference to the critical perspectives on the non human, summarised above, together with a reading of Rosi Braidotti’s theory of *nomadic becoming* to account for emerging creative process at the earlier stage of my studies in 2015 and its association with my own conceptualisation of immersion and immanence which I discuss in more detail later in the commentary.



Rosi Braidotti<sup>18</sup> draws from Deleuze and Guattari's theories regarding 'becoming imperceptible' as a transformative process to consider the structure of Virginia Woolf's writing. Braidotti (with reference to Deleuze and Guattari) sees Woolf's stream of consciousness style as being characterised by "seriality", "radical immanence" and by the "structural contingency of the patterns of repetition by which qualitative processes of transformation can be actualised." On the basis of these attributes Braidotti describes Woolf's practice as the invention of "a genre of her own", as "the intensive genre of becoming" (151). As I commented previously, I will discuss my perspectives on immanence later in more detail, but for the purposes of this introduction I shall gesture towards these in my evaluation of the *book house : house book* project. In this section I consider Nancy Tuana's theory of viscous porosity with Braidotti's use of the term *nomadic* to suggest a practice of immanence, as an 'intensive genre of becoming'. I interpret her phrase "becoming imperceptible" as a reference to multivalent subject positions in association (or entanglement) with the non human, rather than the conventional unified Cartesian subject position which prioritises the human during the creative process, as a theist transcendent view. Braidotti describes "nomadic becoming" as a:

process of expression, composition, selection, and incorporation of forces aimed at positive transformation of the subject. As such, it is also crucial to the project of a creative redefinition of philosophical reason and of its relation to conceptual creativity, imagination and affectivity. (152)

She explains that "becoming" entails 'emptying out the self' so that it is exposed and open to "possible encounters" with the "outside" (152). It is possible to position this explanation alongside that of 'viscous porosity' (summarised previously) and what I refer to as 'immersion'<sup>19</sup>. Braidotti views this sensibility, what she describes as "radical immanence", as "central to the creative process". I made this association between Tuana and Braidotti later

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<sup>18</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 151. Subsequent page references in text.

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Stott, "The Wetfooted Understory", in *The Joy of Secularism: Essays for How We Live Now*, ed. George Levine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 205.

in my research, after I wrote *book house : house book* collection. However, at this juncture I think in retrospective, reading Braidotti's approach diffractively with Tuana's, activates temporal shifts in perspective, towards a deeper critical insight into the *book house : house book* collection. Tuana's term "viscous porosity" accounts in the first instance for my initial approach to creative practice in relation to the non human for *book house : house book*, at that particular moment in time. Whilst reading Tuana and Braidotti together at this later stage enables a wider and more profound evaluation of *how* elements of this earlier project entered into the Arichonan collection.

## Part 8 The *book house : house book* project: becoming nomadic

During the winter and autumn of 2015 I developed what I came to call the *book house : house book* project.<sup>20</sup> I attended a weekly art class held in the black boarded shed of the local bookshop. One week I was making observational drawings outside the shed in the courtyard when I noticed the door to the bookshop cellar. The door was made of horizontal boards, rather like closed louvres which in the past had been painted in a range of colours and finishes. The surface of the boards had an aged and complex patina which suggested figures, images and simulacra of text. For the next few weeks I drew and painted my observations of the boards. I imagined that certain books stored in the bookshop cellar were exuding spectral enactments of texts which in some cases related to the local environment, to the church nearby, to the river, to boats and the sea. Some of the images and palimpsests that I could 'read' on the boards reminded me of classic texts, such as *Moby Dick*, or the Biblical tale of *Jonah and the Great Fish*. I perceived these imaginings to be a material reading of the images on the cellar door which were eventually expressed or articulated as poems. All the while I was aware that my creative practice was being formed as a developing relationship of sensibilities with the non human and this stance is clearly stated in my journals at the time. In this way, the *book house : house book* project responded to my growing understanding of new materialist perspectives on sensuous relations with and through the non human and to Nancy Tuana's conceptualisation of *viscous porosity* in particular. My journal commentaries

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<sup>20</sup> Appendix 1, selected poems from this collection.

refer to ideas about material transactions between the human and the non human, as creative activations which I expressed as drawings, paintings and writing.

The *book house : house book* project developed from conversations I had with my art teacher and mentor, Jane Wallett who encouraged me to treat it as an extended piece of work. I explained my ideas about responding to and with the materiality of the cellar door and that I would like to quietly ‘publish’ the collection in the courtyard to allow the poems to interact with, or to be ‘read’ by the non human, by rain, wind, frost and possibly other beings. She suggested that I approach the book shop’s owner for permission to set up the ‘exhibition’. Jane provided a sounding board for my ideas and made suggestions for practice, namely the importance of using a ‘sketchbook’ or in my case a journal for reflection, evaluation and to make observations. This instructive and dialogic relationship provided a template for the collaboration with Adrian. I had learned how to work with and as an artist does, to experiment, to consider outcomes through visual means by drawing, painting and taking photographs alongside the writing journal. I think this was a seminal experience which is very much grounded in material practices and I have continued to develop the approaches that I learned from Jane and Adrian.

With reference to Braidotti<sup>21</sup>, the project embraced transformations which came about from what she describes as ‘serialisation’, of moment to moment intra-actions with the non human forming “patterns of repetition”. There are distinct elements of practice that I used for the ‘book house : house book’ collection which are extended and developed in the Arichonan project. For example, already there is a sense of recursive practice (of repetitions), of reusing the writing in other forms to trans-form, to gain new readings and interpretations, of attempts to hand texts over to material enactments or the non human. There is the sense of diffractive creative practice to produce new effects and affects.

One particular poem in the collection resonates specifically with Braidotti’s conceptualisation of “nomadic becoming” and quite by chance it references Virginia Woolf’s perspective for writing and exemplifies Braidotti’s ideas about her writing style. Each horizontal plank of the cellar door has an accompanying poem, designated sequentially as ‘books’. *Book VI*,

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<sup>21</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 8.

*Question: what is it that quick exquisite she hopes for?* relates to a spectral figure loitering outside a church at night. The perspective flickers from one observation to another, as serried views. The poem is specifically associated with Woolf<sup>22</sup> and is prefaced by a quotation from *The Waves*: “To whom shall I give all that now flows through me from my warm, my porous body? I will gather my flowers and present them - Oh! to whom?”. I was interested in writing from a transitory yet ‘embodied’ point of view, as a series of sensations in response to the non human which I would now view as one characterised by immanence. At the time I was interested in writing ‘from the body’ in relation to the non human in mutual exchange as “viscous porosity” and I continued to use this approach for the Arichonan writing. From a later critical perspective, Braidotti’s use of the phrase “nomadic becoming” is particularly apt for this poem because features of this state, or “assemblage” are discernible in the writing<sup>23</sup>:

She is her  
usual revenant  
grey loitering and

looking hard at  
the peeling edge  
of things

she picks with  
quicked finger  
nails tasting

odours: the  
sadness of cooked  
khaki and mustard

creep but  
it is not her  
bad dream, so

she leaves it  
on the churchyard  
path with

the dropped potato chip  
like some  
greased profanity

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<sup>22</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1963).

<sup>23</sup> Appendix 1, full text given.

This poem introduces a number of concerns and themes which I develop in the Arichonan collection. I have already discussed the revenant, restless subject position which enables a consideration of time(s) and the death of the human in relation to the non human:

The grave markers  
no longer  
textualise

their dead, they  
are voice lost  
amongst the weed

killed borders  
adrift from  
the path.

To present this poem as part of the 'exhibition' I transcribed it on to a roof slate using a chalk pencil so that the sense of ambiguity and transition were transferred and 'illustrated' materially, to produce new physical effects. In this way I experienced 'becoming' a reader on the basis of re-writing my own poem as a transformative view, thereby making it strange. I write about this sensation, that of the uncanny when I encounter fragments of the Arichonan poems engraved on Adrian's cast plaster figures. This is how I wrote about the experience of transcribing the poem on to the slate in my journal:

Drawing and writing with chalk is a strongly sensual act – on slate the chalk jolts and squeals,  
the dust hangs about you and imprints you. Whatever you draw or write is attracted back to your physical form and fingers...The figure in the poem appears to be ghostly, she is nevertheless playful but unrooted and undecided as though she is drawn in chalk. (29<sup>th</sup> October 2015)

In conclusion, by this means I return to Braidotti's notion of "becoming imperceptible" and I think it is this condition which occupies me the most; I associate it with quietude, with ambivalence, as a gesture of withholding and indirectness, as 'greyness'. Later on, in Chapter

Two I discuss what Harriet Tarlo<sup>24</sup> describes as writing “aslant” which I think is aligned with “becoming imperceptible”. This last quality associates with Jane Bennett’s perspective on the vexed issue of human selfhood in relation to the non human. She proposes that our encounters with lively matter re-shape and so transform us. With reference to creative production this would assume that the creator is transformed in association with materials encountered during the creative process. By this means I am proposing a creative position which is immersive and relational, one which does not assume a dominant position; to allow hesitation, caesurae, doubt and mutual affect as necessary muddling, awkwardness and untidiness, towards an authentic *acknowledgement* of the ‘other’. Bennett<sup>25</sup> expresses these effects and affects as part of what she describes as a “Nicene Creed for would-be vital materialists” which I refer to below as a *vibrant* means of bringing this introduction to a close while simultaneously opening out what is an ongoing preoccupation for the duration of this commentary:

I believe that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests.

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<sup>24</sup> Harriet Tarlo ed., *The Ground Aslant* (Exeter: Shearsman Books Ltd., 2011), 7.

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 122.

## Chapter 1

### Art as research, a collaboration: driving each other to diffraction

#### Introduction

The creative collaboration for *In the Open* exhibition at Sheffield IOA in 2017 led to further reading in the area of new materialism in relation to art as research and I discovered a burgeoning body of work connected to this area. The critical literature refers to ethical considerations of creative production resulting from enmeshments between the human and the non human compared to the ‘privileging’ of the human subject position encountered in scientific paradigms. Many artists and theorists are considering the climate emergency from the perspective of new materialist practices in terms of artistic production and critical thinking. Later, in Chapter Two I discuss, with reference to Charles Darwin and Elizabeth Bishop the influence and confluence of scientific studies of nature ‘across’ poetry, as diffractive readings to produce diffractive writing which is attentive to landscape and the non human. This discussion suggests a position of ‘immersion’ as a feature of a secular “poetic sublime”<sup>26</sup> as opposed to a ‘rising up’ associated with transcendence and Romantic theistic responses to the non human. In this way artistic production unfolds away from changing subject positions as a mode of relational acknowledgement. The open-endedness of this position contrasts with scientific research which is communicated through discrete evaluations, correlations and conclusions based on data sets which aim for significance on the basis of assuming the ‘null hypothesis’. Immersion, or immanence assumes that every ‘thing’ is significant.

The first part of this chapter places collaborative work in the context of ‘art as research’. I reference new materialist perspectives with their stated imperative to search for new productive interactions and permissive representations of the human and non human in entanglement as creative expression. I am viewing these stances in addition to conventional human directed quantitative and qualitative research methods.

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<sup>26</sup> Stott, “The Wetfooted Understory”.

The second section goes on to describe and discuss how Adrian and I evolved a way of working together and how the Arichonan project connects to “art as research”. I then conclude this section with a discussion of the risks, challenges, benefits and implications of working in collaboration across disciplines and a descriptive piece from my journal to explain how the collaboration impacted on my writing, its *affect*.

The first section of this chapter has a conventional academic register, because it discusses ideas from the critical literature relating to new materialism, in comparison to the second section which refers to personal reflections and thoughts relating to the *affect* of the collaboration. As a result, this second section has a more discursive and perhaps digressive style as befits an autobiographical narrative form.

## Part 1 Collaboration for art as research in the context of new materialist perspectives

Before I discuss how the literature related to *art as research* connects to collaborative work, it might be helpful to consider first of all how science and mathematics research is prioritised and reified in relation to that of the arts. Scientific and mathematical research is bound up with notions of what is objective, valid or ‘true’<sup>27</sup> as opposed to the arts which are often associated with ‘non science’: as a subjective, partial and hence a ‘less valid’ stance. Furthermore, (in brief) to state how this opposition originates from perspectives of the human subject in the ‘world’ or ‘nature’; conceptualisations which have derived from Western classical thinking, from Christian beliefs and then subsequently from Enlightenment Cartesian conceptualisations of the thinking self and nature as ‘other’.

These specific conceptualisations have informed and governed (mostly Western) human relations with the natural environment and have persisted up until the present day. The human has been privileged at the expense of the non human. This principle has been justified by religion, philosophy and in modern times by political and economic ideology and

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<sup>27</sup> Tim Ingold, “Dreaming of dragons: on the imagination of real life”, in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, v. 19. Issue 4, (2013), DOI 10.1111/1467-9655.12062.



is replicated in much of (Western) conventional cultural production. New materialist writers are proposing alternative ways of viewing the human and non human which are of particular relevance to artists and those who are seeking to challenge the established view, as a means to prioritise the non human, in attempts to *acknowledge* eco-cide; to *account* for how non human entities *mean* and *matter*<sup>28</sup>. We need an assemblage<sup>29</sup> of diverse accounts, diffractive<sup>30</sup> views which have inclusive, multiple and nuanced resonances in addition to unified certainties and statements of ‘fact’.

If I am to situate my writing in the genre of eco-poetry, then I have to grapple with these issues because they have had consequences for my beliefs about writing and therefore have had an impact on my thinking when I wrote *The Clearance at Arichonan*. A number of writers in the field of new materialism (Val Plumwood<sup>31</sup>, Rosi Braidotti) are proposing creativity or artistic production as a means to effect radical change, as a valid albeit *diffractive* form of research<sup>32</sup>. Plumwood and Braidotti posit creative alternative modes to represent the complexities of the current environmental situation in order to enable the non human in entanglement with the human to articulate and give shape to meanings across the spectrum of environmental emergency, beyond the important but often difficult to communicate conclusions of scientific research.

Donna J. Haraway explores the potential of an alternative creative mode, what she describes as “speculative fabulation” in a series of ‘stories’, [The] *Camille Stories* which are placed at the end of *Staying with the Trouble*<sup>33</sup>. This body of writing explores the effects and affects of the current climate emergency at specific points in the future, as a means of speculating how humankind might achieve, or evolve towards a sustainable means of co-habitation with the non human. *Camille 3* refers to the term “environmental justice” which in current times is used to highlight the rights of the non human, in order to counter social systems which have

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<sup>28</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*.

<sup>29</sup> Coole, *New Materialisms*.

<sup>30</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

<sup>31</sup> Val Plumwood, “Nature in the Active Voice”, in *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, ed. Graham Harvey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 441.

<sup>32</sup> Helen Pritchard and Jane Prophet, “Diffractive Art Practices”, in Pau Alsina and Ana Rodríguez Granell (co-ord.), *Art Matters. Artnodes*. No. 15, 5-14. UOC., (2015), DOI 10.7238/a.v.0i15.2594.

<sup>33</sup> Donna J. Haraway, “Staying with the Trouble, Making Kin in the Chthulucene” (Durham and London: Duke, 2016), 134.

been constructed to privilege and prioritise the rights of the human (or specific groups of humans). In *Camille 3*<sup>34</sup> a “deliberate pattern of heightened environmental justice” is described as follows:

That pattern emphasized a preference for the poor among humans, a preference for biodiverse natural social ecosystems, and a preference for the most vulnerable among other critters and their habitats. (159)

Haraway's [*The*] *Camille Stories* enable a creative re-imagining of a post Anthropocene era or Haraway's preferred term, the *Chthulucene*. The stories present a baldly factual biography of a human being named Camille, for the purpose of focusing a reader's attention to the changing environmental context of her life. Haraway's “speculative fabulation” is an intriguing and creative means of considering the issue of environmental justice as well as an apparatus for exploring possible scenarios which might develop from a “deliberate pattern” of what is currently viewed as radical environmental thinking. The term environmental justice is also connected to the circumstances of indigenous peoples (and Haraway refers to their plight), many of whom have close and sustainable relationships with their local environment. Such populations are often at risk of forced displacement due to global capitalist projects such as mining or colonial expansion. The circumstances of modern displaced populations parallel the experiences of the townspeople from Arichonnan who were cleared from their homes (for similar reasons) and I write more about this subject in Chapter Four.

There is space for science and the arts to associate in rich new materialist collaborations which go beyond what a practitioner in either discipline could achieve alone, as a means of creating new languages of affect. Such new methodologies require synergies, not dualistic oppositions, with an emphasis on process, on questioning, or open intangibles rather than costed, absolute, end stopped answers. We need new shapes and forms of creative response to activate change at the deepest and most fundamental level, to document the diverse and ‘nested’ perceptions of home that I am proposing in this commentary, for humans and non humans in entanglement. When I refer to ‘nested perceptions of home’ I mean home in a

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<sup>34</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble, Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 159.

diverse Bachelardian sense, in our physical, material and creative embodiments and beyond, our relationships with the human and non human in our environments, as the conventional sense of 'house and home', our local community environs and also on a global and planetary level. Our way of living is interconnecting, rhizomic<sup>35</sup> not a self-selecting branching linear timeline with a set beginning and end, as a discrete human self with dominion over 'nature' and the non human.

Pritchard and Prophet<sup>36</sup> refer to Karen Barad's terminology as a means of discussing art practices, using "diffraction as an optical metaphor", conceiving of diffractions as a "counterpoint to the metaphor of reflection" because, citing Gibbs (1998) they do not "place the same elsewhere". They describe the difficulties which beset what they refer to as "arts-based research" within the context of university accountability systems, how such research is judged through "exercises such as the Research Assessment Exercise or the Research Exercise Framework (REF 2014)". The implication is that arts-based research takes on the methodology and presentation protocols from other subject areas as a means of articulating but also justifying artistic output as 'valid' research. They go on to identify the issue of how cultural theorists and producers may regard the results of cross disciplinary work in a positive light while remaining unaware of the danger that the differences between them might be *blurred* by ensuing reductive processes. Pritchard and Prophet argue for *diffractive methods* as opposed to *reflective methods*, to adopt *diffractive* reading and writing as a means of illuminating:

differences as they emerge, amplifying how such differences get made, revealing what gets included or excluded through practice, and prompting us to question how those exclusions matter.' (7)

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<sup>35</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 155.

<sup>36</sup> Pritchard and Prophet, "Diffractive Art Practices".

They reference Haraway<sup>37</sup> who suggests that *reflective methods* entail *mímēsis*, *reflecting images* to produce cohesion and consensus of outcomes, rather than highlighting “patterns of difference” which ensue from the *diffractive methods* of research outlined above.

Finally, what I see to being particularly pertinent to asserting collaborative artwork as a valid research methodology, is Pritchard and Prophet’s idea that difference is not used to create boundaries between practices but to “map the material-arrangements that emerge from these differences”. They go on to say that these *differences* are not fixed and that characteristics may be shared by each position. Diffractive approaches enable oppositions to be accounted for, or acknowledged, rather than to operate as dualist polarities which result in the pruning out of potential synergies as a means to directly arrive at cohesive conclusions, usually with one side ‘winning’ out over another. Diffraction therefore, leads to a “relational nature of difference”<sup>38</sup> conceived of as “*rapprochement*” by Pilgrim and Prophet [my italics].

Teemu Mäki<sup>39</sup> considers the benefits of art as research as opposed to scientific ‘objective’ methodologies. He discusses how art has the potential to address issues and values which often elude scientific method. He states that art “operates in an unclear territory” (11), which he describes as:

passionate, compassionate, and assimilative, but on the other hand clearheaded and analytic, as if the entirety was simultaneously examined from a bird’s eye view too.  
(11)

This bifurcated, synchronous view has similarities to that espoused by Leonora Carrington in her approach to writing and painting, and later on I discuss how the joint perspective of the micro and macro connects to Stott’s ideas about immersion as a “falling back into” with the non human in her discussion of Elizabeth Bishop’s interest in Darwin’s scientific writings.

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<sup>37</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan\_Meets\_OncoMouse:Feminism and Technoscience*, (London: Routledge,1997).

<sup>38</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

<sup>39</sup> Teemu Mäki, “Art and Research Colliding”, 10<sup>th</sup> Version1, *Journal for Artistic Research*, (February 2014). <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/49919/49920> Subsequent page references in text.

Although Mäki does not use the term, the process he analyses has many features in common with *diffraction* interpretations and production which departs from homogenous, uni-vocal, conventional perspectives of research output. He suggests that art is a philosophical-political practice and comments: “Art creates and distributes the kind of silent, tacit, or experiential knowledge and values that are only partially verbalisable” (11). Moreover, “Art (and philosophy) are essential, because values cannot be derived from mere facts” (11). In this sense he proposes “art/philosophy” as a form of “anti” research which he considers to be important because it provides opportunities for “the creation, testing and expression of worldviews as artistic visions, without any pressing need to translate them clumsily, step by step, into a verbalised argument” (11). It is a stepping away from unified narrative in preference for the pluralities of ‘voice’ or articulations, those of the human and beyond the human.

In the paper I have cited previously, Mäki moves on to what I think is his most important point about art as research; (bearing in mind he is referring to Finnish higher education institutions) he believes that there is a “wider acceptance of the extended concept of knowledge” (14) this is because the research in universities has “revealed the limitations of purely verbalised knowledge and thus created a need for a wider spectrum of knowledge and research” (14). He identifies philosophical and sociological perspectives as the prime movers for bringing about this shift in approach thereby enabling the arts to find a home where “the university becomes as good a place to practise art as it is to practise science” (14). Yet he identifies one particular risk associated with this shift in practice whereby “research is seen as the hunt for ‘hard facts’ and art as only the search for semi-subjective aesthetic pleasure”.

Mäki’s thorough interrogation of the issue of art as research describes five models of practice. “Model 4 - ART + WRITTEN THEORY = ARTISTIC RESEARCH” probably best fits with developing notions of practice based doctoral research in Britain, so that “art making and theory writing are seen as research methods, and research results also include both artworks and theoretical texts”. He does not claim that this approach is likely to result in better research or art, he describes and discusses how the work might fail and be an awkward juncture of the two. When the model works effectively Mäki concludes that the “positive

potential” of his final two models have a number of clearly discernible characteristics. This is one which particularly resonated from my perspective and worth striving for:

(The positive potential of model 4) leads to better art if the intuitive artistic practice is infiltrated with a verbalised, conscious and theoretical understanding and vice versa. This does not mean they would merge into one, but that they take turns to play the roles of the soil and a tree: one feeds the other, as in the process whereby a tree absorbs water and nutrients from the soil. (21)

In terms of collaborative work it is possible that the interplay of alternative perspectives creates more space for the authentic entanglement of theoretical understanding and making because these two aspects are continually contested. If this process is documented and truthfully represented across varied media, it is easier to see the ‘joins’, the inconsistencies and the difficulties in order to produce richer and more disruptive, and problematising interpretations. In this way it is harder to ‘close down’ the work, Mäki’s ‘Model 4’ does not necessarily imply cohesion or consistency. I am proposing that the method of working which evolved with Adrian was diffractive: we talked to immerse ourselves, to entangle ourselves in diverse meanings as ripples, issuing forth in (diffractive) waves, each patterning out in interaction with others.

## Part 2 Context and collaboration

In this section I describe the context for the collaboration with Adrian Evans (AE), how we developed a method of working with each other and the main *effects* and *affect* the partnership had on my own work for this project.

The following account describes a collaborative creative process which I conceptualise as *diffractive*; arising from patterns which were generated from collisions, synergies, confusions and uncertainty. We embodied or inhabited a form of experimentation which was bound up with experiencing and expressing *affect* rather than recording quantifiable *effects*. The resulting artwork was a moment of conjugation, of waves furling into interactions of process,

which recursively arrived and retracted. Once it left us it went on to encounter other affects in relation to others, to suggest new meanings, sensations and ideas, as part of an exhibition, in co-existence with other pieces.

I came to think that there was an underlying serendipity to the Arichonan project, despite all my misgivings about the writing and the collaboration, a series of coincidences propelled me into going to Scotland. My greatest concern was that I had not met Adrian before the field trip. We had spoken at length on the phone and we appeared to have developed enough of a rapport to discuss the direction of the project and its possible outcomes. However, this was not really a direct indicator of how we would get on in fairly close proximity. As it turned out we had more in common than I had first thought. When we were introduced, I realised his name was already familiar to me, from when I was at primary school and it wasn't long before we established that he was in the same class as my sister and that his older brother was in the same class as me. It was very strange to be able to talk about common ground (literally), about the place where we were brought up. Even stranger was meeting a recent friend of Adrian's who lives in Tayvallich (where we stayed), who was also from south east Hampshire and attended the same primary school for a while. Of course, this apparent coincidence was not entirely due to fate, the three of us come from similar uprooted backgrounds due to our father's occupations. My father served in the Royal Navy, Pete's father served in the armed forces and Adrian's father was an engineer working for a multinational company and was similarly geographically untethered. All three of us had scattered from the locality from where we had been brought up, never to return due to moving on to higher education and in Pete's case joining the Royal Navy. Neither of us had a fixed idea of home due to our parents' geographical mobility, moving away was the normal thing to do. For my family at least, displacement was no longer an external force exerted upon us, but rather an inner imperative, internalised to ensure economic stability; geographical mobility had become a positive life choice.

There were also parallels in terms of our professional lives which impacted on the project; Adrian teaches Architecture and I teach pedagogy and English for primary initial teacher training. We discovered there were many synergies in our practice, that we faced common challenges and subscribed to similar professional values as an integral part of our work, more

so compared to other academic disciplines. For this reason, the ethical dimension of the project was a concern to us both, how to respond authentically and sensitively to past trauma and how to acknowledge and respect cultural boundaries. These concerns which are related to responsiveness are core professional values for each of us and influenced the method we chose to approach the clearance at Arichonan.

The first poem in the Arichonan collection states my anxieties about the project, the difficulty in finding an authentic voice, one which is not “borrowed”. If I had attempted to write the event almost as a poetic play-script I had the uneasy feeling that it could all teeter on the brink of a *Les Miserable* or *Brigadoon* fusion scenario. Unlike Graeme Macrae Burnet<sup>40</sup> I was not remotely of the place and research into the documentation of the clearance at Arichonan represents the accounts of the perpetrators, not the victims. Macrae Burnet stressed the importance of his research into the life of crofters in the 1800’s as a means of creating an authentic seeming world, one with clearly delineated and carefully observed social stratification which had particular implications for the inhabitants of remote communities. He also commented that he had a direct familial connection to the time, place and space, which further motivated his research and writing.

My other potential difficulty with the collaboration was related to it being a male/female dyad which brought up issues of power in working relationships. I was aware that I needed to be pragmatic in my approach and not to become too hung up over issues of gender and power because if I had been over-sensitive to this point, I would not have been able to proceed with the project. There were the everyday considerations to negotiate – the constraints of time and funding. Adrian is also engaged with part-time doctoral research in Architecture while working full-time which meant he had limited time to devote to the collaboration. He was also facing a confirmation board and any project he worked on needed to be seen to tie in with his studies. Adrian’s programme of study is practice based and for this reason he was keen that the collaboration focused on the site of his planned build in Tayvallich (nearby to Arichonan). Due to his situation I felt very torn, it was a question of going with Adrian’s research interests or not being able to work with him to produce a piece

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<sup>40</sup> Graeme Macrae Burnet, *His Bloody Project*, (Contraband Books, 2015)



for the exhibition. My motivation for deciding to participate as part of the *In the Open* exhibition was also bound up with challenging myself to work in different ways and to make creative connections beyond Essex University.

The issue of influence or power became clear in our conversations about the form which the creative piece would eventually take. I wanted my perspective and writing to have parity with the material making and I felt I had to assert myself to achieve this. This might appear to be a negative position to be in, however in reality this was not the case because I had to articulate my thinking to justify my point of view. Discussions with Adrian were always stimulating and strenuous; quite often we would both say that we felt exhausted after our phone conversations. I think this is the value of cross disciplinary collaborations, which often have surprising amount of overlap, despite drawing on unfamiliar discourses and philosophies. It made it possible for each of us to stand within the threshold of another discipline, sometimes to usefully cross pollinate with the other's stance. Adrian's position as an architect and maker was most often directed towards pre-planned material outcomes whereas I was more concerned with searching my way towards writing for an unknowable conclusion, but more of this later. I think that by combining our separate strengths we produced work which had a wider and more speculative scope compared to what we might have achieved individually.

In the few months before we travelled to Scotland when we discussed the form that the work would eventually take, Adrian had a very strong idea of how it would look. Part of this process involved discussing the conceptual underpinning of the work and I was convinced that the 'truest' way to proceed was to wait until the field trip before we decided on anything concrete, that documenting our influences and discussions was integral to finalising the design of our completed work, not the other way around. I was resistant to the idea of designing work before we went to visit Arichonan because I believed that our piece should be an authentic 'felt' response and we should allow space for unaccounted for events.

I think my strong views about this issue derive from my experience as an Early Years educator, whereby the expectation is to respond flexibly to learning situations as they are experienced, not to proceed with pre-conceptions of what *should* be learned. I am

accustomed to simultaneously appraising and responding to groups of learners, in early learning contexts and on some occasions to large numbers of students in a lecture theatre. I am practised in this form of rapid reflection and considered responsiveness as a means of co-constructing learning, not to inflexibly impose my views. I would argue that this process is a form of creativity, of an instantaneous and precarious kind and the most inclusive if all the elements combine fortuitously. It is immediately identifiable as a space and a 'flow' when you are participating in it, whatever your status in the proceedings. The time I spent in Scotland working with Adrian undoubtedly possessed this elusive quality, as 'fish' and 'fowl' we had somehow generated a creative space, or *home* for making. Afterwards Adrian wrote to me saying:

'Making that space, that brief, quiet place to be away was a hard thing for us to do. And - I don't think I have articulated this - I feel indebted that you accepted so gently and readily, a place that was 'my' suggestion; though perhaps that is arrogant of me; I think perhaps that Arichonan suggested itself'.

From my own perspective, working in a partnership often created useful dialectics which energised my thinking and fed directly into the writing process. Adrian's focus is that of an architect, he was bound up with producing a material piece of work and he was used to making one key creative decision based on a myriad of complex considerations which in time would become a building. I think that this professional attribute made it difficult to convince him not to have a fixed idea of an end product before we went to Scotland. At the start of the collaboration Adrian had most power because he knew the territory, he literally owned part of it; he knew the location very well and initially I felt at a loss in this situation. I made a conscious effort to read the books Adrian recommended and to research his influences in order to attempt to occupy a similar thought space. I bought an Ordnance Survey Land Ranger map so that I could see the lie of the land, where Arichonan was situated and to identify the location of other features, such as the cup and ring markings on natural rock formations.

My journal (Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017) summarises a phone conversation with Adrian. We spoke about displacement and how this applied to different contexts. I had divided the page

in half to make a list, to credit Adrian's ideas and to record my own in order to separate them out, to track their development. It was interesting to see that much of Adrian's thinking related to the material environment, for example, geology, geography and to the work of artists who had influenced his work, such as Anthony Gormley, Maria Pacheco and Will Maclean. On my side of the page I had listed ideas which were mostly related to social and historical perspectives. I was interested in how the clearances related to the thinking of the time, to Malthus and other economic thinkers of the nineteenth century who considered notions of progress and social 'hygiene'. I was immediately struck by the date of the clearance at Arichonan which was 1848, the so called 'year of revolution'. Furthermore, the date of the clearance at Arichonan more or less coincides with the centenary of the last Jacobite rebellion of 1745 – 46 that ended with the battle of Culloden in 1746 which resulted in the defeat of Charles Edward Stewart by the Duke of Cumberland. The Duke of Cumberland's victory initiated the dismantling of the Scottish ancestral clan system of governance and enabled the acceleration of the English colonial project which promoted the removal of the indigenous populations in the Highlands in the guise of 'modernisation'. The implications and effects of colonialism upon indigenous people form an ongoing thread throughout this project and in Chapter Four I discuss this aspect particularly in relation to social and environmental justice. In my journal, I wrote about the clearance as a 'fault line' in the history of the Highlands and I noted the question 'whose fault?'. Already I was considering the project in terms of social justice and wider historical and social perspectives. I also listed phrases which in my mind were associated with the act of clearance: '*a banishment, a silencing, a removal*'.

Adrian had chosen to approach the Arichonan township ruins as a deep mapping project and due to his interest, I thought it would be productive to think about the corollary of applying this perspective. I considered two-dimensional mapping as an act of 'draughtsmanship' (in my journal I emphatically underlined 'man'). This consideration proposed the landscape as 'other' (later this idea of the 'other' as landscape entered into the poetry), that two-dimensional mapping was an act of management and control relying on quantification, on measurement leading to economic valuation and ultimately to the commodification of the land and its indigenous people. I was concerned that anything I wrote would be this, the worst kind of mapping; poetry as an imposition of meaning, as a bid for control of the

narrative. Two-dimensional mapping has often been deployed as a tool of domination and colonisation. From what I understand of deep mapping, the opposite applies. The inquiry is directed at unfolding a specific landscape into its many constituent aspects, not just the physical, but overlapping aspects of the archaeological, anthropological, psychological and historical. At this juncture, I started to consider the methodology of the project and Adrian's interest in deep mapping provided a means by which to unite our approaches. I proposed that we approach the project with a close attention to process, not end product. I wanted our method to encompass accountability, meaningful dialogue, attentiveness and qualitative analysis through dialogic talk and critical reflection.

In part, my perspective, as I explained earlier, is drawn from my background as an Early Years educator and lecturer in Education. It is important for me to comment here about the specific influence of Reggio Emilia for the Arichonan collaboration, because so much of its thinking consciously entered into the way I engaged with the project. The Reggio Emilia approach to learning uses experts, *pedagogistas* (teachers but not as they practice in the UK) and *atelieristas* (artists/makers) to model and scaffold learning through documentation and dialogic<sup>41</sup> talk by this means the process of creative work is separated out into readily assimilated structures which the child or learner will eventually internalise to use as part of their own independent creative expression and practice. This is what is meant by Malaguzzi<sup>42</sup> (a leading Reggio Emilia practitioner) when he refers to the "hundred languages of children".

The Reggio Emilia approach is essentially collaborative, learning is carefully documented in various ways through photographs, video recordings, drawings by the children to represent their own interests and ideas and written observations of the children by the *pedagogistas* and discussions between the children and with the adults. The documentation is displayed using light boxes, screens, or pinned up on the walls to be referred to and discussed with and by the children. Therefore, learning is co-constructed, developing organically between all parties and departs from the 'top downwards' mode, which is the norm in most educational contexts, whereby the knowledge giver is active and has power and the recipient is passive

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<sup>41</sup> Robin John Alexander, *Towards Dialogic Teaching: rethinking classroom talk*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (York: Dialogos 2008)

<sup>42</sup> Carlina Renaldi, *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia* (London: Routledge. 2006).

and 'weak'. Reggio Emilia pedagogical theory references Deleuze and Guattari, drawing from their model of the *rhizome*<sup>43</sup> for its approaches to learning, one which is organic and democratic, as opposed to traditional arboreal models of learning.

I used my journal as per the Reggio Emilia approach, to capture process for reflection and discussion, not to record the making of a preconceived product. Therefore, my journals were used as a means to construct what in Reggio terms is my own personal *language* of expression in response to a particular location and situation. When I visited Arichon and travelled in the local landscape I took photographs and video clips to document my ideas, to replay them back to myself or to discuss with Adrian. From the beginning of our collaboration I made sure I jotted down the details of phone conversations with him, to keep track of our thinking. Now, looking back at my journal I can see how themes from our conversations were developed and realised at the level of the poems or in Adrian's making. Email from CW to AE, February 2017:

I very much like your ideas for your project – your connection to place – the sense of curating histories / geologies / geographies to make sense of building into the future is a feat of pragmatic imagination – a Janus view and a deep commitment. In Iceland, there is a library of water... the idea appeals – to represent in a permanent form that which is usually unboundaried and mutable – to me this seems to have some parallels with your work. I feel that I need to research the remaining, almost intangibles as a basis for writing – of responding to traces of lives lived, the resonances of time and place to make an adjacent response to your own mapping and creative work.

Throughout my journal the issue of methodology is strongly represented in terms of the writing process and also with regard to documentation and discussion because I recognised that I needed to capture the intangibles of working in collaboration with Adrian and to fix our dialogue as a means of tracking the development of our thinking about the final piece. I comment on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017: "not documenting what is seen, but how we see." It is at this point that I first start to think about taking soundings as a constructive process within the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

scope of journaling. I also ask the questions “What do we want to show/share?” and “How do we want people to experience our findings?”.

In an attempt to answer these questions, I considered the term ‘documentation’ in relation to sharing the project. I jotted down ideas such as ‘transformational curation’ whereby the ‘agency of the non-human is acknowledged’. I write about displacement and the paradox of representation. The journal entry for the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017 remarks:

Displacement implies an emptiness or absence following migration, drift or flight as a result of rupture or change. We want to document the challenges of representing mutable or intangible conditions, those experiences or phenomena which trickle through the fingers – which are not present in the historical record or marked on the environment. We are in search of a methodology to document our responses to displacement in a specific location.

Adrian’s particular interest is voyaging as an aspect of displacement. His making was influenced by the work of Will Maclean<sup>44</sup> whose work *The Voyage of the Anchorites* (1996) specifically references the Highland clearances. Will MacLean’s boat shaped sculpture represents a curagh (coracle) containing two zoomorphic figures, one male with fish and beard attributes and a female represented by a bird. The boat has a cargo of representational objects to create a notional new home; sticks for shelter, quern stones to grind grain and religious artefacts. It represents a mythic microcosm of home: man, woman, shelter, food and implements of faith, the boat enables displacement and new beginnings. In parallel with this piece Adrian and I enacted a similar narrative; we were fish and fowl in an aged ford transit travelling northwards with the canvas skin of a tent to encircle our discussions by the stove. We were adrift from our usual lives and perhaps we had to be displaced ourselves in order to fully connect with the project?

*The Voyage of The Anchorites* was reminiscent of boat burial graves that I had seen elsewhere in the British Isles and in Norway. Adrian and I talked about how the act of burial

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<sup>44</sup> Will Maclean, *The Voyage of the Anchorites*, (1996), Wood, Wax finish, Edinburgh, Scottish Parliament.

also incurs displacement and a taking up of space which in time becomes an absence as the body decays. We were interested in how archaeological excavations become a material form of disruptive reading, which enacts a process of cultural translation. It occurred to me that exhumation as a material act of 'reading' becomes an appropriation, a displacement of other meanings in the trajectory of interpretation. I noted on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017

perhaps the most honest source of action is to simply describe what is found (to) avoid interpretation to prioritise questions, to leave space for a multiplicity of meanings.

I left a note to myself in my journal after this comment, with the word "Silbury", with reference to *On Silbury Hill* by Adam Thorpe<sup>45</sup> which wrestles with interpretation and translations relating to the origins and purpose of the feature manufactured in Neolithic times, which have since become opaque after it was built four thousand years ago:

What has come down to us as picturesque ruin, as melancholy reminder of human transience, as haunting relic of ungraspable ancientness, might instead be regarded, with a breath of informed imagination, as something quite other, trackable like a deer's slots in snow to what is utterly modern: as something that might have found its place (had we the evidence) in the history of what is known as 'pre-cinema' – with a trace of that intensity, that prehistoric reverence, awe and even fear, surviving in the familiar spell cast by a darkening auditorium.

*The Voyage of The Anchorites* had a strong influence on the final piece which became a hybrid form: a boat brought to earth occupied by generic figures which were intended to represent the people cleared from Arichonan as well as the dispossessed and displaced in our own time. I think Adrian's abstract forms were more powerful than if they had been tied to named individuals from Arichonan, even if that had been possible. For one thing if we had both followed this route, we simply did not have enough information about the people to make the representation authentic and therefore meaningful. All that remains are the

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<sup>45</sup> Adam Thorpe, *On Silbury Hill*, (Fratrum: Little Toller Books 2016), 219.

buildings, the accounts from the estate listing the payments for rent and finally the detailed court proceedings following the riots. There was also an issue with the parish records which for this period were not kept up to date by the district's incumbent rector, another instance of displacement whereby all the important events of the towns-peoples' lives were left unrecorded, their births, marriages and their deaths. It is poignant that the lives of these people were not thought to be worth the trouble of recording for posterity, or for their descendants. The arc of individual lives was lost, due to the failure to note even in brief terms that each person had existed and lived in this place. There are lists to show the numbers of marriages, births and deaths in different locations, but these are numerical aggregates, without individual names. These people were not erased from the public record, they were not considered to be a part of it, they were recorded in numbered categories as if they were sheep or cattle, as a commodity. The only names in the records are those who pay rent to the estate with a few details of how many "heads" are counted within their household.

The difficulty with researching the people of Arichonan, the struggle to find any concrete details about who was there at the time of the clearance increased our sense of distance from them which enhanced and contributed to the theme of what we began to call 'otherness'. We discussed the sense of the *other* frequently. For me 'otherness' conveyed a sense of not being of the time or place, that my use of documentation had become a process of mapping my 'space' (as time and place) in relation to the 'other'. At the time, I felt I needed to foreground and register that distinct difference in order to understand its particularity, to maintain its separation from me, to demonstrate its qualities authentically in my written responses. For both of us this was an ethical concern and I am continuing to research the subject. The most useful thinking regarding *otherness* is in the area of feminist materialist theory which includes ecocriticism and ecopoetics. Juliette Brown<sup>46</sup>, (art critic and historian, *terra incognita*) writes about the influence of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas on artist Alana Jelinek in relation to her work *The Field*. Brown succinctly summarises

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<sup>46</sup> Juliette Brown with Alana Jelinek, "The Field: An Art Experiment in Levinasian Ethics", in *Living Beings: Perspectives on Interspecies Engagements*, ed. Penelope Dransart (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 112.



the ethical issues which Adrian and I encountered and discussed, within the perimeters of Levinas' consideration of the "Other":

as individuals we struggle to contend with other subjectivities, or that which is outside of us and not in the ways we usually imagine. An ethical engagement with the Other involves examining false assumptions on which we have built a culture of the same. This means we have suppressed difference.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2017, I make a note in my journal, in which I describe the presentation of poet Jonathan Skinner<sup>47</sup>. Jonathan Skinner commented on paying attention to "*sonic vibration in the substrata*" as part of his method for writing/demonstration/protestation. Jonathan Skinner's approach connected directly to articles I had read about human and non-human interactions in terms of a willingness to subdue the dominant human perspective and to prioritise the affect of other than/non human entities. I thought about what this attention might mean in relation to the site of Arichonan; should we consider our inquiry as a "process of collaboration, not extraction; with an emphasis on receptivity (and) a non-prioritising of the personal". I went on to write "a thoughtful unwrapping of place, not mining (rather) soundings to communicate with place."

At this point in my journal (19<sup>th</sup> May 2017) I ask the question:

do we need to talk about our terms of reference – definitions – what we mean when we use particular terms? We need to reflect on our motivations and feelings i.e. formally as a method.

With thoughts of the human and non human in mind; directly below the comment above, I wrote *acknowledgement* on a separate line with a box drawn around it. I suggest that *acknowledgement* could be used to describe a method for writing about Arichonan to encapsulate "a method or process, as a key term for inquiry (or) communication with the

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<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Skinner, presentation on eco-poetry, Department of Literature, Film, Theatre Studies (LiFTS), Essex University, 15 May 2017.

other – the human / the non human and the self”. It occurred to me that collaboration was a multi-layered feature of the project, at many levels, the micro and the macro, as an attribute of deep mapping itself, the hinge point being *acknowledgement*. I justify the use of the term saying it is “a powerful word and process, it comes (with) the assumption that no view is ascendant – it assumes communication, a sharing, consciousness and awareness of the other with empathy and openness”.

In a later comment added to the margins arrowed to *acknowledgement*, I write “non-displacing, grounded yet yielding”.

Adjacent to these thoughts I consider the implications of *narrative*, attached to an arrowed jotted question “as a result of – interpretation? not acquisitive but interpretative. translation – is this a process of domination?”

Summarising this train of thought I write:

#### Acknowledgement → Shamanism

With the comment underneath “A shaman has preparedness to communicate beyond the human, to listen, see without prejudice”.

Underneath the previous sentence quoted above I stuck a post-it note listing three words:

chafing

deep time

ephemeral

This message to myself is self-explanatory after I return from Scotland, because these are meanings which came out of the experience of being and walking at Arichonan, Achabreck and in Kilmartin Glen, meanings which entered into the ideas for writing and the poems themselves, but more of that later.

Shamanism is a theme I frequently return to; it is the main theme in the *Baba Yaga* series poems (which I wrote from 2013 onwards) and to an extent it is a driver for the poems in the *book house : house book* collection which I have discussed previously. I have also written poems influenced by Leonora Carrington in response to prints of her paintings, which appear

to feature shamanistic and ritualistic scenes and events. In fact, for me writing often takes place in a sort of shamanistic thought space; that images, ideas, language/words - trance through my fingers into the ink. It is very fast vertiginous thinking: and this process produced the first two sections of *The Clearance at Arichonan*. I think I work in this way due to my initial approach; usually there is a strong visual element which I capture through taking photographs, drawing and painting or journaling to document my interest. When I work on my own this builds a space for the writing, which then tends to develop quite quickly. Working in partnership with another person gave me a clearer perspective of my practice, it revealed the steps and the *learning* inherent in the process. Initially Adrian was the literal architect of the project, in the Reggio Emilia sense, as an *atelierista*, so that I became a shadow architect ghosting within his structures *but* similarly he was transformed by working alongside me into a shadow poet. In this way we eventually built the work together on an equal footing, by treading in each other's footsteps through intensive, digressive and immersive dialogue.

Our differing backgrounds in terms of subject disciplines led us to talk a great deal about the prioritisation of science and mathematics in research and we were keen to demonstrate the validity of a project which drew from art and the humanities. We discussed how art and poetry enables or aligns a simultaneous view of the macro and the micro in the way Leonora Carrington describes; holding one eye to the telescope and the other to the microscope. Kathleen Jamie<sup>48</sup> makes similar comparative shifts of perspective in *Findings*, between the microscopic view of cell oncology and a wider viewpoint of the photographed topography of a river estuary, she notes that both share physical structures in common except on a different level of scale. Kathleen Jamie's analogy resonates with the ideas I hold about 'nestedness', not just in relation to home but posed as inter/intra -relationships, as entanglement and literal involvement. The following description of my reaction to handling Adrian's figures<sup>49</sup> is associated with this perspective:

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<sup>48</sup> Kathleen Jamie, *Findings* (Sort of Books, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Adrian Evans and Carole Webster, *The Clearance at Arichonan 1848*, (2017), "In the Open: collaborative artworks around place, landscape and environment", Judith Tucker and Harriet Tarlo, in *Plumwood Mountain* (2018).  
<https://plumwoodmountain.com/in-the-open-collaborative-artworks-around-place-landscape-and-environment-3/>

*The difference and distance between seeing AE's figures with the text tattooed onto their surface and then actually handling them, compared to the photographs that I had become used to. How the plaster is cool, then warms to the hand, that they have greater mass than expected, the text incised into the plaster touched and touching to the fingertips. I had not expected this, a surge of recognition - yet this is haptic and emotive not cognitive. The figure is larger in my hands, not a small fragile thing, I have to hold it in two hands because one hand will not bear the weight safely. I turn it around and I am absorbed in the moment of the encounter, I gently push my index finger through the void at the centre of the figure, away from the text. There is some roughness to the curving edge which leads through to the unseen side, the other. What I can see is the skin on the palm of my left hand which bears the weight while I explore the figure with sight and touch, making it unfamiliar, distant to me. I feel a reversal of proportion – the figure becomes a Henry Moore colossus and I am a minimal being crawling over its surface. The encounter is leading me away from myself and I am reading fragments of poems which I wrote, yet the words as letters are now strange to me; transformed from a micron skim of ink on a two dimensional plane to become re-coded as part of this solid artefact occupying space. The letters are carved out, removing traces of plaster so that the emptiness they leave behind is charged with a formed absence, continuing to signify but this process has altered their meaning – the effect allows the reader to enter bodily into the text, the words have greater affect, a wider sensual understanding resonates.*

*I think of trauma in relation to the figures - their tattoos as controlled damage, the scraping, fine line chiselling which can easily go off kilter, or could shatter the plaster. There is jeopardy in such inscription which corresponds to the more abstract production of writing – a high wire act when the concentration might fail and then the balance and flow is lost. The actual process of transcription on to the page is so much blander with word processing soft-ware – the erasures, the stumblings are smoothed away – homogenised into blocks or columns. This is why I always start with a fountain pen and paper it is a more intimate act of making and I can backtrack or score out as I please creating a drawing. Often, I will remember the shape of a poem, the style of*

*my handwriting – open loose and hurried or small tight and dark inked, the crossings out and marginalia when I come to look for it in my notebooks. The flow of the ink is tied into my thinking because I have been writing in this way for such a long time, unspooling ideas in loops, dashes and blanks, the dots of my ‘i’s racing ahead into the future untethered. Occasionally I struggle with reading my own writing and this is actually useful (but frustrating) because it makes my writing strange to me, so that I sometimes have to spend a few minutes guessing what I have written. I do think it is helpful to be strange or ‘foreign’ to yourself. Freud (Frosh) writes about these episodes as incidences of the doppelgänger effect – the glance to the mirror which reflects a stranger’s face, not your own and then the realisation that unaccountably and then unequivocally the stranger is you. I enjoy this sensation because another side is revealed, one which is not normally visible.*

I have written a great deal here about developing a shared method, notably one characterised by diffraction which formed a dynamic process for the collaboration with Adrian and which enabled the emergence of the key ideas which threaded through our project. Because we worked in a male/female partnership and because our respective academic backgrounds are quite diverse, I also needed to write about power in relationships and power invested in contrasting subject disciplines. I have written about how the practices we developed enabled us to work equably and as a result to take greater risks with our thinking and making than if we had worked alone. This method informed and regulated our communications with and responses to the landscape and the core theme of displacement. It made us attentive to absence and changes which resounded through time and place, affecting the human and non human. My account of how the collaboration evolved has created a context, as a rationale and precursor to the decisions I made when I wrote the poems for the collection. The development of a negotiated methodology for this project informed our work at every level with the sincere intention that it would give it coherence and credibility. But most of all we hoped our work would show an authentic and honest engagement with the theme of displacement both in the past at Arichonan and in modern day Britain, revealing how manifest injustices against the poor and dispossessed persist and resound spectrally as trauma throughout time.

## Chapter 2

### Diffraction readings for diffractive writings: immersion and immanence

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses first of all on the ethics of writing about a traumatic event in which I was not participant. I describe the necessary physical and cognitive circling round required to approach Arichonan in the present time, in the actual physical location as a means of taking *soundings* to gauge the effects and affects of place as part of the process of *deep mapping*. I write about how the inadvertent method of journaling was itself a form of mapping which recorded my own specific interactions with place and the non human thereby giving me space to reflect and attend to those effects and affects. The journal became the means by which I recorded my written responses to Arichonan and its locale; it enabled non sequential narratives and sketches as a repository for thoughts and ideas. I could rummage through this, re-reading and re-writing in what I came to identify as diffractive states, so that my previous writing impacted on my reading to produce subsequent writing and re-reading in a recursive process. In the previous chapter I described the field trip as a research process which is *diffractive* based as it is on collaborative research and practice. Later in this chapter I proceed to identify how *diffraction* entered into the process of developing the form and structure of the writing.

Part one of this chapter tackles the ethical issues connected to writing about traumatic historical events; of the necessity to be aware of the sensitivities regarding cultural appropriation. I suggest that “soundings” (derived from “deep mapping”) promote multiple, overlapping perspectives which enable diffractive readings and recursively in turn, diffractive writing practices as creative and ethical means of research.

Part two considers the antecedents and development of the process I used to write the poems in Arichonan collection. I analyse the effects and affects of my previous experiments with form and subject specific language borrowed from the natural sciences. I go on to explain how these experiments which I describe as producing *diffractive* readings for

*diffractive* writing characterise my style of writing and that I regard the poems themselves as experimental apparatuses or assemblages.

I discuss how diffractive readings might be placed to contest (and augment) traditional theist Romantic and transcendent creative responses to the non human and the privileging of the human perspective. To illustrate this discussion, I refer to Rebecca Stott's<sup>50</sup> consideration of Elizabeth Bishop's interest in Charles Darwin's scientific writing and her account of Bishop's chafing against the transcendentalist tradition in American poetry. I propose that Stott's notion of the secular "poetic sublime" with its emphasis on immersion and immanence offers an alternative non-hierarchical position for creative responses formed in association with the non human. I suggest that my use of diffractive readings has created an apparatus which invites immersion and immanence, as a means of writing 'closer', in entanglement with the non human.

## Part 1 Diffractive readings as soundings

I felt a great sense of trepidation before I travelled to Scotland and apart from not having met Adrian before, the most pressing issue of all was what form would the writing take? I could not decide on either the form or the structure before I went to Scotland because intuitively, I thought I needed to be there, to walk around the ruins of Arichonan to enable these aspects to suggest themselves. Before the trip I was already preparing for the visit by writing a journal to record ideas, images and to summarise the conversations I had with Adrian. I continued to use documentation and journaling as an ongoing mapping process to represent and establish my varied responses to the locations I visited, as a means of *embodying* the experiences through photographs, drawings, notes and reflections. Quite early on in my journals I shift from the term *deep mapping* to *soundings*. *Sounding* suggests varied acts of empirical observation such as sampling and measuring on land and sea, as a means of making records to chart changes over time in the form of data. However, there is an alternative meaning which conveys the sense of other synchronous data, as a form of synaesthesia, of paying attention *through* what is being seen, heard, touched, smelled and sometimes tasted, which unlike written records are often fleeting and insubstantial in outcome. I use *sounding*

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<sup>50</sup> Stott, "The Wetfooted Understory".

to evoke the different media I use for research as a corollary of reading which might enter into forms of production either as art or writing. I see this recursive process of 'reading' twist into writing/making and vice versa as a diffractive practice, enabling a multiplicity of relations in terms of the self and other. I view the creative process as one which combines reading and writing/making simultaneously as a moment of *becoming* not as an end-stopped product. Diffraction for Barad entails the behaviour of a process under observation, which alters according to the apparatus used and the perspective adopted by the experimenter. For me this concept inevitably started to bring to mind the behaviour of words lodged in and as part of a poem-apparatus as diffractive reading/writing.

Figure 1



Site of Arichonan (starred)

The issues I confronted regarding familiarity with place, prior to visiting Arichonan were primarily connected to language use. The court transcripts written in the register of nineteenth century legal English give notice for the townspeople to quit Arichonan and they convey a strong sense of physical threat and aggression. This form of linguistic colonialism was also evident at the time when the clearance at Arichonan was first communicated. English was deployed to issue the acts of removal against the townspeople and the writs



implied that anything less than complete compliance would be met with the full force of the law. Therefore, I wanted the first poem to literally *embody* this sense of threat, with a portrayal of the tongue as a muscular organ to convey abuse, as a means of articulating violence which was spoken and gestural, as a *dis-tasteful* act, hence “there is the difficulty/ of my tongue – the muscle/ of my culture speaking over yours”.

I felt that I needed to confront the issue of cultural appropriation. I thought it was unethical to re-imagine the events at Arichonan, to create a narrative which continued to exclude the townspeople by denying them a voice through speaking *for* them rather than attempting to speak *with* them. What is important here is that I am saying *I don't know*. I do not have the knowledge or more accurately an academic understanding of these historical events or the accompanying geographical, linguistic or social and cultural contexts, therefore how could I presume to write about the clearance at Arichonan?

In order to comprehend the scale of loss incurred when communities are marginalised, displaced or cleared I read ethnographic accounts about North American indigenous peoples and their relationships to their surrounding landscapes. I thought it would help me to see the likely effects of the depredations of language, culture and philosophy visited upon the indigenous people of Scotland by English colonials who embarked upon a forceful programme of cultural assimilation. Keith H. Basso<sup>51</sup> writes about the inter/intra relationships between the Western Apache people and their landscape which produce multi-layered meanings using the practice “speaking with names”. He refers to this example of one speech utterance:

It happened at Line Of White Rocks Extends Up And Out, at this very place! This utterance can be used to accomplish all the following actions:

1. produce a mental image of a particular geographical location;
2. evoke prior texts, such as tales and sagas;
3. affirm the value and validity of traditional moral precepts (i.e. ancestral knowledge);
4. display tactful and courteous attention to aspects of both positive and negative face;
5. convey sentiments of charitable and personal support;
6. offer practical advice for dealing with disturbing personal circumstances (i.e. apply

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<sup>51</sup> Keith H. Basso, *Landscape Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (US: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 100.

ancestral knowledge)

7. transform distressing thoughts caused by excessive worry into more agreeable ones marked by optimism and hopefulness; and

8. heal wounded spirits.

Basso<sup>52</sup> explains how a place name has the power to not just evoke but “activate’ and “anchor” a complex set of narratives, truths and beliefs for moral or instructive purposes, to be acted upon as “vehicles of ancestral authority”.

Robert Macfarlane’s<sup>53</sup> essay about the Isle of Lewis, also discusses how local place names have the power to “speak” their relations with the human, of their connections to sailing, agriculture and belief, with the implication that once these names fall into disuse a special form of knowledge is lost never to be regained. There is no reason to doubt that the people of Arichonan used specific place names connected to the use of the land, to myth, to historical events and to the marking of time. Such names would not have been recorded on paper, or on maps but rather, lived in the stories of the people to instruct, to warn, to comfort in the way that the Western Apache “spoke” their names for significant places. The use names from Arichonan are not recorded on the current Ordinance Survey map, they have fallen out of time never to be spoken again. It can be assumed that the clearance at Arichonan and elsewhere in Scotland destroyed indigenous vocabularies of place which expressed the relationships of people to their local landscapes. The clearances brought about not just the physical removal of communities but a multi-layered genocide, the death of languages, of long-standing cultures; the desecration of established relationships between the human and non human, the care of people for their place.

Robert Bringhurst<sup>54</sup> also writes about the loss of languages in connection to the land of First Nation people in America and Canada:

When you wipe out a community, a culture, and leave five or ten or twenty speakers of the language, you can claim the language survives, that it isn’t extinct. But what

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Macfarlane, “A Counter-Desecration Phrasebook”, in *Towards Re-Enchantment: Place and Its Meanings*, ed. Gareth Evans and Di Robson (London: Artevents, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Robert Bringhurst, *The Tree of Meaning: Language, Mind and Ecology* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008), 162.

happens is every bit as terrible as when you clearcut a forest and leave a strip of trees along the edge.... In both cases, something will eventually grow back – but what was there before is gone forever.

Robert Macfarlane collaborated with Jackie Morris<sup>55</sup> to produce an illustrated poetry book, or *spells* as Macfarlane describes his poems as “the lost words” which feature the names of once familiar plants, animals and trees. The book was developed from the realisation that modern children’s dictionaries are shedding such words because children are less likely to know them or refer to them due to changes in childhood experience. Macfarlane writes in the foreword: “The words were becoming lost: no longer vivid in children’s voices, no longer alive in their stories”. Macfarlane makes the point that if humans do not know the names of non human features in their local environment then they are not so likely to care about their loss in modern times. The naming is commutative, it works both ways because place names encapsulate connections between people and the landscape as a means of commemorating events, as descriptors, or as cyphers for myth and legend. Without such ‘grounded’ names a landscape becomes decultured, it is set adrift from human society and it is the nature of humans to exploit or despoil that which does not have a connection to them, the non-human becomes ‘other’.

In the poem *wrong tongued/whisper guessed* I raise the issue of cultural ventriloquism, the danger of speaking through voices from the past, of taking control of the narrative for personal gain in a way which does not properly respect or give space for them. To underline the sense of absence I encountered, I use imagery associated with the making of vernacular textiles because these are described as ‘soft’ archaeology which rarely survive in damp climates and are associated with women who generally lack economic power and whose lives are rarely documented in historical archives: ‘if I use your voice / will I mis-say what / you mean? Do I spin / you in, mis-weave the / missing? A story / theft, a myth / borrowed – feathering / the nest to utter / a fluttered, stuttering / form of telling:’ My reference to thread is a traditional metaphor for narrative, it is spliced with the idea that I might inadvertently or deliberately misappropriate the voices of the least powerful members of the

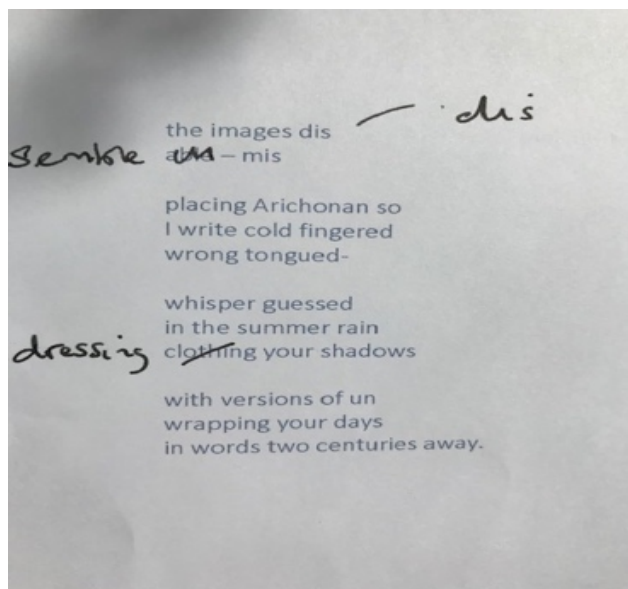
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<sup>55</sup> Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris, *The Lost Words: A Spell Book* (Hamish Hamilton, 2017).

community to serve my own ends. The 'nest' in the poem might be woven from supposition and misplaced imaginings because this is a more comfortable space for me to write in. I include the idea of a nest as reference to Bachelard, with the perspective that a nest is a natural, albeit temporary home, in this instance as a synthetic, created space for making. The point here is: I can leave Arichonan mostly without negative affect, however the townspeople displaced in 1848 had no choice and had to face the emotional and social consequences of the clearance.

I have had great difficulty writing the opening poem to the collection, I have written and re-written it, tinkered with single words and continue to feel dissatisfied. I have decided to stay with this the most current draft because this is closest to how I felt when I embarked upon the Arichonan project before I visited the ruined township in person. I see it as an "uneasy, queasy" poem which is probably not best suited to be the first poem in the collection, it is infected and inflected by self-doubt and ambivalence about the writing process. This is the final draft of the poem and even at this late stage, (May 2019) two years after I wrote the first draft, I am still making changes to it.

Figure 2



Journal extract May 2019

The strongest sense I have of writing this poem is one of a haunting at one remove, that I am reacting to intangibles, grappling with the absence of an absence, which has become a

ghostly presence. The final stanzas of the poem exhibit the classic signs of haunting, there is disfluency of language in the patterning of negation (dis, mis) as an attempt to convey that which is felt emotionally but not visible or audible – hence “I write cold-fingered / wrong tongued / whisper guessed”. These are my botched attempts to apprehend authentic material sensations while I am in actuality removed from the circumstances which produce them. When I discuss my relationship to the events at Arichonan I substitute the verb “clothing” with “dressing” because this implies greater personal involvement on my part, yet while I am attempting to dress, *ad-dress* [?] spectrality I am conflictingly and simultaneously seeking to “unwrap” something which was not fully represented or recorded. This poem reflects on my conflicted and awkward gestures, inferring that I am failing and will fail in a language which is anachronistic to 1848 and to the reality of the clearance at Arichonan. I return to the issue of “dressing up the past” in another poem which follows *the clearance at Arichonan 1848 soundings*, the 8<sup>th</sup> July 2017 which is based on a comment that Hilary Mantel<sup>56</sup> made during her Reith lecture of that date:

when your  
clothes  
become costumes

and your  
face becomes  
a mask, then

you have  
become  
history.

Mantel implies that becoming “history” makes people vulnerable to the loss of their humanity and personhood, that being reduced to the sum of their “costumes” obscures their individuality and vitality, by this means they are hollowed out. Pertinent to this stripping away of individual identity, a little while ago my sister visited a museum in Berlin with one of her Leipzig friends (my sister had worked and lived there prior to unification). They came upon a display of many of the products they had used during the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR) era which were now discontinued. They said it made them feel

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<sup>56</sup> Hilary Mantel, Reith Lecture, *Can These Bones Live?*, BBC Radio 4, London, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

uncomfortable, as though their lives had (and these are my sister's words) "become history". I think that what she meant here is that aspects of life in the DDR had been reified after reunification so that everyday items became historic artefacts, unnegotiable and perhaps unnavigable even for those who had once used them. This sense of being historicised is one that younger people rarely experience and when it occurs it is a glimpse of the uncanny, of fast approaching mortality. There is also another implication to Mantel's comment, at least for me and perhaps other writers; whereby any attempt to reverse engineer the past by making an authentic representation of it is fraught with difficulty, because our writing will always be an approximate, allusive incursion.

For all these reasons I do not feel 'at home' in the poem *wrong tongued, whisper guessed*, the sentiments are uncomfortable and claustrophobic. I feel as though I am aiming towards a conflicted moral and creative construct; that I am forever doomed to fail in reaching this point. The tone is all wrong. I felt I could not use my imagination to summon up the events of May 1848 because for the reasons I discussed earlier I thought this would be unethical so that I effectively blocked myself from attempting this, I was not in the 'flow' of writing. It was a mistake to have written this poem before I travelled to Scotland because I was at too far a distance from the actuality of Arichonan. My ideas and pre-conceptions were literally *ungrounded*. I develop this point further in Chapter 4 with respect to perspectives of nostalgia and "solastalgia"<sup>57</sup>.

In my journal 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019 I reflect upon my feelings about *wrong tongued / whisper guessed* after reading it to a small poetry meeting. I said before I read the poem that I did not like it and "that it appears to contain all the misgivings I had about the Arichonan project". This is what I wrote in my journal afterwards:

There is something of the sin eater about it – it embodies things I don't like about my own writing – spectres which I have conjured of my own volition – the stain of sentimentality, of conventionality, faux disclosure for artistic effect (and affect). I

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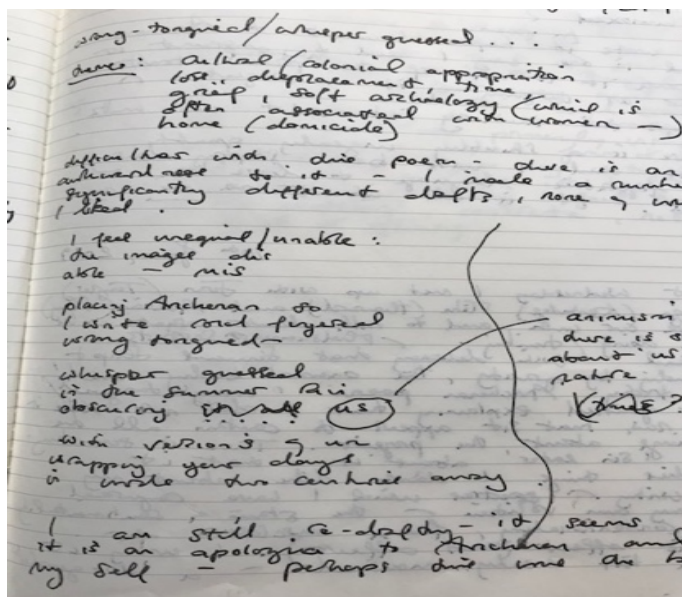
<sup>57</sup> Glenn Albrect, "Solastalgia: the distress caused by environmental change" in *Australian Psychiatry* v. 15, supplement (2007), DOI: 10.1080/10398560701701288.

worry it is a bit mealy mouthed – a ‘do-gooder’ poem. It is very tormenting. For me it is a haunted / haunting poem.

The extract scanned (below) from my journal (3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019) expresses the difficulties I was experiencing with redrafting the poem in an attempt to ‘tighten’ up the writing, to avoid the intimations of ‘faux disclosure’. In the extract I comment:

difficulties with this poem – there is an awkwardness to it – I made a number of significantly different drafts, none of which I liked. I am still redrafting it – it seems it is an apologia to Arichonan and myself – perhaps this is the best place to start from (by) feeling completely flummoxed? I wrote the poem before I went to Arichonan and in one way I need to discount it (from the collection) because it is not of the place – but a projection – perhaps this is the reason it can’t ever work? There is a stumbling ungainly quality to it and I have been stripping away the figurative language to leave the bones.

Figure 3



Excerpt from journal 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019

The solitary point of view predominates, it is one dimensional and lacks other perspectives because there is no *grounded* space for these. Everything is viewed through the lens of a tightly bounded ‘I’ which continually bumps up against preconceptions of time and place.

This writing perspective is only successful if the writer is fully present in the landscape or situation so that perhaps it is a mistake to adopt this position without an embodied presence. Otherwise the writing becomes *papery*, two dimensional and awkward, it lacks the vitality which derives from the exchange of relations between beings, the porosity of becoming in entanglement. For these reasons *wrong tongued/whisper guessed* trips up literally on its *self*.

The second poem in this section *arrival*, acknowledges other perspectives which are *relating* to the 'I' which is *attending* to the ruins of Arichonan; I am using the more active verb form here incurring multiple temporal and spatial perspectives as opposed to *relate* and *attend* which imply a single cul-de-sac conferring dominion on the single subject position. The intention is to offer diffractive readings from the perspective of the *I*, sitting on *a* red raincoat. The red raincoat offers dissonance to a reading; but it is also a point of focus or resonance for the *I*, writing. The single block of colour at that moment is an apparatus for a disruptive encountering of the green surroundings, to enable intense attention. An *I*, *becoming* a red raincoat, as a cypher for a human presence, a porous envelope of potentialities, *(un)glazed with rain water*<sup>58</sup>. Nothing depends on me *being* or *becoming* in that place. The red-raincoat-poem-apparatus focuses away from the human, to the ruins of the houses colonised by the 'more than human', to change and transformation enacted by lichen, grasses and flowers; attention is moving towards plants, animals, soil and stones. Human beings are becoming an irrelevance, their traces remain but these are on a spectral trajectory echoing from the trauma of displacement into an unspecified future. The landscape is impassive to the losses which have and will occur(red). My intention is for the poem to be open to what remains and how Adrian and I specifically interacted with the place as it is (was) on that particular day in June 2017. The perspective is recursive and unspools as a series of micro events or visual clips which meander to the framing of a view through a ruined window which after walking around the ruined houses, becomes one of a series of critical (micro) events.

When I looked out through the window of one particular house I saw and imagined how the view to the Caol Scotnish beyond might have appeared to a person who was standing in this

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<sup>58</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (London: Penguin, 1976), 57.



room nearly two hundred years ago. Would they have felt security or constraint? With their view looking down from the hills towards the South West they might have felt completely at home, at the centre of a familiar world which was nevertheless connected to a wider view which made home all the more precious. Alternatively, there was always the promise of travelling away while relishing the receding township, with the certainty of return. I felt it was a view that could offer either contentment in the best circumstances, or frustration and longing in the worst. Namely, looking out beyond gave a greater appreciation of the meaning of home or alternatively, the sense of home as confinement. Either way home, as a connection to place and time was the root of it all:

... as  
a slow open  
hinge out

from here – a vantage  
sight to Caol Scotnish a  
holding to the eye, one

scan to an end,  
to a beginning  
heaped with

un-reached  
flanks and curves and  
to the south west

that grey perhaps  
the drawing out  
to horizon lines.

I wanted these last stanzas of the poem to convey an ambivalent sense of home, as a place which enables a perspective beyond; as yearning for the unfamiliar which can only derive from that which is completely known. This sensibility is the proclivity of the dreamer who is secure because only the forcibly displaced dream avidly of home.

## Part 2 Diffraction readings for diffractive writing

After January 2008 I started to write poems which were much sparer than before. A few years ago I had experimented with what I called the 'dovetail poems' with a strict writing constraint of two or three syllable lines written in tercets or quatrains and a relentless aaa, bbb, ccc... rhyming scheme. These poems often abutted onto other texts, hence 'dovetail', a simple yet elegant means of joining two pieces of wood together. For example, I wrote a poem which drew upon, or dovetailed with the ambiance of Melville's *Moby Dick* as follows:

Finger track  
nail back  
hard tack

woodgrain  
salt stain  
end gain

red sail  
wave trail  
white whale

poised hull  
harpoon pole  
keening gull

dirty looks  
flesh hooks  
black book.

Ishmael's call  
grace fall  
losing all.

I wanted to see what effects and affects I could achieve through the most minimal writing. These poems have the structure of fishbones and I wanted to suggest the strictures of that patterning on the page. The faint outline of the 'bones' also suggests their inverse, that of absence, whereby the mind fills in the gaps. I wanted the reader to literally draw and ink in their own conclusions, to enable diffractive readings, beyond my immediate intentions for the poem, as a means of augmenting and multiplying my own meanings to entangle in a

readerly (re)writing of it. It is a design to encourage plurality of meanings to encourage post productions which go beyond the original making and the resulting artefact.

In retrospect the compression of drastically restricting syllables in *dovetailing Melville* gives the poem an anachronistic tone, reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon poetry. The compression gives the cadence of a kenning without the allusive element. I was using this restricted form as an apparatus, similar to a diffraction grating for photons<sup>59</sup> as a means of separating out meanings, to capture their maximal and minimal effects and affects. In this way a poem becomes analogous to a diffraction gating apparatus and vice versa, there are productive and commutative properties accruing to both interpretations. Each aspect reveals insights pertaining to the other and raises necessary questions. For example; viewing a poem in this way enables a writer to enact the position of a reader or as an experimenter; the poet is becoming an apparatus in the way a scientist enters into their experiment's design and outcomes. The poet *is becoming/per-forming* form and the form *is becoming/per-forming* the poet. It is a Bachelardian conundrum, whereby a poetic space is a quantum space which has temporal and physical flows and dimensions operating beyond and through matter, whether this is human or non human; it all 'matters' in the end, as Barad conceptualises it.

Once again as a writing experiment I continued with the theme of diffractive readings bound up with diffractive writings. I wrote poems which engaged with *The Handbook of Nature Study*<sup>60</sup> written by Anna Botsford Comstock, which was a pedagogical natural science text, a syllabus compiled for elementary teachers in the US. By collaging and borrowing subject specific vocabulary from the text I discovered an alternative to conventional figurative forms of representation and allusion. The resulting poems collaged scientific terminology together with Anna Botsford Comstock's (hereafter A.B.C.) own views and commentary. Sometimes this experimentation produced unusual and provoking effects which responded to natural phenomena but in addition revealed anthropological insights into life as it was lived in 1960s America. One lesson described how to make an instrument for observing the positions of the

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<sup>59</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 167.

<sup>60</sup> Anna Botsford Comstock, *The Handbook of Nature Study* (New York: Comstock Publishing Associates, 1963). Subsequent page references in text.

stars in the night sky which became a poem<sup>61</sup> including A. B. C.'s suggestion to use a 'bullet from a dresser drawer' as a weight for making a plumb line (845). This poem juxtaposes the study of the night sky, which to me as a child in the nineteen-sixties implied space travel, scientific progress and hence modernity, with that of an object imbued with destruction, with primitive ideas about individual liberty. The reference is so casual, yet troubling for contemporary readers accustomed to accessing on social media, news about atrocities often carried out in American public places. How could a teacher instruct a pupil to use a bullet from their home to make a plumb line? As a primary teacher myself I baulk at this – because of what the suggestion signifies and assumes; at that particular time in small town American homes bullets are as common as cutlery in kitchen dressers and for all I know they might be still in some communities. Here is a section from *The Skyclock*, page 845 to place this point in context:

Divide the  
circumference by  
twenty-four

and number  
the divisions. Then  
fasten a black

string eight  
inches long  
on a line

from the centre  
and fasten  
to the end

a bullet or  
washer so the  
string will

hang plumb.  
Hold the dial  
to see Polaris

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<sup>61</sup> Appendix 2, *The skyclock*, full text included.

As I was writing these poems, (one each day as a creative writing exercise) I reflected that the poems took on a particular way of seeing due to the restricted form. The reading and subsequent editing for the collaged writing became quick intense observations drawn from the text analogous to drawing from a microscope view, one eye to the eye piece and the other eye focusing on the drawing. To achieve a drawing requires switching the view from one eye to the other. A similar technique is required for general observational drawing or painting, and I think it is characteristic of my own writing process and the form it takes. Sometimes the effect is similar to that of a *zoetrope*, or a flicker book, there is the impression of movement or animation given by showing a rapid sequence of individual images. The shape of the poems on the page from a distance is similar to that of a ribbon of film, each stanza is reminiscent of a frame of film unspooling vertically. The surrounding white space around the text gives the effect of a deep mount which for visual art draws attention to the minutiae of a small image, whereby tiny details are given space to breathe, to be noticed. The intention is to convey a sense of flow moving down the page, analogous to a rope ladder or braided thread; to have flex and animation, to suggest a structure that dangles, one which has not been fully secured.

Interestingly one poem, *The wasp*, page 282<sup>62</sup> fails because A.B.C. herself, uncharacteristically uses figurative language which fixes the writing at a particular moment in time so that it jars for a current reader. The smooth, even surface of the pedagogical tone is disrupted by references to hair styles and hairdressing techniques characteristic of the time. These are moderately anachronistic, but what is most disruptive is the overt gender bias, which ascribes feminine traits and accoutrements of the period to a female wasp, the implied male 'gaze' is also present albeit through a microscope lens.

When I wrote/collaged this particular poem I considered how uncomfortable I felt at this process of gendering the non human. That it read like a doubly pernicious form of anthropomorphism, a means of making the other less 'strange' through gendering as well as humanising. With that dual repositioning of the subject there is a corollary, a closing down of questions and therefore meanings. In this writing experiment I wanted to write poems which

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<sup>62</sup> Appendix 2, *The wasp* page 382, full text included.

responded to and interacted with the discourse of the natural sciences. I wanted to see how subject specific language worked in a different context, I was interested to observe the effects and affects, to see if these would open up questioning spaces within which to interrogate my own writing.

*The hedge bindweed*, page 518<sup>63</sup> is one other poem in *The Handbook of Nature Study* collection which is of interest because it is an early example of the style and form I carry into the Arichonan collection. This is the final section of the poem:

The seed is closed: first by  
the smallest sepals,  
then each size in order before

the great bracts  
wrap the pod, two  
seeds and a running root

across the seasons.  
The flower opens until mid  
day and Müller

says they stay perhaps  
for moonlight  
waiting for hawk moths?

The language is sufficient for the subject, it provides precise information through the use of specific terms for the reader to understand how the hedge bindweed propagates without figurative language which is often concerned with human cultural tropes thereby ‘othering’ the non human. The use of analogy and metaphor might be inflected by anthropomorphism, whereby during the process of making comparisons between the human and non human, particular qualities pertinent to the non human are screened out and therefore affect and effect are minimised. Analogy and metaphor have the capacity to colonise the non human through mímēsis or other forms of cultural appropriation. This is the reason why I am interested in subject specific language, in this case terms taken from the natural sciences, which I think enable a different and richer engagement with the non human. Such terminology acknowledges the *separateness* of the non human (as opposed to *separation*

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<sup>63</sup> Appendix 2, *the hedge bindweed*, page 518, full text included.

which implies otherness) and its manifestations throughout material dimensions. In turn, the use of subject specific language in poetry encourages the human to properly acknowledge the hedge bindweed's attributes, to facilitate *entanglement*. This language use facilitates a diffractive reading/writing in creative practice, for a reader and a writer to enter into a more nuanced productive un-prioritised relationship which includes an undifferentiated space for the non human.

When I was writing the poems for the first section of the Arichonan collection I consciously used features of my experimentation from *The Handbook of Nature Studies*. For example,

There is a  
dark thistle  
beyond, buds

shut down  
for now, thick  
stemmed, sparse

leaved, starting  
new petals mauve  
black held taut by

bent wire  
forms a design to  
entice a bee...

In this way throughout the poem I move from close observations of natural phenomena to wider speculation about the past and to my immediate position seated on the red raincoat near to Adrian sleeping in the grass. There is a switching from the present moment to the distant past and my own more recent memories. As the writer I experience time recursively in the poem, spiralling around from my own subject position, outwards into history and snail shell turns, yet simultaneously inwards towards the centre:

At the centre  
the ash tree  
takes in the

higher wind  
-leaves  
as kinetic

fast cyphers  
choreographed  
against the

slower  
changes re-  
shaping the

human out  
of this  
space.

(He wakes as  
if from a  
journey; eyes

washed  
clean by  
away and

I can see it now  
he is the boy my  
sister once knew.)

Gaston Bachelard<sup>64</sup> uses the metaphor of the shell to describe the poet's personal and psychological perspective of the past with reference to Maxime Alexandre's poetry and this is the image I had in mind as I reflected upon these stanzas "My shadow forms a resonant shell/And the poet listens to his past/ In the shell of his body's shadow". I am dwelling in the present, future and the past simultaneously, as an adult woman sitting amongst ruins and as a child at primary school. These distinct selves, woman and child, existing in three temporalities are congruent with wider perspectives of history, of the township as it was in the past and how it appears in the present day, in ruins encroached upon by the non human.

*against that house sheaved in green summer grasses* refers to what I called the "fern house". Other than the shape of a house; with walls, a gesture towards a doorway now existing as a threshold, very little of the human remained, it had become an un-home. Nevertheless, there was a sense of shelter from the wind, the sun shone into it and warmed us, its ruinous state as a home for once humans was transformed by its opening out to the elements to 'house'

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<sup>64</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 124.



ferns, lichens, mosses and invertebrates. The grassy paths were linked by tiny holloways, evidence of small mammals such as voles and mice living amongst the ruins. The remains of the houses teemed with life. My observations of the non human in the fern house inferred human presence from the past. The difficulty of this approach is that of creeping anthropomorphism to produce a superficial and detached representation. I used photographs and the observations in my journal of what I had seen, touched and sensed in the 'fern house' as pragmatic allegories for my thoughts about who had lived there before.

The poem states human absence and non human agency. The window is "glassless", so that the grey sky defines the space, it is "scripted" with rain which "prints" the walls. The water is seen as an animated vector for other non human entities: it "steps light/ and shadow/ against that /house sheaved / in green summer grasses". The sound of a breeze in the grasses is overlaid by a commentary on the human which is not specific to one person so that human presence is distilled to "all we say is air". The language related to the human position is allusive; human attributes are presented synchronously with references to the non human, so that the lines "and our words 'fern\un /furl from mouth/ to earth to sky" give the impression that the fern's unfurling is as expressive and meaningful as human spoken words. Words are formed from air, from breath and the air passes into the soil, into the sky, into plants and animals, so that there is a state of co-mingling. I wanted to give the impression of a spectral conversation; that traces of human utterance correspond or align with natural phenomena and that the meanings produced are mutual and equivalent.

There is a poignancy to the ruined house which led me to think of human remains. This sensation derives from human empathy and kindness towards the dead which produces sadness and an elegiac tone. So that the vitality and liveliness of a herring shoal "the silver ones" infuses and enables a human relationship between an unnamed (fisher) man and woman: "the finger/ ring cast in/ salt a whiteness a/ kindness/ curled into/ the sadness of/ you along/ straight bones". From my position I am 'reading' further spectral traces which I envisage as small generic actions, portrayed as the most reductive units of expression, as morphemes and graphemes, so that the humans are "becoming" due to their own utterances, their own words, because this is the only recourse available vis-à-vis the spectral: "you loved/ you wept/ you *said*/ such *words*/ across and entered/ you *spelled* yourself/ and

she *read/* you utterly and/ truly the making/ and the leaving/ is all here/ in this roofless house". This approach is continued in Part Four *the clearance at Arichonan 1848 soundings*; the townspeople are brought into becoming through second-hand words, from the court transcripts because their direct speech is not reported in the proceedings.

This poem also serves to prefigure the persona of the fisherman in the poem *a white seal skull patterned on stone and it is her story* and his conflicted relationship with a selkie. The story of *The Selkie Bride*, similar to many tales which deal with magical non human to human transformations also suggests the ambivalence which the hunter experiences in contact with the hunted and there are certainly hints of shamanic practice in these stories. Shamans and hunters talk of entering alternative worlds in which they need to seek out their prey, often to make bargains and to offer some form of spiritual acknowledgement or restitution. The spectral elements of *against that house sheaved in green summer grasses* foreshadow *The Selkie Bride* tale which in the poem's retelling provides restitution for the selkie woman. The fisherman drowns while he is fishing and so she is released from the bond between them.

Ethnographic accounts of hunting practices for First Nation people in North America stress the concept of balance between the human and the non human. Colin Scott<sup>65</sup> writes about the ontology and ethics associated with Cree hunting practices in relation to animism, totemism and practical knowledge: "The ethical goal is preserving or restoring harmony by recognising the legitimacy of the interests of the other and balancing those interests with one's own".

Douglas Ezzy<sup>66</sup> writes in more detail about another group of First Nation people in Alaska, the Koyukan who believe in the parity of value between humans and non humans: "We know that the animal has a spirit – it used to be human – and we know all the things it did. It's not just an animal; it's a lot more than that". Furthermore there is recognition on the part of the human hunters that "animals give up their lives for humans, and humans reciprocate not only

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<sup>65</sup> Colin Scott, "Ontology and ethics in Cree hunting: animism, totemism and practical knowledge", *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, ed. Graham Harvey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 169.

<sup>66</sup> Douglas Ezzy, "Embodied morality and performed relationships", *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, ed. Graham Harvey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 185.

with respectful rituals, but also by not hunting certain types of animals...in certain locations, and also by accepting the occasional death of humans...as part of the reciprocity of the relationship".<sup>67</sup>

With respect to these animist beliefs the poem does not only refer to contested gender relations between men and women but also to a wider context, that of the relationship between the human and non human in a specific location which has entered into indigenous narratives specifically those featuring magical transformations. In one sense the relationship between the fisherman and the selkie woman is an allegory of the relationship between the human hunter and the non human, there are similar intimations of unease about the exploitation of the non human for the benefit of the human.

There is another layer of meaning to this poem which refers to the creative partnership between Adrian and myself; so that the ruins at Arichonan provided a 'home' for making and while we 'inhabited' this space we needed to be able to 'read', to interpret the other's imaginings and meanings. This process was enabled by a reciprocal attentiveness and empathy as a true imaginative understanding between two unrelated people. So at another level "you said/ such words... you spelled yourself/ and she read/ you utterly..." also refers to the exchanges between myself and Adrian, in that we needed to learn to 'read' each other and 'spell' ourselves by making our ideas accessible to the other. Once again, as I proposed in the previous chapter, there is the recurring element of Malaguzzi's<sup>68</sup> Reggio Emilia perspective on creativity as a unique "language" pertinent to each individual.

The final poem in Part Two *the lichen territories*, is based on Robert Hurley's<sup>69</sup> preface to "Gilles Deleuze: Spinoza Practical Philosophy". Close by to the wall which was marked by the image of the white seal skull there was a stone patterned by lichen colonies which due to its colouration resembled a cartography of geographical states. The image resonated strongly because it provided a necessary stepping back; from the micro viewpoint to that from the macro and back again, as multiple shifts in perspective.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 185,

<sup>68</sup> Rinaldi, *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*.

<sup>69</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988), ii.

Figure 4



Lichen 'territories' on stone walls, Arichonan

The poem is intended to map ideas which helped to shape the writing, as a somewhat oblique philosophical approach to psychogeography. The first stanza questions identity and the implicit and explicit boundaries of selfhood in relation to the non human; thus

are we/you  
/am I/ is  
it a territory

a con-  
figuration of  
boundaries a

limitation  
of exist/dist  
ance? Are we

in a field  
of forces whose  
actions wait for

experience, a  
connection of  
affections?

The poem interrogates the conventional representation of subject positions and how these are configured in temporal and physical terms, in space. The writing throughout the

Arichonan collection posits the human and the non human as intermingling collections of energy or “forces” which connect without delineated barriers, sometimes acting in synchrony; that perhaps there is a need to view these inter and intra connections in the most expansive way with “the maximum/perspective/possible”. This is intended to be an argument for immersion and entanglement in the world; as immanence as opposed to transcendence, which is the conventional Christian Romantic perspective *on* Nature (in the determinate sense of the word). Particularly in Part One of the Arichonan collection I wanted to write in a ‘grounded’ way whereby there was a sense of the landscape “becoming” or “performing” the writing, rather than the reverse position, of the writing reflecting or emulating aspects of the landscape anthropomorphically.

Rebecca Stott<sup>70</sup> discusses the complexity of representing the affects of the relationship between the human writing subject and the non human in relation to Walt Whitman’s transcendentalism and Elizabeth Bishop’s approach to writing which is influenced by her reading and reflections on Darwin’s work. Stott discusses the work of Elizabeth Bishop and her abiding interest in Darwin. Stott<sup>71</sup> focuses on a key phrase in a comment made by Bishop about Darwin’s thinking:

Reading Darwin, one admires the beautiful and solid case being built up out of his endless heroic observations, almost unconscious or automatic – then comes a sudden relaxation, a forgetful phrase, and one feels the strangeness of his undertaking, sees the lonely young man, his eyes fixed on facts and minute details, *sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown* [my italics].

She compares Bishop’s reading of Darwin to Whitman’s perspective on his (Darwin’s) ideas and theories, as a means of examining the transcendentalist view in relation to one Stott proposes as ‘immanence’ in the sense of a “falling back”, an “immersion” rather than a “floating above and beyond”. Bishop acknowledges her debt to transcendentalism and specifically comments; “Robert Lowell and I in very different ways are both descendants of

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<sup>70</sup> Stott, “The Wetfooted Understudy”.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 217. Subsequent page references in text.

the Transcendentalists” but according to Stott she rejects the idea that all significance is “up there, beyond the physical world” rather she opts for the secular sublime. Stott describes Bishop’s position thus:

If her (Bishop’s) own poetry is a repudiation of transcendence and indeed of the metaphysical...then she recognised Darwin’s work as a repudiation of the transcendent in the same way. (220)

According to Stott, Darwin rejected the transcendent because he recognised the inherent difficulties of its affect in relation to scrupulously objective scientific study and it is precisely this point which Darwin and Bishop struggle with; “how to acknowledge the sublime and yet shake it free of a theistic register” (220). Stott describes Bishop’s poetry as possessing the quality of a “Darwinian sublime, a secular enchantment. It begins in the impenetrable wood of the facts and is to be witnessed only by those who attend to the details and to the particular” (221).

I have read and re-read this essay because for me it represents and discusses important aspects of the difficulties that I encountered with my own creative responses to the non human. My experiments with Anna Botsford Comstock’s syllabus for nature study were based on an intention to acknowledge the non human in *particular*, to *attend to the details* as a starting point for writing, towards what Stott describes as the ‘poetics of immersion’. The following extract from Bishop’s<sup>72</sup> *The Sandpiper* completely demonstrates this quality in her writing. I particularly admire this poem because it reveals those immense shifts of perspective gained by being close to the sea, standing on the shoreline, paying attention both to immensity and to the interstices, the gaps between things:

He runs, he runs straight through it watching it through his toes.  
Watching, rather, the spaces of sand between them.

...The world is a mist. And then the world is  
minute and vast and clear...

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<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, *Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), 129.

Once again with reference to Stott's observation regarding the influence of Darwin on Bishop's poetry, there is the element of the "secular sublime", an immersion into immanence. I suggest that perhaps the sense of immanence is the position of viewing the world both from the micro and macro view, of "the maximum/ perspective/ possible"; whereas transcendentalism tends towards the wider perspective as an uplifting, expansive connection to the divine. Might it be possible therefore, to view this transcendental view as being ultimately tethered to doctrine by monotheism? I think Stott, at the conclusion of her essay precisely locates the expression of the "poetic sublime" in her discussion of the final stanza of Amy Clampitt's poem from 1978, *The Sun Underfoot Among the Sundews*:

But the sun  
underfoot is so dazzling  
down there among the sundews,  
there is so much light  
in that cup that, looking  
you start to fall upwards. (224)

Harriet Tarlo's<sup>73</sup> collection of poetry demonstrates this same evanescent quality. There is the sense of the human subject as writer and observer immersed *with* the non human in kaleidoscopic temporal shifts or *slidings* (as Stott would say) in space (as time and place) which reveal the micro and macro view, as an immanent perspective. For example, *15 June 11*:

field's slide line down  
light depth of sky's  
blue white it is something  
is it

shifting every second  
the field line crossing the  
sky diagonal horizontals  
across a dizzy moment  
of slide  
as we surf the rails

The poems in this collection overlap to provide layers of perspective relating to the same locations; sometimes of one field and the train journey home at the end of a day's work. I

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<sup>73</sup> Harriet Tarlo, *The Field*, (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2016), 36.

think this approach might be described as diffractive writing towards diffractive readings which imbue the writing with granular experience based on specific material observations, at a particular time on a certain day. I chose this poem to exemplify immersion because it too associates shifting and sliding perspectives with ‘a dizzy moment’ or as Bishop described Darwin’s similar “slides”, as “giddy”.

In her introduction to the anthology *The Ground Aslant* Tarlo<sup>74</sup> discusses how radical landscape poetry is engaged in exploring a “revealing/concealing” relationship between the human and the non human worlds while being “alive to the exploitative nature of all this history, this naming and ownership”. Many of her poems in *Field* are phrased as questions, there is a tentativeness and undecidedness to her work which allows space for the non human and enables the reader in turn to examine the metaphorical “spaces of sand” between our toes. In Chapter One I discuss how an open-ended stance of acceptance provides a necessary acknowledgement of the difficulties accompanying creative human representations in association with the non human, that there is an ethical dimension to consider. Tarlo concludes her introduction to *The Ground Aslant* by suggesting a repositioning of the poet, not as “the great romantic myth of originality, of the poet as a genius” but as “a more humble image of the poet as a re-user, a recycler of words, images and ideas”. She comments that the work of the poets in the anthology does not rely solely on “literary analogies” but draws from “botanical, zoological and agricultural histories”, from what I have described as diffractive readings to produce diffractive writings.

The next chapter of this project considers writing which was produced “in dialogue” as Tarlo puts it, with “palimpsesting of past and present sensibilities” in the form of diverse images and texts. There is also a consideration of spectral, or non-texts as a means of reflecting upon and commenting on the use of myth and folk tale generated as a communal cultural response to a specific landscape.

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<sup>74</sup> Harriet Tarlo ed., *The Ground Aslant*.



## Chapter 3

### Identity and Subverted Materiality; the bees and the bees

#### Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section introduces the main context for writing the final poem from *Arichonan Soundings* and for the following sections *Achnabreck Soundings* and *Keills Chapel Soundings*. The second deals with the theme of identity and subverted materiality which provides the context for writing the final poem in *Arichonan Soundings* and for the following sections *Achnabreck Soundings* and *Keills Chapel Soundings*. The third section addresses walking as reading, as talking, as embodiment and the difficulties of writing in response to the unknown.

This third chapter continues to consider identity in relation to the non human. First of all, through text and language features borrowed from fairy tale and magical realism and then through a consideration of the writing self in relation to the landscape through acts of walking. I compare the poems from the Arichonan collection to those from one written previously during the course of my research, namely *Baba Yaga and the fish head child*<sup>75</sup> which is primarily concerned with the magical real embodied by the figure of Baba Yaga, a witch from the Russian folk tradition. The poems use the persona of a suburban Baba Yaga, who has modified her behaviours to accommodate the modern world, specifically that of a small East Anglian town by a river bordered by woodland and marshes. In these poems I draw from the needling, miniaturist observational style of Emily Dickinson, the dark horrors from Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* while trying to avoid the whimsy of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, which nevertheless has an unsettling, queasy tone.

The final poem from *Arichonan Soundings* and those from the following sections *Achnabreck Soundings* and *Keills Chapel Soundings* deliberately reference a pagan view of the non human, or at least the pre-Christian era in the locality of Arichonan. Pagan and animist perspectives seep out from portrayals of fairy tale archetypes and settings. I aim to connect

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<sup>75</sup> Appendix 3, *Baba Yaga and the fish head child* collection, a selection, three poems, full text.

these perspectives to critical writings about walking and animism which offer up useful ideas for discussion about the relations between the human and the non human and as an alternative view which partially connects to Karen Barad's writings about entanglement and diffraction.

In this chapter I continue to interrogate the relationship of the self to the material world and to evaluate my experimentation with the representation of relations between the human and the non human. I refer back to earlier techniques which coalesced to create a Baba Yaga for our own era, an agential self which is set closer to the non human than my own writerly human self. For Baba Yaga I enact a magical transformation in an attempt to bring the process of writing closer to a state of flux and interaction with the non human. In *Baba Yaga laughs velvet and claw sharp*, Baba Yaga prepares for her transformation:

When she is left alone  
in this brick house  
at twilight

she laces her bat soft boots and  
opens the back door  
to the dark garden,

she pulls the black woollen shawl  
embroidered with cherub pink roses  
over her head and she is altered a little.

By this means Baba Yaga is enabled to gain a more creaturely view of the non human;

Insinuating between each dark leaf across the long wet grass  
she mouse steps  
running in bat soft boots.

Beyond the black painted shed;  
the Cornishman's chickens  
settle their feathers and their speckled hen voices,

Another poem in the series, *Baba Yaga and the gift of crows* alludes to her semi-magical transformation which allows her close access to the non human:

Baba Yaga  
is sitting  
amongst the greening

cold potato tops

she has folded  
herself as small  
as a bat wrapped  
shadow and

she is watching  
the rooftop crows  
as they speak  
their rust narratives

which nearly rhyme  
casting a line back  
and forth between  
grey beaks

*Arichonan Soundings* concludes with a poem which responded to what I saw as the shape of a white seal's skull on a stone wall in the ruined township of Arichonan. With reference to Barad the writing develops from diffractive 'readings' or 'soundings' of the landscape in association with my prior interest in and knowledge of tales of magical transformation. I have included a photograph of the 'seal's skull' (below), however this is but a reductive two-dimensional image. In reality I was able to touch the stone, to feel its textures and to scrutinise it closely. The result is the combination of material affect with an abstract cultural narrative which informs and shapes the writing in turn, as a recursive process.

Figure 5



'Seal skull' image on stone wall, Arichonan

My encounter with these multi-layered physical and abstract effects and affects brought to mind the story of *The Selkie Bride*, a traditional Scottish folk tale which features magical transformation. This particular story contests what is meant by 'home'. Home can be a refuge or a gaol, it can be a space for nurturing and creativity, or a site of dominion to prioritise a particular subject position. The story is as follows; a fisherman spies on a group of beautiful naked young women in a secluded cove near to where he is fishing. When they put on their seal skins to return to the sea, he recognises them as selkies. One day he decides to capture one with the intention of making her his bride. He creeps to where the selkie maidens have left their seal skins. He takes the shiniest, softest and darkest of the pelts and hides it away. One by one the selkies return to the sea, except for the seal woman who walks back and forth along the shore keening to her sisters. In one story he befriends her and promises to help, in another he takes her by force. A few years pass; they have children and one day the selkie wife is clearing out the attic space when she comes across a bundle wrapped in a raggy old shawl. She discovers it is her seal skin but she re-wraps it with a heavy heart, her children are too young for her to abandon them. More years pass and when they are grown, she takes up her seal skin to return to her people.

This story encapsulates at a mythic level the experience of displacement and estrangement which Adrian and I discussed so often. I thought of how folk tales connected to landscape are lost once the people leave and this is the element I wanted to represent in the collection, so that along with the bodily displacement of the townspeople, I wanted to show how the intangibles are also lost when culture becomes dislocated from its sources. This concern follows on from my discussion in the previous chapter about the loss of indigenous languages in relation to their physical context and their close connection to landscape. Without the language of attentive naming the human knowledge and understanding of a particular landscape is lost forever and with this loss the stories become generic narratives, without the dynamism that specificity brings. My experiments with writing from the *Handbook of Nature* were founded on a desire to engage *en face* with natural phenomena from an entirely different subject position, to avoid anthropomorphism and a prioritisation of the human gaze. I wanted to allow space to the non human, for it to be freed from conventional lyrical forms of nature writing.

One of the main themes of this project is that of 'home' either at the level of the environment (and the non human), or at the level of community and local landscape (and the non human). Tim Ingold provides a succinct etymology of the prefix "eco" in relation to the concept of home by focusing on its derivation from the Greek word "oikos" for house.<sup>76</sup> Finally, this chapter considers *a* home as a space for the human (and more specifically what this means for women) - for (not)doing, or (not)becoming. Most of the poems referenced in this chapter are written with home in mind, as domestic bricks and mortar, or as a sacred space intuited from carvings on stone to house non-domestic rituals. *a white seal skull patterned on stone and it is her story* is the final poem in Part One of the Arichonan collection and it is a transition point in the collection; from walking around the specific location of Arichonan to a consideration of home and its constituent parts. The poem sets up a domestic and narrative contrast to other representations of home, as a space for belief and ideas about human presence and identity in relation to the non human. Finally, I consider the grave as a resting place, or home to the un-human after death, how the human gives way to the non human at an individual level, much in the same way as the homes at Arichonan became ruins which are now slowly returning to the natural landscape.

## Part 1 Identity: subverting materiality

And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur.<sup>77</sup>

Angela Carter is one of the most prominent proponents of the fairy tale. I think this is because she deploys fairy tale to subvert materiality at the level of female embodiment (refer to the excerpt above). She punches holes through the substance of this particular human sensibility; her bending and twisting of the genre allows the light to shine in on dark, often violent truths relating to how sexuality and gender roles are constructed by patriarchal societies. This purpose is not a corollary to making writerly experiments with style to beguile

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<sup>76</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines* (London: Routledge, 2015), 155.

<sup>77</sup> Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Vintage Books, 2007), 75.

the reader. She aims to disrupt conventional ideas about gender relations as they were (and continue to be) represented in the established literature of her day, she refuses to write polite elisions of lived female embodied experience. She writes new and savage truths in the guise of fantasy, or the magical real. In *The Bloody Chamber* Angela Carter lifts the stage curtain to reveal the blood and viscera which was tidied away in later tellings of traditional tales. Marina Warner<sup>78</sup> explains Carter's engagement with fairy tale as follows:

What Carter had found in fairy tales of Perrault, Grimm and (later) D'Aulnoy were profoundly disturbing symptoms of men's assumed hegemony and woman's collusion with their oppression and sexual exploitation; yet she loved the stories and spent time translating them as well as responding to them.

On the basis of my (diffractive) reading of new materialist ideas and with reference to my previous comments in Chapter Two, I have come to think of Angela Carter's re-use of fairy tale features as diffractive writing, whereby layers of other genres and ideas react and chafe against each other to produce new hybrid forms. It is this process of un-picking and remaking which is central to creativity; that state of teasing out the new from the old using alternative imaginings. To use a fairy tale trope, she spins anew from the old; spinning barbed, irregular yarns.

I have frequently returned to the device of using long established forms in my own writing as a means of experimenting with the writer's point of view to gain new effects and affects. I first encountered this approach through the poetry of W. B. Yeats and later during my studies of Middle English. I read the tale of Sir Orfeo and Dame Heurodice<sup>79</sup> which is thought to date from the late fourteenth century, whereby the mythical story of Orpheus and Euridice is transported to England. Orfeo is King of Winchester ("Thrace") his wife Dame Heurodice falls asleep under an "ympe" tree in an orchard and is stolen away by the King of the fairies. In a parallel with the original myth Orfeo rescues his wife by playing his harp to the King of Fairyland after making a bargain with him. While I was still an undergraduate student and

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<sup>78</sup> Marina Warner, *Once Upon A Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 141

<sup>79</sup> *Medieval English Verse*, trans. Brian Stone (London: Penguin Books, 1964).

before I read Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, I wrote an alternative version in which Dame Heurodice after escaping to Fairyland and finding herself free from a subordinate wifely position, is deeply reluctant to return to Orfeo, who of course tells the story from his own point of view which becomes the established version.

...my happiness ended  
when orfeo came  
he told me I was 'bewiled' and  
without me 'life is grey winter'

...today you hear  
the longyear's version of my tale  
'the ballad of sir orfeo', how he sang  
how he saved me for himself. (February 1982)

Curiously, I also wrote a 'dovetail' poem on the subject of Orpheus and Euridice many years later, this time referring to the earlier mythic tale (I commented on the form of the 'dovetail' poems previously in Chapter 2). It appears that I am perennially interested in questioning and re-representing aspects of the established dualities of man and woman, life and death, this world and the underworld. In the original story there is the main theme of human and non human interaction which has also been a key point of contention and research throughout the creative work for this project.

I think that there are echoes of the *Orfeo* and *Heurodice* poem in *a white seal skull patterned on stone and it is her story* which concludes Part One of the Arichonan collection. There is a similar sense of threat and capture by a male protagonist, this time in the guise of the fisherman, enacted against a selkie woman. However, in my writing of *The Selkie Bride* story I represent the perspective of the seal-wife and her sense of restriction and imprisonment in domesticity. I write about her capture as deceit and violence – she struggles to escape the fisherman who legitimises his abduction by marrying her by force “*those/ so quiet dust/ killed words on the green hill*”. She is caught in a net like a beast and tamed by language, by ‘the word’ and taken into domestic servitude. She is literally stripped of her ‘beastly’ pelt to be

covered up by traditional women's garb, of modestly long skirts and shawls, so that her physical body and its wants are obscured. The needs of the husband predominate. In the words of the earlier *Orfeo* poem, the selkie woman is concealed in the home, "saved" for the personal gratification of the fisherman.

In addition to the exercise and abuses of power at the interpersonal level between men and women (and others) I represent the colonisation of the non human world with references to Christian symbolism; of fish, fishermen, of motherhood, of bread, salt and blood as material embodiment. At this level I want to show how the paradigm of Christian thinking is implicated in the subjugation of women throughout time, its generation of damaging binaries (for men and others too), how it penetrates interpersonal relations and how its effects persist to the current day. My second intention is to consider how the forces which came to enact the clearance at Arichonon were informed by the same imperative, as a drive to marginalise the 'other' at a precise interpersonal level, the locus of the divisive psychology of colonialism and capitalism. This theme is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter as part of my discussion about the use of English nineteenth century legal discourse as an adjunct to colonialism and racism.

I have read several iterations of *The Selkie Bride* first of all as a child and then later as a primary teacher when I read a selection of different versions to the classes I taught. Tony Mitton<sup>80</sup> has written a beautifully spare narrative poem *The Selkie Bride*, intended for children which was especially enjoyed, and I also read Shirley Hughes's tale within a tale *Sea Singing*<sup>81</sup>, which was also well received due to the fine illustrations. I always read these stories towards the end of the autumn term when it started to become darker towards 'home time', it suited the atmosphere of the story somehow. I like to think that this impulse was an analogue to how the tale was originally told, by the fireside in the depths of winter. It has occurred to me that although this tale was quite likely told inside a darkening room, in an entirely human space, the wild is brought into the domestic realm and like the selkie woman, is not quite tamed by it. In this way the wild becomes a disruptive, free and therefore

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<sup>80</sup> Tony Mitton, *Plum* (London: Scholastic, 1998) 53.

<sup>81</sup> Shirley Hughes, *The Shirley Hughes Collection*, (London: The Bodley Head, 2000), 244.



imaginative space which queries the everyday world, giving elbow room to ‘what if?’. I read to my classes from literary texts, but oral tellings are shaped by the interests and priorities of the teller and would be subtly different each time the story was told and often adapted to respond to the audience – strategies which I use myself when telling a story. The story was very likely stitched into the local landscape so that landmarks would be named to place the events materially in the listeners’ imaginations. The listeners would be literally situated in the story landscape more concretely than a modern reader. Shirley Hughes borrows a similar strategy by tying the story to a family member, her illustrations consolidate the fiction by showing artefacts described in the story

The themes which resonate with me personally are connected to the loss of the selkie woman’s freedom, of self-hood and individual agency due to the traditional sleight of hand trick which induces the selkie to collude with the perpetrator. She is bound by love and duty to her children, of the need to care for others beyond her own personal wishes, so that she is tied in a situation which is ultimately self-destructive. The selkie is bound in the way that every mother is, to deny her own wants for the sake of her children.

In the previous chapter I write about an idea of home which is contested; it can be a place of safety and comfort, but it can also represent constraint and confinement, especially for women. For female artists and writers there is another dimension to this sense of limitation, that of not being able to make or write due to domestic constraints.

Rachel Cusk<sup>82</sup> writes about this conflict of interests:

‘The artist in me wanted to disdain the material world while the woman in me couldn’t; in my fantasy of the orderly writer’s room I would have to serve myself, be my own devoted housewife. It would require two identities, two consciousnesses, two sets of minutes and hours. One ‘I’ would have to clear the children’s toys from the desk so that the other ‘I’ could work.

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<sup>82</sup> Rachel Cusk, *Coventry* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), 80.

Clearly, in the past other, mostly women writers have considered this same point, how the “pram in the hall” (Cyril Connolly) becomes the ‘enemy’ of an artist and the subsequent need for a “room of one’s own” (Virginia Woolf) in order to work. Deborah Levy<sup>83</sup> comments on Simone de Beauvoir’s lifestyle as a writer. She makes the observation that de Beauvoir chose to live separately from her partners and lovers because she recognised that domesticity would compromise her writing. De Beauvoir writes to her lover Nelson Algren “I want everything in life, I want to be a woman and to be a man, to have many friends and have loneliness, to work much and write good books and to travel and enjoy myself.”

Deborah Levy<sup>84</sup> addresses the issue of repairing the duality incurred by being a female artist or writer with the aid of magical thinking. In a portrayal which has commonalities with my conception of Baba Yaga as a creative shamanistic figure she riffs on the properties of cross dressing as both woman and man ostensibly to solve a plumbing issue, which becomes an allegorical portrayal of moving beyond a proscribed female role. She considers the wearing of a black silk nightie, a (French) postman’s jacket and fur boots as garments pertaining to a shaman:

‘I appreciated the fur boots with their comforting warmth and magical properties (I suppose my phantasy was that I had skinned the animals myself) and the postman’s jacket seemed to be the counterpoint to the black silk nightdress.

I was the man. I was the woman.

Perhaps I was the shaman?’ (32).

The role of the shaman is to travel in the next, or ‘other’ world while remaining bodily in this version of ‘reality’. Baba Yaga makes minute adjustments to become ‘other’ to her everyday self in order to become close to the non human. It might be that all artists and writers need to become ‘other’ to themselves in order to fully occupy a highly individuated creative space in order to travel beyond themselves? In a recent poem *foxed; an un thought plot*<sup>85</sup> I write about this experience. It is an experiment to occupy the fox’s thought space whereby I use a

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<sup>83</sup> Deborah Levy, *The Cost of Living* (UK: Hamish Hamilton, 2018), 96.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>85</sup> Appendix 4, *foxed; an un thought plot*, full text included.

jumpy chopped up form to convey a fox's sensibilities. I think of it as a variant of a Baba Yaga poem because it explicitly associates a writing self with a shamanistic process to enable the subject to move beyond her own consciousness:

skin tight  
drum finger  
beats

heart blood  
rush close  
to open - push

pushing  
I am through  
my eyes look

through  
the skull  
.i i l l l i i .

inter- intend  
yes in this  
in - four

steps along-  
scent  
strong: bones:

The poem references Ted Hughes' poem *The Thought Fox* which is a beautifully controlled and elegant rendition of an imagined fox which nevertheless has a granular presence in the writing. It is *a* fox conjured and smoothly written from his own perspective whereas I wanted to represent the uncomprehending and incomprehensible mind space of *the* fox which had entered Portcullis House in Parliament, as a potent rewilding of a quintessentially human space, as a locus of cultural power. I imagine the fox's mind at the time of its foray to be chaotic, confused, fragmentary and impressionistic. The allusions to shamanism are intended to demonstrate the challenges of writing a representation of immediate physical sensation as literal form. However, at the end of the day it is just as much an imaginary act and approximation of the non human as Hughes' poem. The writing is influenced by my interest in Charles Foster's *Being a Beast*. Foster attempts to live *as* various animals in order to align

his human sensibilities with theirs. He writes about the paradoxical experience of being a hunter; how the hunter has to think themselves into being the prey, how this insight brings you closer to the animal than in any other form of human and non human interactions. He describes the hunter's sensibility as that of the shaman as a means of anticipating and imagining the hunter and animal entangled in a synchrony of behaviours and movements. With these thoughts in mind, how is a writer or artist to accomplish this deadly visceral intimacy?

Levy<sup>86</sup> cites Marguerite Duras who suggested that "writing comes like the wind", and Levy continues: "It's naked, it's made of ink, it's the thing written, and it passes like nothing else passes in life, nothing more, except for life itself". Levy's reference to Duras and her own comment about the writing process gives the impression of it as a force which is physical yet realised at an abstract level of existence, as a metaphysical entity. I think therein lies the conflict and difficulty inherent in written representations of the non human; the writer is forever striving to use a language which is beyond the material. This is why from my own point of view as the writer; seeing and holding the weight of Adrian's *readings* and *re-writings* of my poems was so powerful and resonant. His work literally put me in sensate *touch* with the location which *made* the poems and yet withheld itself, because it was in essence inaccessible in that particular mode, other than as an abstract coded form, a shadow generated by the writing apparatus. The non human needs to be allowed to 'speak' as a physical mode, in diffractive interaction with the human. Barad discusses how the apparatus for experimentation has its own effects and affects on that which is under observation. The scientist in one sense often has to resort to a 'slant' gaze on phenomena, in much the same way as a writer or an artist does, because the non human is always partially 'unknowable' due to the lack of a direct means to apprehend it. We are not ever able to enter into that direct event of becoming or making with it, or as it, other than in an adjacent state of our own becomings and makings which we ascribe to the creative state. Put simply; our human cultural apparatuses are not equal to full representations of becomings or makings; a partial encounter is all we can hope to achieve. The collaboration with Adrian enabled a fuller and

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 186.

deeper creative process and subsequent acknowledgement of the non human than I could have achieved on my own as a writer.

In her introduction to *The Ground Aslant* Harriet Tarlo<sup>87</sup> discusses the varied connotations of 'aslanthness', that this term acknowledges the incompleteness of the human perspective in relation to the non human, partly inspired by the Emily Dickinson poem, 1263 *Tell the truth but tell it slant*, which is directly referenced by two poets in the anthology. Perhaps magical thinking is the solution to this conundrum, that the shaman's view gained arcanelly through drum beats and painted symbols is an attempt to see the non human indirectly and incompletely, yet paradoxically in the round.

Leonora Carrington<sup>88</sup> writes with great precision on the subject of becoming and making in the world(s):

I haven't been able to reconcile image world and word world in my own head. I know the Bible says sound comes first – I'm not so sure. Perhaps simultaneously, but how did it get solid?

For Carrington, reality, or materiality is contested and lacking in solidity, her painting is concerned with, as she describes it the "imaginal space"<sup>89</sup>, one populated by fantastical beings and locations which are the product of her own mythology and she states: 'The matter of our bodies, like everything we call matter, should be thought of as thinking substance'. Yet despite her depiction of mythological imaginary worlds Marina Warner identifies a strong pragmatism in Carrington's approach to painting which she refers to as 'dailyness' which Carrington describes as follows: 'Painting is like making strawberry jam – really carefully and well'<sup>90</sup>.

Carrington's paintings show broken, open views of rooms in houses and ritual meals made in cauldrons. Cooking and art are seen as synchronous processes which engender

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>88</sup> Marina Warner, "Leonora Carrington's Spirit Bestiary; or the Art of Playing Make-belief", *Leonora Carrington's Spirit Bestiary*, ed. Andrea Schlieker (Serpentine Gallery, 1991), 20.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 13.

transformation underpinned by references to myth and Catholic iconography as a key vocabulary in her personal creative language. Whitney Chadwick<sup>91</sup> comments on the relationship between cooking and artistic production in Carrington's work:

She has related alchemical processes to those of both painting and cooking, carefully selecting a metaphor that unites the traditional woman's occupation as nourisher of the species with that of the magical transformation of form and colour that takes place in the artist's creative process, nourishing the spirit.

At the denouement of Carrington's novel *The Hearing Trumpet* the main protagonist Marian Leatherby is induced to eat a broth made of her own flesh with miraculously rejuvenating effects, which might be viewed as an allegory of the power of female subjectivity in creative production, as a means of enabling the proliferation of selves with an accompanying multiplication of self-determination and agency:

...and there I was standing outside the pot stirring the soup in which I could see my own meat, feet up, boiling away merrily as any joint of beef...From a speculative point of view I wondered which of us I was.

Later Marian looks into an "obsidian mirror" and sees a triple image reflected back at herself:

Holding the mirror at arm's length I seemed to see a three-faced female whose eyes winked alternately. One of the faces was black, one red and one white, and they belonged to the Abbess, the Queen Bee and myself.

In Chapter One I comment on how my encounter with Adrian's sculptures engraved with phrases from my own work provided a similarly defamiliarized and uncanny view which enabled me to view it as a stranger. In my journal I describe this sensation as "delicious" and this is the sense I have as a reader when I read the extract above, which in the context of self-cannibalism is particularly apposite.

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<sup>91</sup> Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2010), 68.

In the Arichonan collection, the poem *a white seal skull patterned on stone and it is her story*, portrays cooking as a torment to the selkie wife's watery sensibilities although it does offer a brief imaginary respite from her situation:

she pours  
soft water  
on dry flour-

licks one  
finger, a  
dab of salt

to her tongue  
eyes closed and  
it dissolves

(green weed  
sleek alive;  
tide pulls and drift

the surface  
skin elides  
mackerel and mercury

quicks)...

The selkie woman's physical contact with her 'husband' offers a similar imaginative release. Charles Foster's unique perspective on the hunter needing to understand their chosen prey emerges in this poem. The fisherman is also at home in two elements, on earth and on the water and the selkie is conscious of his dual nature:

...now the

narrow man  
in his boat  
fishes the moon

the silver  
risk, he is  
worn wire

frayed and there

was once when he  
had loved such tin

white skin  
slipped like  
scales, closed

eyes to  
hard breaths and  
heart fault

snagged not  
any easy love but  
a cupped hand

sometimes to  
receive the  
other – a

wrapping  
of skin to  
skin against: within.

Leonora Carrington's work has had profound influences on how I write and how I think about writing and creative production. Her writing and paintings have prompted me to experiment and to discover my own identities as a writer, a woman and a maker, to draw upon my own mythologies and sensibilities in relation to the world(s) I inhabit. If I had not encountered her work I would not have had the confidence to engage with the persona of Baba Yaga who gives me licence to act beyond my usual human self, or to write in the space of the magical real which has greater permeability to dreams and the imagination. When I first encountered Grayson Perry's sculpture of Baba Yaga's house, he provided me with a hybrid fusion of a domestic and *imaginal* space within which to write. Perry<sup>92</sup> describes his creative space as his "mental shed" and so I arrived at the 'black boarded' *imaginal* shed to house my own alternative imaginings. Leonora Carrington's magpie approach to mythology and esoteric ideas has inspired me to overlay texts and images in my own writing. During the course of my studies I wrote *The humdrum conundrum: for Leonora Carrington* which acknowledges this debt.

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<sup>92</sup> Wendy Jones and Grayson Perry, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl* (London: Penguin, 2007), 23.



I end this section by returning to the theme of home as a contested yet creative space for women which in the domain of the magical real therefore enables alternative and proliferating identities. Leonora Carrington played endlessly with varied imaginative perspectives on the domestic, while Angela Carter subverted the fairy tale as the traditional narrative space allocated to women and children. Her vibrant use of this form liberated conventional perspectives on gender and sexuality in narrative and has enabled subsequent writers to experiment with challenging subjects and ideas. My poem for Leonora Carrington led to writing further poems about female protagonists in off kilter domestic settings; or to be more precise women who are not at home in their own homes, they are often older wives and mothers who are literally 'un-settled'. It is precisely this quality which I identified in the writing of Deborah Levy and Rachel Cusk and one of the reasons why I enjoy their writing. I have previously discussed the *book house : house book* collection in the introduction to this commentary; there are two particular poems in this collection which also explore the sense of 'un-settlement', namely; *Book VI: What is that quick exquisite she hopes for?* and *Book VII: A somehow difference and she is similarly changed*.

The following excerpt from *The humdrum conundrum: for Leonora Carrington*<sup>93</sup> draws upon images in her paintings which show buildings broken open (broken homes?) to reveal women in the throes of reinvention and transformation or engaged in magical seeming domestic rituals. The poem is inter-cut with imagery and direct speech taken from *The Duchess of Malfi* which resonates with my thinking about Carrington's approach to writing and art and the difficulties she faced when she assumed alternative unconventional identities:

the duchess has  
turned on the brothers  
so that we can  
take shelter in a thistling

hue of sky: the  
'yes': the open roof hovels  
hold our blue spaces un  
furnished within

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<sup>93</sup> Appendix 4, *The humdrum conundrum: for Leonora Carrington*, full text included.

by possible flowers  
and probable horses  
at blossom  
cantering echo ended

for these audacities of  
simplicity we shall  
be shot to death  
by pearls

## Part 2 Walking as reading; talking; embodiment - writing the unknown

through gentleness an understanding between the mountain, my body, and my  
mind...

Leonora Carrington. *Down Below* (1942).<sup>94</sup>

I reiterate and reuse the idea and image of the “cupped hand” from stanza thirty- eight in *a white seal skull...* for the title of the first poem in Part two of the collection. *a cupped hand* overlaps with the previous depiction of the selkie’s human form. The selkie woman’s particular body is transposed to Achnabreck to become a universal body conceived as landscape marked by cup and ring patterns pecked into stone. The protruding rock forms suggest a magical transformation on a larger scale, as a tattooed body projecting from below the ground, as a material text to be deciphered. It is possible that this stony semblance of a giant woman’s body might have been revered, tended to and loved as a primordial ‘mother’ to the local community. As I wrote the poem I thought of Leonora Carrington’s painting *The Giantess* (1950) which depicts a towering female figure whose bare feet are planted into the land, her torso encompassed by oceans and her head topping the heavens, while she is surrounded by the beasts of the earth, sea and air. In her hands she cradles a tiny egg, emblematic of creativity and rebirth.

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<sup>94</sup> Warner, *Leonora Carrington*, 17.

When Adrian and I talked about our visits to Achnabreck and Keills chapel the recurring themes were of unknowability and 'otherness'; we were confounded by the inscrutability of the cup and ring markings on the rock which in part was repeated in the designs and devices incised on the grave markers sheltered by Keills chapel. There was a commonality of material and resonance; the marked stones suggested messages from below ground, from an imagined space which was now unavailable to present day humans. What was once fabricated and human was unravelling back to becoming non human and therefore less open to our interpretations. At both sites we were engaged in a process of oblique readings. I view the resulting poems as diffractions of sensed but not definitively known meanings; in the way an artist represents negative spaces to draw or paint a composition. In the face of not knowing, our only recourse was to look attentively at what was there and for us to discuss the possibilities and ideas which were diffracted from our individual perceptions.

*a cupped hand* suggests a gesture of either giving or receiving which from my perspective is intended to convey interrelatedness. The cup chiselled into the stone provides a manufactured non human receptacle and I imagined it filled with liquids from living bodies as a vitalising exchange between the human and the non human, as a mutual gift:

a cupped  
hand  
to hold

rain, salt  
semen, milk-  
warm blood

ring a  
round, with  
in rings held.

It was a sun and showers day when we visited Achnabreck and I noticed that the rain had filled the cup shaped spaces in the stone and the concentric ring markings too, so that the sun made them shine silver. It was not a stretch of the imagination to think about how the water filled markings might look at night under the light of a full moon. During my research I found a reference to a paper which noted that similar sites along the west coast of Scotland

were seen to be in alignment for lunar eclipses, long ago in the distant past. It seemed to me that these markings suggested the obverse of the everyday, the other side of the known world. The next poem in the sequence *fault lines fissured* explores this aspect of questioning the meaning of the cup and ring markings:

A white cup  
a silver ring,  
the rain:

trying to  
read the  
pattern – is

it revealed?  
The circling  
around

within – you  
have become  
a conundrum

Figure 6



Cup and ring markings, Achnabreck

Achnabreck is situated in what is described as a “ritual landscape” as part of Kilmartin Glen which has standing stones and burial cairns dating from the Neolithic and Bronze ages. Walking with the grain of the landscape was an essential act of inter and intra communication for us both. We were exposed to the clamouring rain, the wind and the mud

closing over our boots in the open, we were inscribed by our surroundings, marked outside and inside by non human presence.

Tim Edensor<sup>95</sup> writes about the difficulties of representing narratives based on walking, he contests the view that these should follow a straightforward linear progression stating; “while there may be a clear beginning and end, the temporal experience of walking is usually far from a flow of successive, episodic events”. He writes about the unique experience of walking through ruins which he believes highlights “complex temporalities”. More importantly for the purposes of this project he proposes that walking through ruins “draws attention to the limits of narrative both as a technical means to represent walking and as a metaphor for walking”. The remainder of this chapter is a commentary on how the writing process developed in response to the landscapes we walked around and how the resulting work with Adrian connected strongly to Edensor’s ideas about finding alternative methods to represent walking through ruins.

When we walked amongst the ruins at Arichonan, first of all we took a circular path clockwise before we individually doubled back to revisit particular locations which interested us personally. We each took photographs pertinent to our interests and I made a video clip of the ash tree at the centre of the settlement which resonated with me due to its association with Yggdrasil the “life” tree in Norse mythology. The leaves and branches were caught up in the wind and if I closed my eyes it sounded like waves sounding on a sandy shore, so that then I thought of the townspeople being forcibly transported to British colonies over the oceans. At that moment the wind rushing through the tree signified displacement as the sound of multiple out-breaths in sadness, of the wind in sails and of the aftermath, a lonely sound, of a township without its humans slowly giving way to the non human. In this excerpt from the poem *arrival* I represent the slow leaching out of human traces at Arichonan as “slower/changes re-/shaping the//human out/of this/space.”

Later in Keills chapel, I re-encounter the tree of life motif, this time fixed on a grave marker and in the following poem I refer back to the earlier image of the ash tree in *arrival*. Because I

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<sup>95</sup> Tim Edensor, “Walking Through Ruins”, *Ways of Walking*, ed. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst (London: Routledge. 2016), 136.

saw, heard, touched and walked around the tree at the centre of Arichonan the stone carving activated these sensations so that I saw, or sensed 'beyond' the grey cold markings:

the tree of life

ash – transfixed stone  
ever a trick of the light and  
shift of leaves  
down to the root.

It seemed to me that many of the motifs and images carved onto the grave markers sheltered in Keills chapel connected to observations of the non human which I had made during our walks around Arichonan and Kilmartin Glen. I made notes about these sightings in my journal, along with drawings and photographs which I discussed with Adrian at the end of the day. I saw the grave markers as a form of text which encoded and often connected to experiences of the natural world which I had encountered during my walks around the landscape. For example, we saw bees, wrens, ravens, a toad and the remnants of brown snail shells following predation by thrushes. There were yellow irises blooming beside the ditches and at night time there were the calls of tawny owls from the woodland by the bay beyond Tayvallich. The images on the grave markers were worked around by knotted patterns, many of them were in the shape of a rectangular cartouche. The knot work brought to mind the cup and ring markings at Achnabreck. Some of the designs included similar scrolled spiralling and circular patterns and we speculated on the connection; were the later patterns influenced by these earlier markings? Were they maps of travel in the 'other' world? Did they indicate contours of a lost mythical topography?

The poem *knot work patterns and the wren in the green grey willow*, is made from two poems tied together as form attending to its subject. Alternating stanzas refer to images I observed on grave markers so that the next stanza refers to one aspect of a specific moment when we stood on a slab stone bridge over a fast-moving stream while wrens sang in a nearby tree. In Celtic mythology the wren is seen to be a messenger between 'this' world and the 'other' and by this means I wanted the poem to traverse time, to revitalise past representations, to make them live again in this world. Keills chapel was a chilly, dark, dry interior space which protected the grave markers from the elements which had started to

erase the carvings, yet they were now displaced from where they had been placed originally, away from their human dead. The carvings of the natural world represented what the dead lacked in the 'other' world, perhaps it was a way of bringing semblances of life to them in their new unhuman state.

In the Kilmartin Glen museum I read how in Neolithic times humans were often transformed from their human guise after death by the addition of animal attributes. There are the instances of magical thinking at the moment of interment; a woman is buried with a swan's wings at her back and there is a grave of a man with antlers attached to his skull. The Christian iconography at Keills chapel appears to be subsumed by references to earlier pagan ideas whereby the human and the non human were portrayed synchronously in other dimensions. As I walked around the chapel the portrayal of non human images had an enlivening effect (and perhaps affect) on the human dead, they brought shafts of life into a space where time had stopped once the grave markers had become historical artefacts.

I was surprised to encounter echoes of the funerary practices I had read about in the Kilmartin Glen museum at Keills chapel. There is a finely carved nominally cruciform stone which depicted the image of an angel. However, the angel is uncharacteristically in the guise of a woman with wings which were attributed to a heron by the accompanying information plaque. I saw images of stags carved on to the stones and strong portrayals of ravens on one grave marker. I brought these motifs into the poem *knot work patterns and the wren in the green grey willow* because they were not representations from the fastnesses of the past as anachronistic thought but vital lively assemblages of the extant non human, in the here and now. I see the poem as an attempt to twist or entangle experiential momentary encounters with the non human as a creative non-chronological, non-linear mapping of our walking and talking, as a response to the difficulties identified by Edensor, which I discussed previously:

*angel*  
she is soft edged  
, this angel pecked on stone  
-or a woman  
with heron wings

the wren – her

vital lightening  
messages...

*stag*  
your strong lines – such  
sexy jaunty  
antlers – I know you  
the life in death chase.

her loud  
sweetening call  
is heard...

The braided form is intended to give the impression of passing thought, of plural affects. Punctuation is used in an unconventional way to indicate caesurae as gaps in thought and language and to emphasise the plainness of the word choices, as a deliberate attempt to eschew figurative language which would inevitably have a distancing effect. I wanted to allow the non human a space unadorned by human embellishment. The wren poem is intended to be 'heard' insistently in the background as a descant to the Keills chapel stanzas. I experimented with changing the colour of the text for the wren poem and by using italic script, but I thought this limited the perspective of the reader because it removed any sense of nuance. I wanted the representations to emerge quietly, to puzzle over, not to be overstated or foreshadowed in any way.

I wrote *the bees and the bees* in transit on the return journey home to Essex. On the previous day we had visited Carsaig cemetery near to Tayvallich which looks westward to Carsaig Bay, opening out to the Sound of Jura. A number of the graves were sunken and tilted, the stone markers were partially eroded by the weather so that it was impossible to read the names and dates of those who were buried there. A few details remained; the curve of an angel's wing, or illegible script, although increasingly the main decoration to the stone was applied by the non human, by lichen clusters. These were delicate, almost lacy designs, they seemed gentle and tactful in their steady obscuration of the carved lettering and patterns on the grave markers. I transposed the images of these stones on to those in Keills Chapel and imagined the same processes at work if they had remained outside in their respective cemeteries. I considered how the sword cartouches would be softened, how they would give way to shapes created by the non human:



a sword  
cartouche  
into unmanned

frailty and  
faintness  
offset griefs

mitigated by  
a tilt toe  
to heel walk a

round a path side  
story and the  
bees; and the

bees tell  
all now  
because you

are un-  
worded  
nameless in clover.

I was interested in the process of namelessness, how originally the grave markers proclaimed who their humans were in life. It was likely their descendants would visit to leave flowers and to remember them; to think of how they looked, what they said and what they meant to the people who loved and missed them. I thought of the people from Arichonan who were generally nameless in the estate records until they made their court appearances after their protests during the enforced clearance from their homes. They disappeared from the earth so much more rapidly than those who could afford to pay for a grave marker. Their identities escaped the public record so that they lived on in memory only. In the following chapter I will consider the spectrality of the townspeople which is revealed by their absence. The title of this poem refers to how bees in Highland superstition are considered to be the souls of the dead, in this case they are nominally associated with the physical presence of human remains, their current concern is foraging for nectar from the flowers growing over the graves. In the end the non human bestows equality after death, it does not matter if you have paid for a grave marker because in time this will be erased by natural processes. The

non human is ambivalent and self maintaining. The human has become un-human and it is appropriate that the non human re-colonises the manufactured textual meanings with its own scripts; there is even a lichen species (*Graphis albascripta*) which grows in hazel woods in the Western Highlands which is a simulacrum of hand written script. The second poem in Part One, *arrival* refers to the inequalities between the tenants and the landowners at Arichonan. I convey the sense of 'soulessness' in the lines "There is a/ dark thistle/ beyond, buds/ shut down/ for now, thick/ stemmed, sparse/ leaved, starting/ new petals mauve/ black held taut by/bent wire/forms a design to/ entice a bee... ". At the moment of writing the poem I thought that the bees represented yet another form of inscription or transformation; as a living vital poetry; as 'bee lines' which annotate the relations between the un-human and the non human; there is a death, there is life, as a restitution of sorts.

In Chapter One I suggest that the archaeological excavation of a grave might be viewed as a form of disruptive reading which destroys the 'text' as it decodes its meaning. It is interesting to note here that Adrian's final sculpture took the form of a boat shaped burial which contained figures en-*graved* by excerpts of the poems and images. The affects from the carvings in Keills Chapel were 'translated' or 'transformed' into poetry, the poems were then snipped up to be carved into new forms on literal un-human figures made from plaster. Unlike graves in 'real death' the meanings produced were arranged to encourage multiple interpretations because the poems had lost their two dimensional linear structure. They were intended to be picked up, to be held, to be read and touched in the round. Adrian's text choices from the poems disassembled the original significations to enable diffracted meanings, to produce diffractive writings for diffractive readings, as new assemblages. I think that in this case the resulting creative disruption of narrative embodied our walking, our questioning and our conscious unknowing. This process produced a form which was properly attentive to the sensation of walking around Arichonan and its environs which involved a necessary tentativeness and uncertainty. I believe that the recursiveness of our approach and the resulting disrupted and disrupting forms are a lively, embodied response to walking around ruins. Tim Edensor<sup>96</sup> describes the unique effects and affects of this process; the "sensual characteristics" and the ruin's "peculiar affordances" which produce "unfamiliar

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 123.

states” of mind. In a comment especially pertinent to the conclusion of this chapter he remarks:

Finally, I critically interrogate the much-mooted metaphorical relationship between walking and narration suggesting that such parallels are overdrawn. The illegible, fragmented experience of passage through a ruin suggests that walking is not amenable to authoritative representation.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 123.

## Chapter 4

### Diffraction towards a domicile: identity, nostalgia and solastalgia

#### Introduction

Throughout this project I have discussed the issue of the subject as one which is materially embodied, with reference to the idea that creative process is produced diffractively in *entanglement*<sup>98</sup> with the non human. In Chapter Two I discussed immanence as a perspective aligned to immersion, as a synchronous view of the micro and macro which I think of as a vibrant force for reading and writing texts diffractively. That is to say, it is possible to enact a reading and writing process which sets texts to rub up against each other, to tear, cut and collage, to bleed and seep through across other dimensions to produce unexpected, variant meanings. So far, I have been writing about the effects and affects of this approach on critical reading for research and on writing in terms of language use and style. Yet it is *The Clearance at Arichonan 1848 soundings* which reveal a stronger commitment to the creative use of diffractive reading and writing due to a necessary concomitant problematising of form.

For the previous poems in the collection I developed form, themes and ideas based on ideas that I have worked on for some time. However, the subject matter of the clearance posed a number of difficulties which made it clear that I would have to develop a form and mode which would be radically different to the other poems in the collection. Before and during the time I visited Arichonan I was casting around for a form and register which was capable of addressing and respecting the themes of displacement and trauma. The previous poems in the collection came out of a consideration and acknowledgement of place based on detailed observation, through journaling, taking photographs and videos and sometimes drawing. These poems are able to show loss and cultural erasure because they respond to the material deterioration of human making; of lichen patterns on stone walls, of legible and illegible grave markers, demonstrating the steady and comprehensive enmeshment with the non human. The court records of the trials after the riot at Arichonan are available in paper-based

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<sup>98</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 381.

archives, as microfiche copies or in a digitalised format. The ‘lively’ events which comprised human emotions and actions at the time of the clearance at Arichonan have become spectral and ghostly in their archival resting places. As I have remarked before, the people at Arichonan left no direct records of their own, they even lacked the parish records which marked their individual births, marriages and deaths. They were represented indirectly, as numerical commodities on the estate records, in a spectral algebraic form which revealed their absence. Mel Y. Chen<sup>99</sup> refers to ‘the calculus of animacy’ due to a pre-existing hierarchy of privilege, whereby the least privileged groups (including the non human) are accorded a reduced animacy. The calculus of animacy incurs a cost for those considered to be less; their homes, cultures and languages are not respected by those who are most privileged and therefore such groups become vulnerable to displacement or colonisation. My task for representing the historical event of the clearance at Arichonan was to find a form of writing which revealed those gaps in the record which corresponded to individual people without performing what I referred to in Chapter Two as “cultural ventriloquism”. I wanted the writing to convey the sense of urgency and immediacy which would have been rife at the time of the events without the danger of speaking *as* the voices from the past and without taking control of their narratives for the benefit of personal creative practice.

The first section of this chapter will deal with the impact of the clearance at Arichonan on selfhood (physical, digital and spectral) in relation to power, social participation and justice. In Chapter One I refer to Haraway’s creative explication (as “speculative fabulation”) of the term ‘environmental justice’ in relation to problematic relations between the human and the non human within the context of the climate emergency. This section also includes a consideration of the treatment of indigenous peoples with reference to environmental justice, as an adjunct to the mechanisms which are driving the climate emergency. The theme of social justice in human terms follows on from ideas I discussed previously in Chapter Two when I considered the ethical difficulties of representing the non human as *other* and how this conflict has permeated the writing process. The writing throughout this

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<sup>99</sup> Mel Y. Chen, “Animacies”, in *The Post Human Glossary*, ed. (Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 33.

project proposes respect and acknowledgement for all entities without the conventional dualisms being brought into play which prioritise the human, or specific groups of humans.

Previously in Chapter Three I described how *haunting* and *spectrality* become embodied as myth, folk law and folk tales in the poems. Therefore, in the second part of this chapter I will develop these ideas further to consider the notions of haunting, the uncanny and the spectral as symptomatic of what John Porteous and Sandra Smith<sup>100</sup> describe as *domicide*, the destruction of home. These perspectives are proposed as critical responses to Romantic poetry about social displacement and dislocation expressed as nostalgia. In my own writing I am aiming to consider loss and trauma, to respond with writing which seeks out absence, to invite and so to acknowledge haunting and spectrality.

In the third and final section of this chapter I consider the process of writing the central poem of the collection which deals with the court proceedings following the protests at Arichonan. I set out to account for the form and structure of this poem as diffracted reading and writing with reference to Barad, as a means to account for human absence and loss, inflicted by the exercise of colonial power which is expressed in the present day as haunting.

## Part 1 Presence: questioning identity, agency and effect

Before I went to Arichonan I read Heather Macfarlane's<sup>101</sup> introductory account of the clearance at Arichonan based on her transcripts of the court documents which recorded the trials of the townspeople who protested and attempted to resist the evictions. Macfarlane's research adds a deeper insight into an act of clearance compared to other historical texts which describe the clearances in other districts using broader brushstrokes. She comments that the events at Arichonan were unusual because the townspeople did not leave their homes quietly and unlike the tenants in other districts, they were supported by neighbouring farmers. Macfarlane's ancestors were among the Arichonan townspeople who were cleared from their homes in 1848 and it is this distant but personal connection which informs her

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<sup>100</sup> John Smith and Sandra Porteous, (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

<sup>101</sup> Heather Macfarlane, *Arichonan: A Highland Clearance Recorded* (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2004).

relationship to the past and perhaps for this reason it gives greater resonance to her account of the events. It should be noted here, as a particularly poignant postscript, that one township, that of Auchindrain which is close to Arichonan, survived the clearances because a subsequent Duke of Argyll rejected advice to clear it. Further, more detailed historical information about the clearance at Arichonan is to be found in Thomas Devine's *The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed*.<sup>102</sup>

In order to gain more detailed information about the current state of the ruins at Arichonan and to improve my familiarity with the site I referred to a recently published archaeological field survey.<sup>103</sup> The survey provided structural data about each individual building, explaining when and how they were constructed and accurate records of their dimensions. It underpinned an improved understanding of the layout of the township which was not immediately clear when I visited, and it enhanced my material sense of it. The survey gave me a better understanding of the changes after the clearance when one or two buildings were extended to become the accommodation for shepherds which enabled them to be close to the sheep runs. It was poignant to see how a thriving, varied community shrivelled to become the homes of shepherds, as a few domestic dwellings.

According to Macfarlane, the 1851 census records that only one tenant remained from the original community and I speculate whether they or their family were able to remain in contact with those who were forced to leave. The main form of long-distance communication at this time would have been via letters delivered by the national 'penny post' which was established eight years before the clearance at Arichonan, in 1840. I am not certain how literate the townspeople were; in the parish records births, entries for deaths and marriages were often counter signed by a cross rather than by a written signature. Without any means of contact with dispersed family members, a clearance would have the effect of a major multiple bereavement. It would seem as though the displaced people were as good as dead if

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<sup>102</sup> Thomas Devine, *The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed* (Allen Lane, 2018).

<sup>103</sup> Roderick Regan, "The Deserted Townships of Kilmory Oib and Arichonan and Kilmory Mill", *Historic Buildings Survey*, Argyll: Kilmartin Museum, 2014. [http://www.kilmartin.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Kilmory-and-Arichonan-Sett \(Devine 2018\)lements-Survey-Report.pdf](http://www.kilmartin.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Kilmory-and-Arichonan-Sett%20(Devine%202018)lements-Survey-Report.pdf)

they had migrated across the world to America or British colonies overseas, never to be heard from again.

Our lives, our selves across the axes of time and place are accounted for by data more profound in its dimensions than the handwritten estate accounts for Arichonan listing material household goods and chattels attached to the head of a household. Social media and online services commodify the interactions enacted online, so that each person is digitally in thrall casting a data trail or shadow whenever they log on to a computer. There is a new form of social and economic contract which is played out online and it may not be to our advantage despite its easy convenience for the smooth running of our everyday lives. The townspeople of Arichonan were mostly illiterate and poorly educated which contributed to their failure to challenge the legal process brought against them. However, it could be said that we are similarly in a state of ignorance regarding the undetectable algorithms which govern our online lives and which affect us materially. We are living across two dimensions enmeshed physically and spectrally in the digital realm.

Those who do not have recourse to the digital realm through poverty or other factors are fast becoming a marginalised underclass who are not able to easily access vital services for health, welfare, justice or even utilities. They are vulnerable to exploitation and displacement and many people lack the resources to challenge onslaughts from powerful groups with vested interests. The vulnerability of disadvantaged groups is a key element of the poems in the final section of the collection. It is important to note here that the Grenfell Tower fire occurred while we were in Scotland which is why this modern event is interleaved with the poems which relate to the court cases of the Arichonan townspeople. Adrian and I discussed how the predicament of the tenants of Grenfell Tower had a direct parallel to the situation of the townspeople of Arichonan. Both groups of people respectively, are and were generally on the margins of society without the leverage to challenge injustices against the most fundamental right of every citizen; to have a home which is safe in terms of construction and safe in terms of tenure. It is not enough to have a strong connection to the environment you live in; you need power and the resources power confers as a means of protecting your home and livelihood. Power is expressed materially, socially and culturally so that if you lack those attributes you are vulnerable and at risk of marginalisation and displacement. In modern



Britain if you are poor you can never take home for granted because your circumstances are likely to be precarious, with zero-hour labour contracts and private rentals you are forever in danger of losing your job or your home.

The townspeople of Arichonan only have recourse to a material presence expressed as absence. Avery Gordon<sup>104</sup> describes how writers such as Luisa Valenzuela, Toni Morrison, and Sabina Spielrein are “attuned to the sense of resounding emptiness”. She comments:

These women possess a vision that cannot only regard the seemingly not there, but can also see that the not there is a seething presence...seething, it makes everything we do see just as it is, charged with the occluded and forgotten past. These women comprehend the living effects, seething and lingering, of what seems over and done with, the endings that are not over. (195)

Chen’s term “the calculus of animacy” is adjacent to what Eve Tuck and C. Ree<sup>105</sup> refer to as a process; identified by Haraway as “making-killable”. This is perceived:

as a way of making sub-human, of transforming beings into masses that can be produced and destroyed, another form of empire’s mass production. *Making-killable* turns people and animals into always already objects for violence, genocide and slavery.

The townspeople of Arichonan in terms of the “calculus of animacy” were made ‘killable’ at the level of their homes and community. Inevitably they succumbed to colonial power and were removed completely, this was achieved so effectively in most townships that at Arichonan had they not they protested at the clearance, they would have left no individual traces on the written record at all.

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<sup>104</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 195.

<sup>105</sup> Eve Tuck and C. Ree, “Glossary of Haunting” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis (Left Coast Press, Inc., 2013). 649.

## Part Two Finding a way and the way to say

I do not pretend to inquire: but I know you will object—and indeed several of our best and wisest friends concur in the opinion—that the depopulation it deplores is nowhere to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet’s own imagination. To this I can scarce make any other answer, than that I sincerely believe what I have written; that I have taken all possible pains in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege; and that all my views and inquiries have led me to believe those miseries real, which I here attempt to display.<sup>106</sup>

(Dedication of *The Deserted Village* to Sir Joshua Reynolds by Oliver Goldsmith).

Following the previous discussion about identity in association to place – how then do artists and writers respond to social injustice as artistic production? What (and who) needs to be attended to before the process of creative production is embarked upon?

There is another darker strand to some forms of ecological thinking which Nina Lyon<sup>107</sup> raises; that of a call to earlier so called ‘traditional’ pastoral values which rely on the old binaries of oppositional oppressions expressed as patriarchy, parochialism and feudalism. There is not the space here to discuss this issue in detail, although it partially enters into the discussion in this following section of how specific Romantic poets responded to the social upheaval caused by enclosure and the clearance of agricultural labourers from the landed estates.

Oliver Goldsmith, Thomas Coombe and William Wordsworth, respond contemporaneously to the effects and affects of clearance and enclosure and what it meant for agricultural labourers and their communities. John Clare as a poet in the Romantic tradition might also be included in this group although unusually his poetry is informed by his own lived experience as an agricultural labourer, his poems offer a personal protest against enclosure and sweeping agricultural land reform. For this section I shall refer specifically to Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village*<sup>108</sup> (1770), Thomas Coombe’s *The Peasant of Auburn or, The*

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<sup>106</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, *The Poems of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed., Robert Aris Willmott (London & New York: Routledge & Sons, 1877), 29, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/49723/49723-h/49723-h.htm> (accessed March 17, 2020).

<sup>107</sup> Nina Lyon, *Uprooted: On the Trail of the Green Man* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 2016).

<sup>108</sup> Goldsmith, *The Poems of Oliver Goldsmith*, 29.

*Emigrant. A Poem*<sup>109</sup>. (1783) and William Wordsworth's *The Female Vagrant* (1798)<sup>110</sup>. These poems were later seen to be 'morally' (in the Christian sense) laudable and firmly established in the canon of English literature, particularly *The Female Vagrant* and *The Deserted Village*. In view of this provenance they might be seen to be fixed in a Romantic tradition which arose out of a reaction to rapid industrialisation. Romanticism is often imbued with a sense of nostalgia for the pastoral idyll with its accompanying connotations of unworldliness, purity and an established, albeit benign social hierarchy with a consensus of order. There is the sense of a settled, semi pre-lapsarian state which relied upon particular principles of Christian governance by responsible masters over biddable servants; that a relationship ordained by God has been corrupted and destroyed.

Throughout this project I have considered the ethical difficulty of speaking or writing for a subject position which is beyond my own experience. This issue is a particular problem in relation to the townspeople displaced from Arichonnan. My aim in this section is to explicate my personal stance regarding the creative representation of historical trauma experienced by individuals whose voices are silenced in the face of colonial or social oppression. The following comparison of the portrayals of displaced older women in Wordsworth's *The Female Vagrant* and Clare's *Rural Evening* explains some of the difficulties I have encountered in negotiating an appropriate form which addresses the ethics of representing other subjectivities. Previously, in Chapter Two I write about failing to write 'grounded' accounts of trauma, describing this as 'papery' writing. I use the phrase 'cultural ventriloquism' to identify an unethical writing position to illustrate my concern that no matter how experimental or radical the subject matter, or form used by the poet it is possible to identify haunting traces of a poet's point of entry into association with other subjectivities. It is this issue which I discuss here by setting up a close reading of Clare's *A Rural Evening* alongside Wordsworth's *The Female Vagrant* to consider how subjectivity might be inflected by either nostalgia, or solastalgia depending on each poet's personal lived experiences.

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<sup>109</sup> Thomas Coombe, *The Peasant of Auburn or, The Emigrant. A Poem*, ed. David Hill Radcliffe, Spenser and the Tradition 1579-1830 data base, <http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/TextRecord.php?action=GET&textsid=37822> (accessed March 17, 2020).

<sup>110</sup> William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963), 44.

There is a particular melancholic and yearning quality pertaining to poetry written from the perspective of non-participant observers who sadly view the encroachments and depredations of nature visited upon ruined homesteads due to “the tyrant lord” usurping “the whole domain”.<sup>111</sup> Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* and Coombe’s *The Peasant of Auburn*, which references Goldsmith’s earlier poem are written with an overwhelming sense of nostalgia, they unlike Clare are personally distant from the material effects they record. So, the question I would like to ask is; what is the value of Goldsmith’s and Coombe’s nostalgia for home as a dwelling place, as community and as landscape; what is its place in writing about displacement and loss? Is it an emotion only to be afforded by those for whom these traumas have no direct effect? I think this question is at the centre of what I have been anxious to avoid in this final section of the Arichonan collection, that sense of sympathetic but ultimately empty and superficial engagement with the plight of historically displaced people.

Nevertheless, Goldsmith, Coombe and Wordsworth provide valuable and insightful representations of displacement and forced clearance from the land in rural eighteenth century Britain, which in the case of Clare’s poetry is authored authentically and animatedly by a victim of these events. Their work, at the time of publication was seen to be audacious and innovative in subject and form. Goldsmith’s dedication of *The Ruined Village* to the artist Joshua Reynolds reveals the suspicions held by his contemporaries regarding the veracity of his observations and demonstrates his own commitment to documenting the predicament of dispossessed agricultural workers. Wordsworth’s poems *Michael, a Pastoral*<sup>112</sup>, *The Ruined Cottage (The Wanderer)* and *The Solitary Reaper*<sup>113</sup> are heartfelt statements of a censorious poetic sensibility confronted by observations of the effects of displacement and acute personal loss experienced by workers on the land.

Clare’s poems often refer to his personal sense of loss and trauma in response to enclosure. He writes about the suffering caused by the loss of access to the common land for

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<sup>111</sup> Coombe, *The Peasant of Auburn*.

<sup>112</sup> Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 226.

<sup>113</sup> William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. (Hutchinson 1978) (Hutchinson 1978) Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 230, 591.

agricultural labourers and their families and the destruction of their communities. *Rural Evening*<sup>114</sup> alludes to the suffering of the elderly poor in direct counterpoint to the nostalgic tone expressed at the beginning of *The Female Vagrant* by Wordsworth:

Now at the parish cottage wall'd with dirt,  
Where all the cumber-grounds of life resort,  
From the low door that bows two props between,  
Some feeble tottering dame surveys the scene;  
By them reminded of the long-lost day  
When she herself was young, and went to play;  
And, turning to the painful scenes again,  
The mournful changes she has meet since then,  
Her aching heart, the contrast moves so keen,

From my own perspective Clare's poetry has an immediacy and freshness of expression which is lacking in *The Deserted Village*, or even *The Female Vagrant* which is largely narrated from a first person subject position, expressed in nostalgic terms as she recalls her long lost home; "Can I forget what charms did once adorn/ My garden, stored with pease, and mint, and thyme,/ And rose and lilly for the sabbath morn?" As a reader I hear the voice of Wordsworth in these lines, not that of a displaced agricultural worker. Clare's reflections on the subjectivity of the older woman in *Rural Evening* is anchored materially in place and time "the parish cottage wall'd with dirt" with a "low door that bows two props between". The handling of time is adroit and direct compared to *The Female Vagrant*, the old woman is placed in a correspondingly aged and sagging door frame looking at the children playing outside and the reader is invited to empathise with the "mournful changes she has meet since then,/Her aching heart, the contrast moves so keen". The *Female Vagrant* is an example of what I have described previously as "papery" writing, whereas *Rural Evening* "seethes" with remembrance of times past, there is the sense that Clare is part of the scene, that he knows this woman by name. My comparison of the depiction of materiality in the two poems reveals how in *The Female Vagrant*, due to Wordsworth's nostalgic perspective the material effects and affects are flimsier and not as convincing as Clare's embodied engagement with the elderly woman in *Rural Evening*. In light of this comparison it would appear that writing from a nostalgic viewpoint is wont to produce a seamless yet

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<sup>114</sup> John Clare, *Poems*, ed. Norman Gale (The Rugby Press, 1901), 55, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/52601/52601-h/52601-h.htm> (accessed March 17, 2020).

disembodied, immaterial affect which encourages the spectral. Distancing narratives of this kind tend to close down interrupting and interfering voices, Wordsworth speaks for and over the position of the female vagrant, whereas Clare invites us beyond the garden gate into the decaying material environs of the elderly woman in her collapsing cottage.

Clare's position is that of a man who has barely survived a *domicide*, the destruction of his home environment and community and who is haunted by the consequences of it for the rest of his life. Glenn Albrecht<sup>115</sup> uses the term "solastalgia" to describe a sense of "pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one's home environment". This condition is particularly pertinent to Clare who observed at close hand how familiar landscapes and ways of life were transformed for ever. Albrecht<sup>116</sup> concludes that solastalgia "captures the essence of the relationship between ecosystem health, human health and control (hopelessness and powerlessness) and negative psychological outcomes". His approach based on quantifiable data using a research tool; the environmental distress scale (EDS) is used to substantiate qualitative data derived from interviews and this by implication is purely anthropocentric. Nevertheless, the physical effects and affects of environmental degradation are acknowledged, particularly on marginalised groups such as the indigenous people in Australia who are notably included in Albrecht's succinct references to relevant research in this supplementary article. With a view to Clare's fluctuating state of mental health it is possible to say that he was strongly affected by the social dislocation associated with changes made to familiar environments by landowners. His perspective is not from a distant position of relative comfort and prosperity, informed by a melancholic sense of nostalgia for what was; a quality which characterises the writing of Goldsmith, Coombe and Wordsworth. By way of contrast it is important to note that Clare's state of mind was strongly affected by social and environmental upheaval which directly impacted on his well-being. The difference in writing positions is palpable. Goldsmith, Coombe and Wordsworth's writing is imbued with nostalgia due to their relatively secure social and economic status, whereas Clare's might be described as one characterised by solastalgia due to what Albrecht<sup>117</sup> calls "the lived experience of the physical desolation of

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<sup>115</sup> Albrecht, "Solastalgia", S96.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, S98.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, S96.

home". Clare's experience was lived and ongoing, it is a critical and material component of his writing which embodies his distress and trauma. By comparison nostalgia is a gentler, quieter emotion suited to elegy, suggesting weaker connections between the human and the non human. Solastalgia captures a sense of the continuing grief of the human in response to an enforced rupture of a valued reciprocal relationship with the non human.

Clare's intimate knowledge of rural poverty at the level of known individuals is not available to me. At Arichonnan I stood in the ruined houses which resounded with absence, with the unhuman, with those who have passed out of memory beyond the archives. I began to understand that there is an ethical constraint to imagination when confronting the trauma of unrelated others, that I would have to work tentatively, as I commented before. I would therefore have to write 'aslant', nomadically from the margins, to be attentive to haunting. First of all, I needed to consider what I was (not) dealing with, what form of haunting was I attending to?

Eve Tuck and C. Ree<sup>118</sup> question "But why haunting?". They propose that haunting is "...the cost of subjugation. It is the price for violence, for genocide", and that "Erasure and defacement concoct ghosts". They cite Alexie (1996) who makes an incisive point about the "Great American Indian novel", that "when it is finally written, all of the white people will be Indians and all the Indians will be ghosts". (643). Because they are writing from an American perspective Tuck and Ree associate haunting with settler colonialism which they describe as "the management of those who have become killable, once and future ghosts - those that had been destroyed, but also those that are generated in every generation" (642). From my own position the haunting they write about has a deadly reverberation; those who colonised were themselves displaced by colonisation in their native lands, from Scotland and Ireland only to become agents of oppression and displacement in the service of empire. Hence the intergenerational urge to conserve these identities, as a response to earlier social and cultural displacement, therefore producing a form of voluntary haunting which at the same time quashes the ghostly trauma of the original indigenous ghosts. It seems that colonialism is rife even in the realm of the spectral.

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<sup>118</sup> Tuck and Ree, *A Glossary of Haunting*, 643. Subsequent page references in text.

### Part 3 Finding form

Extract transcribed from journal Monday 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2019

*The court records related to the clearance at Arichonan have a disembodied impersonal voice which excludes those who find themselves in opposition to the judiciary. The court records are threaded through with absence – the names of the townspeople have been decoupled from their voices, all that remains are the barest bones of testimony in curt reports from the agents of the law. This is an act of deracination; the court process strips away personality, vitality and what remains is a prose form inflected and infected by the cadences of the King James Bible – its poetry swollen to an impersonal rhetoric which fills the gaps absolutely. In this way the townspeople are (trad)/(re)-duced to observable actions pinned to a timeline of events, matched to the irrevocable legal process – the deployment of implacable colonial power.*

*Braiding frayed, decayed voices into a narrative, a 'non language' as warm breath discernible in the chill air. I had to acknowledge that I could only 'conjure' the shape of their voices to construct a grammar of silence, absence, lack and powerlessness. I needed to expose this in the process of writing. It would be impossible to arrive at this position by deciding on a predefined end product. Many hauntings are not specific, they might be experienced as atmosphere, temperature or as gathered shadow. In terms of form and style I had to silence and stand away from myself, to discover a new language which does not; state, explain, impose or close down - one which is activated to imply, suggest and question as a flow of listening. To purposely encounter and acknowledge ghost talk as a means of entering into the haunting to reveal the stripping away of their language – idiom, personality, dissolved amidst the collapse of familiar referents, immersed in the sulphuric acid of their history and our own as one condition, improperly mixed, toxic and corrosive. The townspeople referred to by name in the court records appear as snipped out shapes through which a featureless*



*lack leaks out – these figures are even denied existence as spectres, they are gaps in time casting slight voiceless shadows, they have been utterly denied.*

I realised that the poems which comprised *The Clearance at Arichonan 1848 soundings* would have to use varied and perhaps contrasting modes due the challenges of the subject matter. The fourth section of the collection which deals with the actual events of the clearance needed to take a very specific form. I knew this even before I went to Scotland and I felt anxious about how I would work with this material. I read the transcriptions of the court proceedings<sup>119</sup> and I was struck by the arcane language of the court records, its cadence and rhythm. The words used by the court officials were weaponised against the uneducated defendants who appeared to have little recourse to legal representation, they were completely displaced from the proceedings. The colonial legislative system worked to ensure, as it did in other parts of the British Empire that individual voice and indigenous languages were silenced. I lost sleep over thinking about how I was going to represent the events of the clearance in an ethical way, one which did not detract from the experiences of the townspeople. I therefore needed to attempt to develop a form and style which was appropriate for the subject matter. It was clear that I would have to remove *myself* from the writing, to stand at a distance from it, but I did not know how I could do this in such a way that the poetry would have impact and power, to do justice to the consequences of the clearance at Arichonan.

While I was researching artists' explanations of their approach, I came across Jutta Koether whose work focuses on "the *behaviour* of paintings not the surface" and her comment resonated because at this point it was a core concern of mine. I wanted my work to have affect, to have *behaviour* sufficient to communicate the trauma and injustice of the clearance. A few weeks before I travelled to Scotland, I went to a poetry reading at Essex University featuring Ralph Hawkins<sup>120</sup>, a local poet. He read a long narrative poem about the excessive and corrupt deployment of power by the uppermost echelons of society in Stalinist Soviet Russia and its perverse and often fatal effects on individuals. He used what I heard as a

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<sup>119</sup> Macfarlane, *Arichonan*.

<sup>120</sup> Ralph Hawkins, poetry reading, Art Exchange, University of Essex, 15 May 2017.

stripped down prose form which was completely appropriate for the material. Hawkins' reading gripped and mesmerised me, the language was spare, almost like journalistic reportage and did not interfere with trajectory of the narrative or its implications.

There are two contesting locations of presence bound together in *The Clearance at Arichonan soundings*. The ruins at Arichonan testify to the absence of the human as spectral presence a "cutting together-apart"<sup>121</sup> in diffraction with the archive of the court records relating to the clearance which affirms named presence and human events although these are ultimately inflected by absence due to the passage of time. It is an unsettling dynamic which sparks insights into the theme of memory, or the lack of memory (un-memory) in association with a textual record which was designed to resist direct utterances from the townspeople. The records were intended to serve as a quantitative account, as an untoward textual record of the exercise of power deployed by the privilege of the voiced over the voiceless. Time is stretched between these two entities; now and not now. Murris and Bozalek<sup>122</sup> cite Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2014) who refer to the individual (with regard to time) as "multiplicity", they tether this perspective to Barad's "agential realism" which "implies that the past is open for future reworkings" stating that "Quantum Field Theory (QFT) has inspired spatial *and* temporal diffraction as a research methodology". In this instance I am most interested in the temporal shifts encountered in association with the ruined township in the present day and the court archive which records the legal process relating to the riots at Arichonan in 1848. It is the slicing, knotting and binding together-apart of these entities which offer an approach to evaluate the writing using what Rick Dolphijn<sup>123</sup> (with reference to Deleuze's conceptualisation of "occupation") describes as a means to "think in involvement".

Murris and Bozalek<sup>124</sup> (with reference to Barad) propose a shift to "diffracting diffractive readings" of, and with excerpts from the theoretical literature, as a methodology which

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<sup>121</sup> Karen Barad and Rick Dolphijn, "Chapter 3: Interview with Karen Barad" in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, ed. Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (Michigan: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 52.

<sup>122</sup> Murris and Bozalek, "Diffracting diffractive readings of texts as methodology".

<sup>123</sup> Rick Dolphijn, "Occupy (After Deleuze)" in *Posthuman Glossary* ed. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 304.

<sup>124</sup> Murris and Bozalek, "Diffracting diffractive readings of texts as methodology", 6.

attends to “differences and matters of care in all their detail, in order to creatively repattern world-making practices”. Their approach enables an insight into the process of reading the court records through and with excerpts from The Guardian newspaper reports on the Grenfell fire which occurred at the time of the field trip; as a means of achieving spatial and temporal diffraction effects and affects for writing. In this way I hoped to allow a space for an ethical reading/writing *for* and *with* the events at Arichonan in 1848; as Murris and Bozalek<sup>125</sup> comment, “becoming sensitive to the always political and ethical nature of research”. They cite an interview with Barad<sup>126</sup> (2012) who comments “Moreover, the production of values and meaning through the diffraction apparatus is always... with an eye to our indebtedness to the past and the future” and they go on to state “Being creative, but not in the sense of crafting the new through a radical break with the past.”

Therefore, if I had I re-imagined the scenario of the clearance at Arichonan by putting words into the mouths of persona *which* (not *who*) are ‘made up’ I would immediately fail to respond ethically to the past, so that the writing would lack integrity. The connection between the past and the present would be severed under these circumstances and as a result the writing would be limited to producing superficial, unsatisfactory connotations for the present. Such writing would be what I described before as ungrounded’ and would suffer from similar issues to the opening poem of the collection which I struggled with for the same reason. Due to these considerations, it seemed more ethical to refer directly to the court records, to make cuts which acted with and against other cuts to produce diffraction effects and affects which spark new positions and performances. The use of excerpts or cuts of reportage from The Guardian intensified these effects particularly at the level of the temporal. The past was fully acknowledged because it was permitted to cut into and with present day events.

Due to the sense of loss, displacement and absence at Arichonan caused by the intervention of the state legal apparatus, it was clear that the writing needed to accommodate notions of haunting and spectrality in relation to social justice. Avery Gordon<sup>127</sup> uses Raymond

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>127</sup> Gordon. *Ghostly Matters*, 202.

William's term a "structure of feeling" to suggest that haunting is a social experience, an emergent solution, as "something to be done" which is at the "very edge of semantic availability". I interpret "the very edge of semantic availability" to be an affect which results from those moments of creative practice which involve a "cutting together-apart". I see this affect where I have interleaved cuts of reportage from The Guardian about the Grenfell Tower fire, with cuts from the court transcripts in 1848 which record the legal response to the riots at Arichonan which enables two temporalities to spark against each other. Gordon discusses the concept of a "history of the future" and I propose that diffractive readings of texts might achieve an aligned effect, by allowing space for non-contiguous temporal cuts due to re-reading as re-using, through a diffraction of text fragments from different eras. By this means I return to Tarlo's idea of the "humble poet" as a recycler, as a re-user of older and other things. Braidotti<sup>128</sup> describes this self-effacing guise as "becoming imperceptible" as a prerequisite for "emptying out the self" as "nomadic becoming". The "emptying out" of the creative subject position, as I have said before is characteristic of a practice founded on immersion or immanence. In addition to the "falling back"<sup>129</sup>, into intra-actions with the non human, the process in this poem also depends on what I would describe as a "standing apart beside" (analogous to a "cutting together-apart") in order to acknowledge spectral difference, its effects and affects and yet also to invite its presence.

Avery Gordon refers to Williams's concept of "a structure of feeling" to identify conflicted spectral processes which not only require an understanding of them as "an affective social experience and consciousness" but also as "spellbinding material relations". Williams's "structure of feeling" accommodates the chafing of oppositions which are not represented or recognised by "fixed forms" (the academy) that refrain from allowing or articulating "presence". Gordon associates haunting with the *structure of feeling* as a means to identify the material affects of prominent historical and social events or circumstances which once analysed or recorded by institutions are usually divested of personal affect or 'feeling'. A structure of feeling embraces the 'tangle' of the subjective and the objective as "sensuous knowledge" or "historical materialism". Gordon's perspective on haunting in relation to

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<sup>128</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 151.

<sup>129</sup> Stott, "The Wetfooted Understory".

injustice and trauma adds an important material consideration of the social and cultural dimension as a necessary element of creative practice which is characterised by immanence; thereby “entangling” human and non human “multiplicities”<sup>130</sup>.

Gordon<sup>131</sup> asks a question which is especially pertinent to this project

How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly? How do we develop a critical language to describe and analyse the affective, historical, and mnemonic structures of such hauntings?

Williams’s *structure of feeling* is seen to account for “how hauntings are transmitted and received” and Gordon refers to the gaps produced between “organised forces and systematic structures” and the everyday attempts to mediate between them, namely between the institution and the individual. She suggests that it is the interstices which generate the “afflictions” and “visions” as emanations of the spectral.

From my own perspective I propose that the use of diffractive readings of texts from two different time frames; the archived court records pertaining to Arichonan against and through the reports about the Grenfell Tower fire in *The Guardian*, suggest a “critical language” albeit couched in a creative form. The excerpts I chose from the court records and from reports in *The Guardian* foreground how institutional action, or inaction (in the case of the Grenfell Tower fire) impact at an individual level. I cut *The Napier Commission 1883: Ross Noble writes against The Guardian newspaper Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2017: Aditya Chakraborty reports*. The former poem ends with an extended quotation from the Marquis of Lorne (soon to become the Duke of Argyll), who in 1846 comments on the “laziness, ignorance and intractability” of his tenants and that “without extensive emigration” a “greater evil still” will be averted. Here the Marquis of Lorne is deploying the “calculus of animacy” by denigrating those who he is about to evict from their homes. The themes of the next poem echo those in the former, except time has shifted to the present day, to Haringey in London where social

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<sup>130</sup> Murris and Bozalek, “Diffracting diffractive readings of texts as methodology”.

<sup>131</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 18.

housing tenants are being similarly castigated. “[A] senior cabinet member” assesses the worth of just over one thousand houses as “minus fifteen million”, which he asserts is the cost to improve them. His assessment is designed to support the privatisation of the housing estate which would entail the displacement of the existing tenants. However, in this poem the voice of one tenant, Sam Legatt is directly reported, and her comments are intended to echo backwards in time, to ‘speak’ with those people who were forcibly removed from townships in Argyll, such as Arichonan:

...They think  
we’re what makes it worth minus

fifteen million. Us the plebs, the  
people who’ve lived here  
raised our families here,

worked here, got our  
memories here. We’re just  
a commodity to them.

Sam Legatt is entitled to speak *into* the past in this way because she *herself* is on the brink of displacement for the economic gain of those who are supported by the power of the state to exploit the poor and disadvantaged. Her voice exposes the voicelessness of the tenants who lived on the estates of the Duke of Argyll who were not given the opportunity to speak out at any time. I cut this poem to be read diffractively against *Arichonan Spring 1848: The Summons of Removing* which snips up fragments from the legal document from Poltalloch Estates to notify tenants in the township of Arichonan to “flit and Remove themselves” as a statement which is given agency because it forms a response from the past to Sam Legatt to state “this is *their* legal process; this is how *they* remove you from your homes”. I make another cut; to refer to a perspective from 1846, this time as analysis written by Friedrich Engels who provides a counterpoint to the Duke of Argyll’s comments written a year earlier; he writes about the predicament of the working classes in Manchester which I paraphrase in the poem as “their oppression,/ their exploitation, their premature/ deaths as *social murder*”. This is the alternative fate for those cleared from the land, if they were not forced to emigrate, they became ‘factory fodder’ in the rapidly expanding industrial cities in the north of England.

Next I turn to the Grenfell Tower fire and another form of inquiry whereby the press investigated the health and safety oversight for the building and typically because the tenants are poor and disadvantaged there does not seem to be any follow through for existing procedures. The subsequent poem *David Collins of the Grenfell Tower residents' association said it* draws attention to how even though concerns were reported repeatedly none were addressed, or even responded to in order to allay the tenants' concerns. Kensington Chelsea Tenants Management Organisation (KCTMO) simply did not listen seemingly because the properties were not privately owned. An architect, Sam Webb reported to the Home Office that half the buildings of this kind used for social housing did not meet basic fire standards. He was told "nothing could be done because too many people would be made homeless". The tenants, like the townspeople from Arichonan lost out to the "calculus of animacy", and the unbearable truth to face here is that they were literally "made killable". Worse still in the first instance, no one in a governmental position was prepared to confront this uncomfortable truth, to express regret or to offer support. Polly Toynbee<sup>132</sup> commented "Theresa May was too scared to meet the Grenfell survivors. She's finished". And Toynbee concludes "the people spilling out on to the street, sheltered by churches and mosques are the unwilling emblems of deliberate Conservative attacks". The cuts relating to the Grenfell Tower are made to act with and against one another and also with and against those from the court records for the riots at Arichonan. I wanted these temporal cuts to generate affect – a *structure of feeling* that connects the predicament of the individual to institutional power or malpractice, to allow a voice to the silenced.

The next poem in the series *Inveraray: 17<sup>th</sup> August 1848* lists the names of those townspeople at Arichonan who were charged with attacking the "agents of the law". As before, I collage excerpts from the court proceedings, however this time I cut in with my own commentary from reading these inferentially. This particular cut reveals a powerful protest which sings through time and is carried out by two women, Sarah MacMillan and Christian Campbell who refused to be interrogated in English and needed a "Sworn Interpreter" to be

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<sup>132</sup> Polly Toynbee. "Theresa May was too scared to meet the Grenfell survivors. She's finished." *The Guardian*, 16 May 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/16/theresa-may-scared-grenfell-survivors-finished-austerity-cameron-osborne>

“examined in the Gaelic language”. I guessed that both women did in actual fact speak English because Christian’s sister Catherine Campbell was “duly admonished/and thereafter judicially/ examined and interrogated in English”. Sarah MacMillan and Christian Campbell used their chance to speak on their own terms, in their own language, they were not passive figures: I comment “and I strongly hope this/ was one more protest-//to speak their own/tongue, to use/their own words,//to trip up the/court in its methods,/to use their process against them?”.

There is one other occasion where I deviate from the actual court transcript and this is the poem *Catherine Campbell McLachlan’s words revived from John Gillies’ statement*. John Gillies “Sheriff-office” reports the process of breaking down the door to Catherine Campbell McLachlan’s house and what she said to him: “I asked John/Gillies – by/what right//had he/to enter/my house?”. The text which follows in the poem thereafter; I inferred from the court record. I acted against a self-imposed constraint in doing this, but I wanted to “revive” her words, to allow her some redress. For both these examples I used the cuts to release the women’s spectral voices from the formal court record, to abut the personal against an impersonal, (so called) objective account, to allow a “structure of feeling” which otherwise would be absent. The subsequent poem *Taking the prisoners to Lochgilphead* places Catherine Campbell McLachlan’s simple direct statement in the context of the wider community’s support for the townspeople cleared from their homes at Arichonan. I make a cut from Heather Macfarlane’s account which precisely locates where support was to be found “In the passing/from Bellanoch along/the narrow wooded defiles//people crowded/to heap stones/upon John Gillies’ men”.

My intention was to diffract the different registers used with and against each other in this part of the collection. The language of the court transcripts is written in a convoluted, abstract obscurantist style which defies everyday colloquial understanding. It is an exclusive language of power which is deployed by a small group of powerful (in this instance) men, on behalf of the colonial elite. This final chapter of the commentary (with reference to the beginning of Chapter 4) is prefaced by a journal entry which notes my own feelings about the legal process used against the townspeople. This personal affect was influenced by my critical reading of Avery Gordon’s accounts of haunting and Dylan Trigg’s perspectives on



memory and the uncanny which acted together to give the sense of spectral and absent voices, of presence denied.

On several occasions I was invited to read the Arichonan collection of poetry and each time I came to read these particular poems (Part Four) I was aware of a noticeable physical effect and affect on myself and on the audience. It seemed to me that the words ‘asked’ to be spoken and for human breath to enliven them. Previously in Chapter Three I discussed the idea of the creative practitioner as shaman. During those moments when I read the poems I became closer to the events which the writing embodies and in turn through my own breath and body I enter into what *feels* like *nomadic becoming*. It is very similar to the sensation I experience when I am writing, drawing or painting, that sense of being immediately present. Sometimes I write about becoming my own ghost during that process of complete self-effacement, or immersion and during the reading of this section of the Arichonan poems I feel as though I am allowing myself to be ghosted through and with a *haunting* litany of names and text unheard for nearly two hundred years.

The Arichonan collection concludes with two poems which approach the position of the migrant as “Part five: migration soundings”. The previous section, Part four considers the interleaving of time and texts for two specific events to produce further meanings. The poems in the final section embody different forms of temporality which are less specific. These poems are intended to have a mythic quality which might apply to all epochs of human existence across time. The first poem *a bird flight and you are too young for such distance* developed from an image of a monochrome spectral shadow of a hand overlaid on a white background.<sup>133</sup> The hand was slightly smaller than an adult’s and at the time there were graphic reports of child migrants drowning on the sea crossings to Greece. I ‘read’ and cut the two elements together along with thoughts about what happened to the townspeople of Arichonan once they were cleared from the land. I wanted the poem to convey a physical sense of reaching out as a gesture of loss and abandonment as an integral part of the migrant experience and also the failure to grasp that hand either in the present moment, or to pay attention to what has gone before.

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<sup>133</sup> Preto Taneja, ed., *Visual Verse*, v 04 chapter 02. <https://visualverse.org/images/tertia-van-reensburg/>

I wrote the final poem after reading an account from archival material about women from a cleared township singing psalms on board a ship as they set out for their new lives overseas. They were heard to sing *Penitential Psalm, number 102*. This particular psalm (as they well knew) is especially apt because it describes how a group of starving people are removed from their place on the land. I have placed it against and with the first poem in Part Four which relates the Marquise of Lorne's description of his tenants and their dependents. It is intended as a repost to his dehumanising commentary, as a lament by and for those people he cleared from his land; their home. The original psalm is shot through with images of destitution, of starvation, of smoke and burning which speaks to and with the townspeople of Arichonan, the tenants of Grenfell Tower and migrants from war zones throughout the world. The psalm embodies the effects and affects of forced displacement of disadvantaged and destitute populations by power elites across the ages.

In the face of human displacement and trauma in association with the degradation of the non human and the ongoing climate emergency, it is difficult to engage "imperceptibly" with creative practice when there is the overwhelming impulse to make forceful statements and interventions. For the writing in Part Four of the Arichonan collection, I knew I would have to "purposely acknowledge ghost talk" as I remarked in the excerpt from my journal, at the opening of this final section for Chapter Four which I return (diffractively) to here:

*In terms of form and style I had to silence and stand away from myself, to discover a new language which does not; state, explain, impose or close down - one which is activated to imply, suggest and question as a flow of listening. To purposely encounter and acknowledge ghost talk as a means of entering into the haunting to reveal the stripping away of their language – idiom, personality, dissolved amidst the collapse of familiar referents, immersed in the sulphuric acid of their history and our own as one condition, improperly mixed, toxic and corrosive.*

Throughout the process of writing the sequence of poems in Part Four I struggled at times to "stand away from myself". If I had broken with this constraint by speaking *for* the spectral, rather than listening and attending to the ghosts, the process of "wronging the wrongs", as

the aim of haunting would continue<sup>134</sup>. Gordon<sup>135</sup> identifies this urge as a desire to revive the utopian, as another form of haunting:

To be haunted in the name of a will to heal is to allow the ghost to help you imagine what was lost that never even existed really. That is its utopian grace: to encourage a steely sorrow laced with delight for what we lost that we never had; to long for the insight of that moment in which we recognise, as in Benjamin's profane illumination that it could have been and can be otherwise (57).

Therefore, with Gordon's commentary in mind regarding the possibility of synchronous hauntings of our future hopes entangled with our perspectives on past affect; I conclude here with Tuck and Ree's entry for 'F' in their Glossary of Haunting<sup>136</sup>; 'Future ghost', as a necessarily diffuse writing position to aspire to:

I am a future ghost. I am getting ready for my haunting.

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<sup>134</sup> Tuck and Ree, Glossary of Haunting, 642.

<sup>135</sup> Gordon, Ghostly Matters, 57.

<sup>136</sup> Tuck and Ree, Glossary of Haunting, 648.

## Conclusion

Further questions: looking a-head, going forward headless

### Part 1 Original intentions: evaluation and analysis

As I explained in the introduction to this project, I started out with a set of what initially appeared to be fairly simple intentions. Primarily I wanted to consider creative practice in more general terms as well as to evaluate the specific development of my own writing in relation to subject, style and form. My reading of theory was directed towards formulating new perspectives on practice and to properly account for how my views changed throughout the duration of the project. At the same time, I was beginning to consider creative practice in relation to the non human in view of new materialist perspectives and to propose art as a form of research within the context of the available critical literature.

In this section, I shall evaluate how I addressed these interests and in the light of my evaluation, I shall analyse the impact on the writing process with reference to my current work and to raise further questions for research in the future.

### Part 2 Developing a process: reading the critical literature

In this section I would like to consider the effects and affects of the research process and to do that there needs to be a frame of reference. To assist with this task, I return to Teemu Mäki's models for art as research (which I discussed in Chapter 1) and his conclusions about what constitutes "good academic artistic research". The two following criteria are, from my own perspective those which I would like to be considered after reading the collection of poetry and this accompanying commentary. They are the questions I have asked myself throughout the project. First of all, has the research changed my creative practice and the resulting work? Secondly, is the creative work included as part of the research 'results' more self-aware and self-reflective than it might have been had I taken a different approach, for example, if it did not reference or apply new materialist thinking? Is there as Mäki proposes "a significant element" in my work "that ponders the origin, context and form and content of the artwork itself"? So that the writing is "not only able to show or be the research results

but also able to reveal and embody the research process”? These are the key questions which guide my concluding evaluations and analysis.

Karen Barad’s ideas about diffractive reading, the notion of “a cutting together-apart”, which was originally developed from Donna Haraway’s ideas about diffraction, enabled a dynamic reading of theory which has strongly influenced and impacted on the development of my creative practice. Barad’s theories informed and accounted for the productive processes and the final outcomes of the collaboration, to enable a deeper level of critical reflection.

Reading and subsequently writing diffractively shaped new understandings of ways (in the sense of paths rather than as methodology) to undertake creative practice in association with the non human. This approach produced creative work which engaged with challenging themes such as forced displacement and social injustice, and which also acknowledged the *intra-actions* with the non human. I think that without the collaboration I would not have had the opportunity to experiment as fully with alternative perspectives on creative process in association with the non human. The partnership stressed the necessity to explain and account for our individual ideas, often in exhaustive detail and I think this process provided an unusually clear view of each other’s thinking and imagining, through an assemblage of other-to-self-revelation, which in turn produced new ideas and imaginings. My writing journal was an essential tool, its importance and significance travelled beyond keeping a record of ongoing practice, it was a creative document in its own right because I overlaid the writing with drawings and diagrams, augmented by photographs and video clips.

In Chapter One I discussed ideas about art as research leading to a discussion thread (with reference to Maki) which noted the difficulty of resolving the tension between conventional research or doctoral study by creative practice, of the need to justify such practice by writing an accompanying academic article, commentary or essay. Due to my reading of the scholarly literature, my subsequent writing about creative partnerships and because now I am in the position of viewing the project retrospectively, I feel I am better placed to offer an opinion on current approaches to art as research. On the basis of my own experience I suggest that in addition to creative work, art as research might constitute representations of process through the use of diverse media. For example, by using an electronic journal, or online blog

which have the capacity to capture photographs, drawings and video clips, including more conventional reflections on practice with references to theory.

I think that a less formally constrained research *space*, or *map* would represent a more authentic response to active creative processes as they occur over time. In this way creative outcomes and academic research would be brought closer together to reveal deeper and clearer insights into practice. This approach is aligned with teaching in the fine arts which places an emphasis on sketch books, journals and portfolios as a means to capture process and progress in thinking and making over time. These are viewed as a necessary component in the assessment process and are often included in exhibitions following a programme of study. The use of sketch books and journals is encouraged as a necessary element of pedagogy and training for artists, who usually continue to follow this practice once they have completed their studies. This approach is endorsed by theory relating to diffractive reading, whereby the practitioner compiles a body of work which is thoroughly interleaved with considerations of the creative outcomes throughout the duration of the project before they are finalised. By this means the nuts and bolts of the process are revealed progressively and recursively for evaluation and discussion with reference to the academic literature or stated practice by other makers, artists or writers. Effective creative production develops from a deep engagement with ideas about the world, its materiality (ontology), knowledge and philosophy (epistemology) and culture. This pedagogical approach acknowledges that practitioners need to learn to 'grow' a personal template as a creative space within which to interrogate such ideas, to follow and develop their own unique perspectives and spaces for making or writing.

Throughout the writing of this critical commentary, I sometimes experienced a sense of tension between giving myself permission to veer away from an academic register when I *felt* this was not appropriate or equal to the task of accounting for the effects and affects related to my own individual practice and style of making and writing. On these occasions I *felt* uncomfortable, that this writing was not academically acceptable or 'correct', that I was "troubling" (in Haraway's usage) the academy by adopting an eccentric, unconventional method and register. I persisted with the approach because I think working in this way is a feature of diffractive theory for writing and making and because I believe it enabled me to

reflect, respond and create at a deeper level of practice, to take *care* with the subject matter I was working with.

Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor<sup>137</sup> writes about Susan Sontag's use of *regard* in relation to what is viewed. Sontag enjoyed what Wagner-Lawlor describes as the "multivalent resonance" of the word in its performance as a noun and a verb. With the former, it is associated with attention and looking, "but also as a kind of esteem, admiration". For the latter, as a verb, *regard* is interpreted as looking intensively. Sontag's use of "regard" is not dissimilar to the perspective which in Chapter One I describe as *acknowledgement*, as an ethical recognition of difference between the human and the non human. I speculate that "acknowledgement", or "regard" might be viewed as an active principle, or key element of *immersion*, a term which I borrowed from Rebecca Stott, as a precursor to the proposition that I am aiming to write from a position of secular immanence as opposed to theist transcendence. Such a position implies a shift from a single subject view which privileges the human over the non human, to one which allows multiple perspectives and associations. Wagner-Lawlor comments "Regard is a particular form of attention: intensive, evaluative, care-ful" (122) and most importantly for the purposes of this project she considers and proposes how the wider definitions of *regard* might include the non human as "the *object* of general disregard". She goes on to remark:

An economy of regard must also be ecological, an extended relationality that, too, is maintained through generous gestures of (self) critique and care that come from seeing the other. (124)

Throughout this commentary I have endeavoured to highlight and discuss specific questions in order to illuminate my thinking at various points, however, my intention was not to answer these conclusively. From the outset I wanted to avoid a designed or designated outcome to the collaboration because I think sometimes conventional research methods invite predetermined conclusions. Due to the sensations of loss, absence and spectrality which we

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<sup>137</sup> Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor, "Regard" in *Symptoms of the Planetary Condition: Critical Vocabulary*, ed. Mercedes Bunz, Birgit Mara Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele (Meson Press, 2017), 121. Subsequent page references in text.

encountered in the ruined township we needed to pay attention to what was not there, to give space for multivalent perspectives to unfold gradually as part of a deep mapping (Adrian), or in my case, *soundings* of time and place.

Now that I am approaching the completion of this project, I think that Adrian's figures engraved with phrases from the poems are the most apposite form of response because they allow greater space for conjecture, further imaginings and new, material engagements. They are the entanglement of a poetry sliced from the bones of its original representations, etched into heavy tactile forms which give tangible heft and *feeling* (emotional and tactile) to splinters of meaning which capture absence and the vanishingly small silences left behind. I believe that it is the figures which hold the most power compared to the poems because they continue to evoke (and provoke) questions and sensations in ways which elude written text. Therefore, I suggest that the figures are potent exemplars of diffractive reading and making. The creative outcomes of the Arichonan project are acts of *regard* and therefore generosity, as Wagner-Lawlor states:

An economy of regard is related not to mastery and the production of sameness, but to the play of difference, diversity and heterogeneity. Not a simple transaction of one thing for another, but an inter-action, an engagement between equal (equally regarded) agents. (124).

The interplay between Adrian's selections as diffractive readings of the written text, embodied by his plaster figures serves to illustrate the principle described above (an economy of regard) to achieve a parity of mutual exchange and acknowledgement which animates them and therefore provokes new dimensions of relationality with a viewer/holder/reader. From my own point of view, working in a creative partnership with an artist enabled me to work in an unaccustomed way which will undoubtedly influence and inform how I work on future projects. The process of engaging with the Arichonan project developed a map of creative pathways for posing questions, for reflection and decision making. As I commented before in the first chapter, the collaboration challenged me to go beyond what I was capable of individually in terms of creativity and theoretical thinking. The project gave me a space within which to experiment and then afterwards a place to gather



seemingly disparate strands together, Arichonan was a necessary focus and lynch pin for my ideas and paradoxically for a ruined township, it became a creative 'home' for making and writing.

### Part 3 Going forward; a body, a-head

In this section I set out a brief context for my current practice. I will exemplify this through the analysis of a recent poem which is not only representative of my written style at the moment, but also demonstrates how I have developed themes and ideas from the Arichonan collection.

I completed *The Clearance at Arichonan: 1848* in August 2017; although I have returned to the collection to redraft one poem, notably the first (awkward) poem in the collection which I discuss in Chapter Two, I have not made any other alterations. In the intervening years, I have continued to write poetry and it is evident to me at least, that the Arichonan project has had a strong impact on my current writing. My reading of new materialist theory in relation to creative practice has transformed my use of form and has impacted strongly on the style of writing. These changes have been made in response to my perspectives on writing in association with the non human. I use techniques which were consolidated during the writing of the Arichonan collection as part of my own creative 'language' which I explained in the context of Reggio Emilia theory in Chapter One. I now have a more developed understanding of my individual creative practice and I consciously refer to this when I am writing. I have shifted from a somewhat intuitive process to one which is more considered and as a result I have a greater awareness and command of the effects and affects of the techniques that I use. As I indicated before, later in this section I shall consider a recent poem which demonstrates a number of the approaches which are emerging. Before I embark upon this explication, I shall discuss the work of an artist, Stuart Mugridge whose work resonates with my own ideas about working in association with the non human. The following discussion sets up a diffractive reading of Mugridge's practice against (and together with) my own perspectives to illustrative effect, which I think reveals deeper insights into our respective thinking in relation to new materialist ideas about creativity.

At the CHASE conference, *Environment: Landscapes and the Mind* at Goldsmiths University in June 2015 I met a fellow doctoral student, Stuart Mugridge who continues to practice as an artist. Inevitably we discussed our research interests which were partially aligned in terms of theory. In his blog<sup>138</sup> he uses the term *langscape* which he proposes as a means of recognising:

the impossibility of a (human) union with nature – through words and writing whilst simultaneously revelling in the possibilities that recognition of the difference provides in a form of *becoming-landscape*.

In Chapter 2 I discuss how I would like my writing to have *behaviour* in the way that artist Jutta Koether describes her painting and making. I have come to think that my personal creative ‘language’ (which does not only constitute writing) is a form of ‘behaviour’ performed as a strong association with the non human. In the blog<sup>139</sup> which was designed to commentate on his activities for his doctoral studies and which he continues to maintain, Mugridge describes his practice as *performance* [my italics], as a “Deleuzean *becoming*” [my italics] with landscape which to me seems to represent a concept similar to, or aligned with *behaviour*. In his essay *Poetry and Thinking* Robert Bringham<sup>140</sup> discusses the interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of *mímēsis* which is generally translated as “imitation”, Put simply this determines the assumption that art reflects reality. He proposes what he believes to be a closer translation; that of *participation* [my italics]. He then refers to Simone Weil’s reflection on the purpose of art and words which she explains as follows: “Their function is to testify, after the fashion of blossoming apple trees and stars” which Bringham<sup>141</sup> interprets as saying “When words do what blossoming apple trees do, and what stars do, poetry is what you read or hear”. Bringham’s analysis is interesting and important with regard to Haraway’s views on reflection and diffraction which I discussed in Chapter One. His preferred use of the term *participation* brings together notions of *becoming* which on the basis of my research, associates with what I have identified as *immersion or immanence*.

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<sup>138</sup> Stuart Mugridge, “About”. Working with/in landscape Blog.  
<https://romancingthebritishlandscape.wordpress.com> (accessed 4 April 2020).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Robert Bringham, *The Tree of Meaning: Language, Mind and Ecology* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008)

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 144.

Mugridge's statement of the "impossibility of a human union with nature", properly acknowledges difference; and his use of the term "langscape" encapsulates for me Barad's notion of "cutting together-apart". In the 'abstract' to his thesis he proposes<sup>142</sup>:

...exertion as a logic for the creative act by recognising and embracing the performative potential of long distance walking and running and their disruptive relationship to writing and thinking.

From my own perspective (I have written about these ideas previously in Chapter Three) Mugridge's practice of running and walking embody (in the literal sense) a diffractive, or as he expresses it a "disruptive" reading of landscape for *langscape*. Although Mugridge's theoretical position is somewhat different to mine, we appear to have travelled in parallel to arrive in a similar space where there are definite and intriguing points of synergy regarding practice. We have both side-stepped conventional *mímēsis* in favour of *participation* (or *langscape*, *immanence*, *immersion*) as a means of acknowledging difference in the 'other' to arrive at a relational creative practice which shows *regard* (Sontag) for the non human, as a "paying attention together-apart" (my own interpretation) or as Tarlo would put it "the view aslant".

As I commented before, as an aside, my creative practice does not consist entirely of writing. For the duration of my studies I have attended a weekly art class to develop knowledge and skills for drawing and painting. I have discovered that the research and thinking needed to produce art work often enters into the writing. At one stage I had an interest in drawing and painting quite small objects at a much larger scale in order to pay attention to their form. I think this element is quite apparent in my current writing. The poem<sup>143</sup> *we skirt vast puddles and jostle awkward umbrellas...*, which I analyse below, shows this aspect, whereby I am attending to small events and sensations in the context of wider cultural and political circumstances. There is certainly a strong visual element to my work. The Arichonan poems

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<sup>142</sup> Stuart Mugridge, *-becoming-landscape[fold here] intra-rupting landscape, language and the creative act*, Doctoral thesis. (Birmingham City University, 2018) <http://www.open-access.bcu.ac.uk/7210/>

<sup>143</sup> Appendix 5, Part I, 20/20 collection, *skirt vast puddles and jostle awkward umbrellas...*, full text included.

depended on my use of visual media and I have continued with the practice of keeping a journal which includes drawings and diagrams as well as writing to represent my thinking. I started to explore the use of a more systematic approach when I wrote the *book house : house book collection*, the details of which I summarised and discussed in the Introduction. As I explained this was a fully formed project and provided a basis for the work with Adrian in terms of understanding how art work might inform writing. This process demonstrated the need to reflect and evaluate practice in order to engage with a project at a deeper level beyond producing artefacts which are superficial in their effects and affects. This project evolved pathways for associations with the non human and to explore creative *intra*-relations because the art work was fully grounded in attending and responding to (and with) material conditions. The collaboration with Adrian enabled me to refine this practice further, to properly interrogate and extend my thinking, to justify and consolidate considerations of style and form which has given me confidence to experiment and seek out alternative approaches.

My interest in politics and social justice continues to shape my writing. I wrote *we skirt vast puddles and jostle awkward umbrellas...*<sup>144</sup> just before Christmas 2019 after the General Election. I was aware that I would experience strong emotions whichever political party was elected to government; either crushing disappointment or elation. I decided to attend to small events as they occurred during the day after the election and to record these in the writing journal. Throughout the day I made a conscious effort to evaluate and reflect on these events as a conscious ‘stepping back’ in order to commit my feelings, actions and encounters to memory. As chance would have it my young grandson stayed overnight which added another layer of relationality and tension because of course I needed to attend to him. I felt a sense of ‘stretch’ between focusing on my grandson at home in our kitchen and listening to the analysis of events issuing forth from the radio. I wanted the personal domestic activities; once again Leonora Carrington’s ‘dailyness’ to “cut together-apart” the wider social and political context. By this means I hoped to produce writing which *mattered* in the Baradian sense because I had deliberately manoeuvred my perspectives to work in juxtaposition with my material circumstances. I set up ‘conversations’ between the personal

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, Appendix 5.

events in my life, beyond my life and non human entities: “The radio/ speaks in low / tones to a mauve cloud// and rain splinters”. In these lines, I use a method which I describe as ‘torqueing’ the language by twisting and bending words and ideas to generate vibrant affect, with enjambment and unfamiliar word pairings. Sometimes I use a series of internal half rhymes to intensify this effect, often driving towards a ‘volta’ at the end of the poem, as a disturbance represented in form and thought process to pose further questions, to open out rather than close down meanings.

In this poem I use techniques which have become established elements of my writing ‘language’ or style. I have a personal colour palette which corresponds to specific ideas and emotions. I tend to layer these against each, as I would mix paint, for the colours to react to each other to gain affect. For example: “At the/ black book/ shop shed - // I paint a baby’s face, / soft// peony pinks/ against the/ shadow// at my back”. This is because I write from a sense of strong inner visual associations which resonate physically and cognitively in my imagination. The poem ends with references to colours I associate with a positive and generative sense of *becoming* in a creative space ‘...I think of// ochre, umber/ and honey, of/slow accretions// which grow/ forward into/ tomorrow where//these so/ slight times/ shape a// gentle countering/ purpose against/ a bleak day.’ The poem shows a sense of movement through time and place. It begins in the most intimate place, a bed, then shifts to the kitchen, the site of the domestic and archetypal image of home, then to the cloistered world of school regulated by routines and small rituals. Next I walk to a place near to where I live; the black book shop shed which is an important site of creativity for me and then I leave our small town to travel into Colchester to see an exhibition of Anthony Gormley’s work *Field for the British Isles*<sup>145</sup> which has a resounding presence in the wider world. There is an opening out of perspective followed by a rapid re-focusing on to the particular ‘...there is/ a shift of perspective,/ down, crouching// to see Field; hand/ -form figures, as earth tone/ strata, their mouths a// loud, silent, echo/ O...’

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<sup>145</sup> Anthony Gormley, *Field for the British Isles*, 1993, Clay, First Site Gallery Colchester, 16 November 2019 – 8 March 2020.

The figures in *Field* are made in collaboration with communities from around the world and I wanted to convey this sense of participation at the level of personhood, in counterpoint to the massed (democratic) judgement of the election result. I thought of Arichonan, of the disenfranchised nameless townspeople which the half-form figures in *Field* brought to mind, then I thought of the figures Adrian had made. I felt the affect of the figures' lack of mouths in *Field* and the corresponding silence which was paradoxically audible because the absence of voice generated ideas and dialogue about them. Hence the lines 'a/ loud, silent, echo/ O', the 'O' signifying zero which maintains and enables place value, namely something, not as nothing. Quite by chance another visitor to the exhibition was speaking to one of the curators, saying that the number of figures in *Field* coincidentally matched the number of bees in a beehive so that I imagined a low humming resonant presence amongst the figures, as a murmuring, repeated 'O'.

The bees in the excerpt above also reference Helen Jukes'<sup>146</sup> discussion of the Hebrew etymology of the word for bee (deborah) which I found intriguing and influenced the ideas suggested by the poem. Apparently, the root for the word bee (debar) means to pronounce or speak and other derivations include:

(an act, word, literary text); an inner sanctuary inside a temple (literally 'a place of the Word'); bee; wilderness (a place where things live within a larger system, as words live within speech); mouth.

This specific etymology of the word 'bee' resonates especially; bees are a constant theme in my writing, especially in the Arichonan collection which I wrote before the publication of Jukes' book in 2018. Coincidentally in previous poems they are also involved with meanings pertaining to speech or utterance, as non human messengers. For example, two poems in the Baba Yaga collection reference bees in their titles and relate to reading and communication. In *we skirt vast puddles and jostle awkward umbrellas...* I wanted the bees to convey a message, the "accretion" of small, good, warm things, as "dailyness", to propose a

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<sup>146</sup> Helen Jukes, *A Honeybee Heart Has Five Openings* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd., 2018), 245.

means to counter the larger political scale of bleakness and loss which impacts on individual lives, especially those of the dispossessed and disadvantaged.

Adrian and I have discussed working together in the future, to work towards what we think of as closing the circle for the Arichonan project. In a further response to the poems he has collected a series of model boat hulls and made 'cargoes' to put into them. One cargo is of glass phials containing the bodies of honeybees (dead from natural causes, sourced from a friend's hive) and in response I have written a poem *counting the dead hive bees*<sup>147</sup>. Another poem *Saint Kilda house mouse*<sup>148</sup> relates to a cargo of mouse bones which references Arichonan and a species of house mouse unique to the island of Saint Kilda which became extinct when the human inhabitants finally left, an expression of reciprocal displacement. Adrian's making, bound together with these particular poems, refers back to the field trip to Arichonan and our encounters with the non human; the minute holloways made by mice or voles across the grass pathways and the bees near to the graves at Carsaig Cemetery. However, the work is intended not only to return to a past, but to travel into a future. We have discussed launching a model boat from the coast near to Arichonan to carry an as yet unthought of cargo to express our recognition of creative displacement as a 'bringing home-away' to what was cleared. By this means we hope to gesture some tangible measure of restitution, or *recognition*.

I gave this final section the title "Going forward; a body, a-head" in order to restate my commitment to writing in association with the non human, to acknowledge a relational entanglement based on mutually sensuous engagements. In the Introduction I described this sensation as "viscous porosity" and referred to Kirby's phrase "nature scribbles and the flesh reads" which at the time appeared to specifically address emerging ideas about my own personal creative practice and instigated further reading about new materialism and creativity.

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<sup>147</sup> Appendix 5, Part II, *counting the dead hive bees*, full text included.

<sup>148</sup> Appendix 5, Part II, *Saint Kilda house mouse*, full text included.

I offer one last act of diffractive 'reading'. Lately I have been researching art work and literature which features the headless, (mostly) female body as a means to focus on alternative considerations of *embodied* responses and associations with the non human. I had been thinking about visual representations of Medusa and the state of headless-ness which is conventionally described as 'disembodiment', as a disconnect between thought and sensation. I am working on a painting which depicts a scene from a dance performance based on the myth of Medusa's decapitation which features the muscular male figure of Perseus triumphantly holding up her severed head. This act might be interpreted to represent the rejection of female agency by separating the head from an apparently inert and passive body available for further abuse and control. However, I am interested in turning this view 'on its head' by reclaiming and returning to the body, to turn away from the dichotomies of Western European rationalism in favour of a sensuous relationality with the non human which acknowledges difference through *embracing* non privileging, multivalent perspectives. By this means in my ongoing creative practice I would like experiment with opening up spaces to contest conventional assumptions about how humans are living their lives during an era of climate emergency, devastatingly named by theorists as the "Anthropocene". With respect to 'nature', the 'environment', or the non human; I would like my work to invite questions about our relations to, through and with the non human, for my creative work to *trouble*, for it to have *behaviour* as a tentative practice of continual and unfolding questioning, as a falling back immersion, as a quiet, grey practice acknowledging immanence, aslant.



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## Appendices list

### Appendix 1

*bookhouse : housebook* collection (2015), a selection with reference to the commentary.

- Book VI *Question: what is it that quick exquisite she hopes for?*
- Book VII *A somehow difference and she is similarly changed.*

### Appendix 2

*The Handbook of Nature Study* collection (2017), a selection with reference to the commentary

- The writing constraint – explanation of the approach taken
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### Appendix 3

*Baba Yaga and the fish head child* collection (2013 - 2019), a selection with reference to the commentary.

- *Baba Yaga laughs velvet and claw sharp at Miss Grey*
- *Baba Yaga laughs leather and beak hard*
- *Baba Yaga and the gift of crows*

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- *foxed; an un thought plot* (2019)
- *The humdrum conundrum: for Leonora Carrington* (2014)

### Appendix 5

#### Part I

*20/20* collection, a selection.

- *we skirt vast puddles and jostle awkward umbrellas (13<sup>th</sup> December 2019)*
- *a letter to Babylon: when there are lies in the face of burning truths*
- *we do not need to comment on this*

#### Part II

Post Arichonan collection, a selection.

- *counting the dead hive bees*
- *Saint Kilda house mouse / Arichonan field mouse logarithm of connection*

## Appendix 1 Introduction (and Chapter 2)

*bookhouse : housebook (2015) collection, a selection*

### Contents

- Book VI *What is that quick exquisite she hopes for?*
- Book VII *A somehow difference and she is similarly changed*

#### Book VI

Question: what is it that quick exquisite she hopes for?

*To whom shall I give all that now flows through me from my warm, my porous body? I  
will gather my flowers and present them - Oh! to whom? Virginia Woolf, The Waves*

A splintered  
moon, the may and lime  
trees blossom, the church

yard gates are  
open iron wrought and  
charity was the wheel that

eased their  
hem once  
greased by

legacy or largesse,  
the railings on  
The rust red wall

crazy angled  
up strokes, a latinate  
script and all

she can read is  
time seeping  
from the colander grey church.

The grave markers  
no longer  
textualise

their dead, they  
are voice lost  
amongst the weed

killed borders  
adrift from  
the path.

She is her  
usual revenant  
grey loitering and

looking hard at  
the peeling edge  
of things

she picks with  
quicked finger  
nails tasting

odours: the  
sadness of cooked  
khaki and mustard

creep but  
it is not her  
bad dream, so

she leaves it  
on the churchyard  
path with

the dropped potato chip  
like some  
greased profanity a

chance offering to  
propitiate the quietness  
of this place

the faith in  
waiting; she  
wishes on

that one safe  
star in Saint  
Mary's heaven:



she wishes she may  
she wishes she might,  
but what is it

that quick exquisite  
she hopes for?  
The moon

is all she can  
see a gilt  
half edged absence,

tomorrow: will she gather  
this morning's flowers in  
offering to yesterday's waves?

## Book VII

But, I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes.

Charles Dickens *Great Expectations*

It is a somehow difference and she is similarly changed

This morning she remembered  
Miss Havisham: spider thread  
skeins bind  
the kitchen to

become a slow  
clock time abandoned room,  
a torn dress, a grey veil,  
a tin heart milagro; those links

made in loose  
dust chains and  
so those sun  
bleached peppery

moth husks adorn  
low windowsill vitrines  
where desiccation  
blooms in

spectral fades  
and the alabaster  
rose stems  
are decayed

every stalk  
resembles those  
creaked joints beneath glass  
cased lapis shimmered

beetle wings while  
white dirty porcelain  
petals pose vagaries of  
fingerprints, silken must

which vanishes  
In the exhalation  
of paled  
hush tones, a

movement of  
the lips  
sufficient to dispel  
all the summer times,

an erasure by  
the Earth's drift,  
and the  
spiders creep

in today,  
the house  
articulates its autumn  
vocabulary, it is

a somehow  
difference and she  
is similarly  
changed;

death is in  
her a little more  
turning the woman's bones  
to blue rain.

## Appendix 2 Chapter 2

*The Handbook of Nature Study* collection, a selection (2017)

### Contents

- The writing constraint – explanation of the approach taken
- *The Sky Clock*, page 845
- *The wasp*, page 382
- *The hedge bindweed*, page 518

### The writing constraint

Every day using an application to generate a random page number from the *Handbook of Nature Study* (1963) by Anna Botsford Comstock to identify a 'lesson' – in order to ensure an unbiased random selection. One hour to write a response. Anna Botsford Comstock's word choices or phrasing may be used or amended in précised/paraphrased form; direct quotations will be indicated in the text and attributed.

The first intention is to build a collection of poetry based on didactic observations intended to inform lesson planning for American primary teachers during the early 1960's. The language register is characterised by simple scientific vocabulary and is low on figurative description which offers interesting challenges for writing poetry. Can poetry be written by borrowing a mode which is intended to inform, which is often plainly expressed and repetitive in descriptive terms and therefore lacking in emotional affect?

The second intention is to start the morning with a structured writing exercise as a warm up before moving on to the main work of the day.

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2017

The Sky Clock page 845

:imagine this  
dial printed  
on the sky –

for star  
time note  
where the

line from  
Polaris to  
Caph crosses

the face of  
the dial. It is made  
from stiff

white Bristol  
board, cut in  
a circle

one foot  
across: a  
hole in

the centre of  
half inch  
diameter.

Divide the  
circumference by  
twenty-four

and number  
the divisions. Then  
fasten a black

string eight  
inches long  
on a line

from the centre  
and fasten  
to the end

a bullet or  
washer so the  
string will

hang plumb.  
Hold the dial  
to see Polaris

through the hole  
and turn the  
dial around

the line leading  
to Polaris until  
the plumb

line falls  
over the twelve  
mark. Note

the line from  
Polaris to Caph  
where the dial is crossed -

at this point  
the reading of  
the dial is 'star time'

called  
sidereal time  
by astronomers:

this time is  
used by sailors  
and others who

need to  
calculate time  
without a timepiece.

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2017**

The wasp      page 382

look through a  
lens at a  
wasp in the face;

her hair  
in a pompadour;  
its points and arabesques.

Her wings are  
folded quite prettily  
like a fan.

Abdomen: yellow cross  
bands scalloped round  
wise on black.

Even her jaws  
are yellow, notched and  
bordered black,

soft black  
antennae, yellow  
legs, wearing a

comb on her wrist. It  
is a real comb  
and quite ornate.

### **Monday 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2017**

The hedge bindweed page 518

: roadside-pyramid a  
burdock skeleton  
convolved pink and

white, bound  
coiled tightness  
strangulation by stealth.

A twisted bud  
unwinds from bracts  
'keeled like a duck's breast'

there are five  
pale green  
unequal sepals

some like fragments,  
the corolla lobed  
five stars each

thickening white,  
thinning to pink  
margins. Stamens

demarcate nectar  
wells, spoon shaped  
stigmas push

through the anther  
cluster (and pollen  
grains are pearls under the lens).

The seed is closed: first by  
the smallest sepals,  
then each size in order before

the great bracts  
wrap the pod, two  
seeds and a running root

across the seasons.  
The flower opens until mid  
day and Müller

says they stay perhaps  
for moonlight  
waiting for hawk moths?

This is an interesting  
question for  
investigation, to

be settled by  
a child old enough  
to make truthful observations.



## Appendix 3 Chapter 3

### Contents

*Baba Yaga and the fish head child* collection, a selection (2013 – 2019)

- *Baba Yaga laughs velvet and claw sharp at Miss Grey*
- *Baba Yaga laughs leather and beak hard*
- *Baba Yaga and the gift of crows*

#### Baba Yaga laughs velvet and claw sharp at Miss Grey

When she is left alone  
in this brick house  
at twilight

she laces her bat soft boots and  
opens the back door  
to the dark garden,

she pulls the black woollen shawl  
embroidered with cherub pink roses  
over her head and she is altered a little.

the unseen blackbird calls  
a penny warning, a sound of  
coins against keys in the apple tree.

Miss Grey the slim tabby  
from next door outstares her with amber and is  
surprised by tiger eyes;

she laughs velvet and claw sharp  
Miss Grey blinks once and  
slinks hurriedly through the clematis hedge.

Insinuating between each dark leaf across the long wet grass  
she mouse steps  
running in bat soft boots.

beyond the black painted shed;  
the Cornishman's chickens  
settle their feathers and their speckled hen voices,

their creaky crooning spells  
a hex on dark, the moon, the fox to  
bind a blue silver April day.

She smiles into the corner of her mouth  
wearing bat soft boots and a black woollen shawl  
in the black painted hut with yellow hen's feet,

This is what happens  
When she is left alone  
In this brick house at twilight.

4th December 2013

### Baba Yaga laughs leather and beak hard

Baba Yaga sits at the blue sky top  
of the wild bird cherry and  
she fast rides the sharp March wind

the grey-pink blossom  
is 1920s teacup frail against  
the stark cast iron cherry bark

she is watching Miss Grey  
the slim tabby from next door  
make cruel mischief with the garden birds

Miss Grey sharp mouths  
warm soft votives  
on a cold tiled floor

a pair of bodiless robin's legs  
like tiny filament cutlery poised to  
consume a sparrow's snipped off head

Baba Yaga laughs  
leather and beak hard and  
there is a close rush of crow's wings:

the next time I meet her for a cup of tea  
she wears silver wire at her throat  
threaded with grey nylon claws and china cat's teeth.

10th March 2014

## Baba Yaga and the gift of crows

Baba Yaga  
is sitting  
amongst the greening  
cold potato tops

She has folded  
herself as small  
as a bat wrapped  
shadow and

She is watching  
the rooftop crows  
as they speak  
their rust narratives

Which nearly rhyme  
casting a line back  
and forth between  
grey beaks

mother to father  
and the louder  
calls of crow  
children who

converse in  
nursery verse  
those simpler yellow  
corn fed tales.

Early in the morning  
she leaves  
mixed seeds or  
old cheese

on the red brick step of  
the black  
boarded shed and  
swills out the water

in the stone sink  
it is a rising shower  
over the greening cold potato  
tops and onion spears

she sits ink still  
inside her shadow;  
bird winged in her  
black woollen shawl

she watches the  
garden remake itself  
in the new sun  
spun in layered threads

of colour, each shade  
one by one. Baba Yaga  
watches carefully  
until it is done.

The crows settle black wings  
to warm black boards  
perched on the red brick step  
pecking words into haiku string:

the moon has dropped its  
rinds from beautiful  
night feathers, today we eat!

Baba Yaga listens and lists  
their burr rasping calls as she turns  
their gift along the stitching  
of her palm, a wire nickel spring and so it is.

27th February 2015

## Appendix 4 Chapter 3

### Contents

- *foxed; an un thought plot (2019)*
- *the humdrum conundrum: for Leonora Carrington (2014)*

#### foxed; an un thought plot

un-think:  
fox - trans  
form shape

long four  
steps - muzzle - teeth  
points cutting

porcelain  
but road  
shine eyes

a membrane  
lack in  
the other

living : call  
out of being  
under the

skin tight  
drum finger  
beats

heart blood  
rush close  
to open - push

pushing  
I am through  
my eyes look

through  
the skull  
I I I i .

inter- intend  
yes in this  
in - four

steps along  
scent  
strong: bones-

keep stay  
remain that  
other mind

out of her  
skin vixen  
now - bright

all see  
through warm  
ice to tongue -

the others-  
-noise chase  
a hunt a

shitting  
piss  
caught-hurt

dark  
release  
trees leaves

some feathers  
claws quiet  
think human

cross the  
wet grass  
the threshold

a pen  
the reverse  
side of used paper

I write  
words arrange  
forms

sometimes  
I am  
beyond myself

(With reference to Charles Foster and *The Guardian*)

The humdrum conundrum: for Leonora Carrington

She is figured  
on such  
strange geometrical  
hinges opening

all ways  
to a many  
fractalled  
fabular

sea, it furls  
to intendrelling  
frills, lipped, cupped  
within dimensions

and all the doors  
windows, buttons and zips  
now open  
inwards: in words.

But she knew  
this: the hoof, mane, tail,  
streaming atmospheres;  
hold your palm outstretched

Nell, flat as my  
mother would  
have it, only  
crusts and sugar cubes

to offer to your  
galloping particles  
of paint and your fingers  
remain burned and bitten to

the quick for every  
minute the pen is held  
stilling black ink  
writing a humdrum conundrum-

for this the  
duchess Leonora and  
painters and poets  
and makers are smothered

with cassia: and the  
diamond collar  
cut throat  
remnants of

strutted street media  
whores and  
popinjays careening  
emptiness inside the vacuum

decanter and  
they all drink that blank zinc  
tincture to its  
bottomless infinite

the duchess has  
turned on the brothers  
so that we can  
take shelter in a thistling

hue of sky: the  
'yes': the open roof hovels  
hold our blue spaces un  
furnished within

by possible flowers  
and probable horses  
at blossom  
cantering echo ended

for these audacities of  
simplicity we shall  
be shot to death  
by pearls



coaxed by the poppin  
jay media whores  
careening emptiness  
inside the vacuum decanter.

Now the circus folk  
gather, tight roped  
and teetered, spun and  
sang farewell to you, for

you our first and  
last duchess look to the  
jaguar stars, his serpent eyes  
as you re-make the moon

in quetzal feathers, that  
silver sidhe at futuring  
super symmetric speed; Artemis  
infinitely arriving tomorrow.

## Appendix 5 Conclusion

### Contents

#### Part I 20/20 collection, a selection

- *we skirt vast puddles and jostle awkward umbrellas (13<sup>th</sup> December 2019)*
- *a letter to Babylon: when there are lies in the face of burning truths*
- *we do not need to comment on this*

#### Part II Post Arichonan collection, a selection

- *counting the dead hive bees*
- *Saint Kilda house mouse / Arichonan field mouse logarithm of connection*

#### Part I 20/20 collection, a selection

we skirt vast puddles and jostle awkward umbrellas: Friday the thirteenth of December,  
twenty nineteen

five forty-five the  
boy calls  
out –

‘didn’t you  
hear me?’  
He consents

to lie  
between us, cold  
footed warm hands-

for a minute, he is  
muscle and fidgets so  
we all get up:

in the dark kitchen  
we hear the news-  
it is hope

less and I  
feel the weight – sore  
sad rage

settles around  
my ribs wrapped  
in black

about my  
heart. I drink bitter  
coffee, see to

toast, boil  
eggs and spread  
jam for the boy.

The radio  
speaks in low  
tones to a mauve cloud

and rain splinters -  
meanwhile colours  
are painted

on second hand  
paper. We leave  
the house, we edge

round vast  
puddles and  
jostle awkward umbrellas

all the way  
to the class  
room door

where it seems  
to be just  
another day.

At the  
black book  
shop shed –

I paint a  
baby's face,  
soft

peony pinks  
against the  
shadow

at my back.  
We have  
hot noodles to

eat in  
town – fresh  
ginger and chilli,

jasmine tea unfurls  
in a glass and we  
walk to the exhibition

along the broken  
pavements;  
gum stuck,

dodging  
raggy pigeons and  
the plastic woven

into everything.  
Anthony Gormley-  
a rational

voice: there is  
a shift of perspective,  
down, crouching

to see the field; hand  
-form figures, as earth tone  
strata, they mouth a

loud, silent, echo  
O - and a woman  
speaks about her

bees – she  
says there are  
forty thousand in a hive;

a similar  
number to the  
crowd. I think of

ochre, umber  
and honey, of  
slow accretions

which grow  
forward into  
tomorrow where

these so  
slight times  
shape a

gentle countering  
purpose against  
a bleak day.

a letter to Babylon: when there are lies in the face of burning truths

*Apocrypha: The Epistle of Jeremy, Chapter 6 (King James Bible)*

candle light  
lit for those  
without light to see

their hearts  
may be eaten  
by creeping things

yet they feel  
nothing. They are  
sat upon by bats, bees

and birds – by this  
you will know  
they are not gods

the things  
therein  
unbreathing they

are bought  
for a  
high price, made

by masons, carpenters  
and smiths they  
can be nothing

else than  
the work  
will have them to be

from human hands -  
gods of wood laid  
over with silver

ivory and gold  
are like a  
white thorn tree

in an orchard  
that every  
bird sits upon -

like a  
dead body cast  
into the dark

it is better  
to be a useful  
unglazed bowl

in a house,  
or a door to keep  
things safe

than have false  
gods – they  
cannot set

up a king  
in a country or  
send the rain

they are  
insensate to  
your wants

it is unwise  
to have idols  
so close to falsehood

when there are  
lies in the face  
of burning truths.

21<sup>st</sup> February 2020

we do not need to comment on this

he said: it smells of water  
melon – dark  
wet, light dry

(I am thinking  
of Elizabeth Bishop's  
'Of love lies sleeping')

once my  
daughter wrote a message  
stuck to our fridge door

tomorrow's  
yesterday is  
our today

it is timely; warm  
sun, spring-  
the clouds

transform –  
they think from  
pig snouts

into elephants  
you lie  
on your back and you see

she - measuring  
out string  
from the top of the hill

for air to  
billow in their  
downward

dashes to catch  
the wind inside  
the white backed kite

striped in  
brexit  
colours

before this I  
sit with a woman  
I have known

for a number  
of years – she  
holds

a priceless girl  
in her lap and she still  
has the mother in her

to rock the girl  
to sleep we do not  
need to comment on this

our back and  
forward words  
tune to her

slow breaths  
like bees and we make  
sour pandemic jokes -

waiting outside  
the classrooms for the  
children to come

it seems all so fragile –  
now becoming memory - a  
film from the Pathé past

unreal – Kodak  
colouring reels of  
celluloid.

Next; we are walking  
he is writing  
his name

with a stick in  
gravel: vowel  
shifts and stones

consonant  
with naming  
himself.



He is  
making marks  
in this moment

while I  
mark the time  
ahead of us

the vanishing  
minutes  
into months.

## **Part II** Post Arichonan collection, a selection

### counting the dead hive bees

counting the dead  
hive bees  
each one

soaked in  
hot water  
to make

chitin  
malleable  
for placement

in the  
glass phial: a  
fragile proboscis -

out of the  
strong came  
forth sweetness.

The cargo  
a model  
launched:

each leg  
rigged and  
the keel,

abdomen, thorax,  
the bow  
eyed

ancient  
painted  
against ill

omen, yet death  
has befallen  
the fleet

and they count  
each flimsy  
wing flown.

Saint Kilda house mouse / Arichonan field mouse logarithm of connection

Arichonan minute field  
mouse runs, hollow ways  
between the stones

St Kilda the people left  
eighteen months a tiny extinction –  
a negative displacement

into non being  
because of other absence.  
She knows how that

feels the  
heart crusts and crumbs  
less and less - a

Gretel search  
to find my way home  
to find it has gone.

Alone. There was an extinction  
event some DNA remaining  
in the bones - coding a past which was vital.

