

## LOCATION, DISLOCATION, TRANSLOCATION:

### Navigating a Space between Place and Becoming through Practice-led Research

#### Abstract

The focus of this thesis is the experiential landscape viewed through the lens of a performative visual arts research inquiry. The project explores the dialogue between practice and theory through a series of research projects that focus on the experiential inter-relationship of body and place, incorporating still and moving imagery, sound, text and performance. The inquiry follows an understanding of the body as a site of cross-fertilisation and proposes that the oscillation between an experience of landscape and the reception of artworks (between engagement, understanding, articulation and artefact) aids reflexive creativity in the maker and encourages audience reception. Through exploration, examination and rigorous analysis, this practice-led study applies an affirmative criticality to the concepts of dwelling and becoming, and lays the foundation for a reappraisal of notions of home and identity in theory and in practice. Contextualising these theoretical concepts, indicative creative projects are outlined throughout. An extended review of *Communion*, an artwork first performed in 2008, is pivotal to understanding my expanded research practice through a conjunction of media and a series of collaborations. Personal projects are examined here alongside relevant artworks by other practitioners – namely Ana Mendieta, Roni Horn and Tacita Dean.

Following a largely phenomenological methodology, embodied practice forms the basis of an argument that proposes that attention to the localised specificities of place is a productive means through which to reconsider our relationship with the experiential landscape. In this regard, offering new interpretations and understandings of the inter-relationship between a place and a self, and raising questions around issues of belonging and identity (personal, social and cultural). The discussion rests on an understanding that subjectivity is multiple and hybrid and that the potential of becoming is (arguably) important to more ethical, inclusive understandings of belonging on a range of scales, from the immediately local to the global, the personal to the socio-cultural. The enfolded self and located place in this study are understood to be continually in process – sites of constant (re)negotiation; intimately connected, physically and psychologically co-constituted, and informed and performed by each other in practice.

Chapter One lays the foundation for my discussion, outlining early research and giving an overview of debates surrounding practice-led research in the visual arts before detailing the position and particular approach taken in this project. Informed by a range of cross-

disciplinary writers including art historian/curator Miwon Kwon and cultural geographer Doreen Massey, Chapters Two and Three examine issues of place and embodied practice and detail the phenomenology and temporality of place as explored, understood and (re)presented in this research project. Visual examples of relevant works by other artists are given together with personal artworks through which the terms location and dislocation are expanded. In Chapters Four and Five, I examine the concepts of dwelling and becoming in relation to notions of home, belonging and identity as explored in the context of two specific locations – both places I call ‘home’. Here, the words of Luce Irigaray, the artworks of Ana Mendieta and the observations of Edward S Casey inform practical research and the dynamic role of the body in the synthesis of practice with theory is highlighted. Again, examples of personal artworks are reviewed at length alongside those of other artists. In the final chapter, Chapter Six, I discuss the interplay between practice and theory with regard to the philosophical understanding and practical application of photography in this project. The concepts of affect and haptic visibility are examined and particular attention is paid to the oscillation between presence and absence – as experienced in the lived landscape and as reflected through the photographic image. Texts by Roland Barthes and Jean Luc Nancy inform empirical research and, in the dialogue between embodied experience and abstract ideas, the visual examples from personal projects (as well as other artists) are pivotal.

Research in this doctoral project is progressed throughout via an interactive exchange between practice and theory where the lived and the learned both play important roles and together serve to deepen corporeal and conceptual understandings. The body is understood as a site of cross-fertilisation in the performativity of practice where a diverse range of influences and references intertwine and constantly merge to blur the boundary between practice and theory. In this respect, a performative writing style is employed in order to reflect the locus of research (the phenomenological landscape) as well as the performativity of the dialogue between the abstract concepts and concrete particulars that together inform this inquiry. This thesis further proposes that performative writing strategies are necessary in order to adequately reflect embodied research and that, in this respect, the project serves not only as a model for dissemination of practice-led research within the visual arts but across the disciplines.

## LOCATION, DISLOCATION, TRANSLOCATION

### An Outline of Terminology

In order to assist the reader and to clarify the position of the writer and the research project, the title of this thesis needs expansion. The words within the title are multi-layered and suggestive on several levels, referring to the lived and bodily subjective as well as the interdisciplinary theoretical framework of this project, ie to concrete particularities and abstract concerns. Location, dislocation, translocation also relates to a range of temporal actualities and perceptual translations. These terms are taken to be relative and experientially connected in what follows.

**Location** is taken as referring to the landscape generally and to place specifically, but it also refers to the situation of the individual; location is where the work is founded and, on occasion, sited but also where the body is placed, the socio-cultural positioning of the (non-unitary) subject. Location might also be taken to refer to the discipline in which the work is situated but as the theoretical basis of the project covers the visual arts, social sciences and humanities, location needs to be understood as multiple. For location here read locations.

In Practice: the locus of practice in this project is plural and rural as the embodied research centres on particular tracts of Gloucestershire as well as significant sites in the north western peninsular of the Hebridean Isle of Mull. Here 'location' refers particularly to the material specificity of place(s); tangible landscapes that can be located on a map. The influence of specific locations are clearly evident in all the artworks discussed/imaged in this thesis – for example, representative images from the *Asides* series and the text that accompanies these photographs.<sup>1</sup>

**Dislocation** refers to the deconstruction of several key terms within this research inquiry but also describes the literal movement and perceptual dislocation of self as experienced when walking through the landscape. Dislocation applies to temporal experience when perceived via the vehicle of a walk; when a subject is simultaneously aware of past, present and immanent futures as perception shifts as a result of embodied practice, causing disruption to normative temporal routines. Dislocation may also translate as a challenge to assumed knowledge (lived and learned); dislocation might thus result in unfamiliarity within the previously familiar or 'understood'. Additionally, dislocation can be taken to refer to the dislocation of imagery when shown outside the context of the original experience. Dislocation could, additionally, be the experience of a viewer of works made and/or performed.

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<sup>1</sup> *Asides* in Chapter Two, Section 2.5, pp74-76

In Practice: dislocation, as understood in practice, translates as the psycho-physiological landscape and/or the landscape of memory or imagination – the phenomenological landscape of experience where imagination intervenes, where perception temporarily disorients and where linear temporality collapses. As a consequence, the immediate location becomes both somewhat less familiar, a place that (however momentarily) dislocates the researcher/walker, and somewhere more grounded in (a growing awareness of) the larger particularities of 'local' intersubjectivities. Dislocation might thus be used to refer to a shift in understanding as previous assumptions are challenged; this is where concepts explored in practice become problematised and previous certainties become impossible to maintain in the face of lived experience. Dislocation – a displacement between corporeal experience and conceptual knowledge.

An example of my understanding of dislocation can be evidenced through the *Neither Here nor There* artwork, a work generated by a brief visit (experienced as a dislocation) to the city of Budapest. This artwork has been further informed and challenged by a reading of cultural theorist/curator Miwon Kwon who critically examines the concept of dislocation in the context of site-specific artworks which address (through various media) the inter-relationship between location and identity.<sup>2</sup>

**Translocation** refers to the place, literal and metaphorical, that the subject subsequently inhabits as a result of encountering a specified location/s. In this respect, translocation refers to sensation and affect – where memories cut through present experience, where intimations of absence and presence are contemporaneous. Translocation also alludes to the passage back and forth across disciplinary boundaries and theoretical concepts. Translocation could be the result of embodied experience – of corporeal *and* conceptual understandings of place, of attentive consideration given to location in a variety of manifestations. Translocation could be the result of consideration given to and reflection upon works made and/or performed (by interventionist/mediator and, as a result, by a receptive audience).

In Practice: translocation, as examined in the context of practice-led research, refers to a progressed understanding resulting from an experience of dislocation in practice – the place where, subsequently, concepts can be newly examined, further explored and critically analysed in the light of new developments/deepened understandings. Translocation – a place of altered awareness due to a merging of corporeal and conceptual knowledge.

Inspired by the work of Ana Mendieta (and building on critical examination of the concept of dwelling and notions of home), my understanding of translocation derives from practical and

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<sup>2</sup> *Neither Here nor There* artwork in Chapter Two (Sections 2.2 and 2.3, pp64-70) – see also text in Chapter Six (Sections 6.6 and 6.7, pp191-195) relating to a collaborative research project (and reflection on a text by Jean Luc Nancy) with images from *Atmosphere*, part of the *Visible & Void* series evidenced later in Chapter Six.

theoretical exploration (and subsequent analysis) of the concept of becoming, as informed primarily by the writings of Luce Irigaray.<sup>3</sup> This understanding is developed and can be evidenced in practice through the (expanded) *Communion* project.<sup>4</sup> In *Communion*, a series of translocations result from an initial (quiet) performance and a body of photographic images taken on the island of Mull; here, the translocation of people and place effected through a conjunction of media and a series of multi-disciplinary collaborations and performances. Translocation in *Communion*: a meeting of the corporeal with the conceptual, the (e)merging of places, of media, of minds and bodies.

### **Location, dislocation, translocation**

And yet the terms, taken together, could describe the location and/or dislocation of the personal in the social and a shifting of ground, a translocation, between the two – particularly if, as in this study, they are more closely interrogated and inter-woven through tales of lives lived via a revisiting of individual and socio-cultural histories/genealogies. The terms also allude to crossings between descriptive narrative and more traditional academic translation of research – an abutment, as evidenced in this project, of subjective description with cultural critique.

**Location, dislocation, translocation:** an examination of the inter-relationship between a place and a self – an articulation of ‘realities’ and potentialities as understood and informed by multi-disciplinary theoretical knowledge *and* attentive personal experience/exploration of place.

**Location, dislocation, translocation:** brought together in a series of fragments via partial narratives comprising episodic encounters framed alongside socio-cultural understandings and theoretical enquiry.

**Location, dislocation, translocation:** offered here as a contemporary contextual re-positioning of theory with practice reflecting both experience and rigorous critical analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> My understanding of becoming is also informed by the writing of Deleuze and texts by a range of feminist theorists engaged with the work of Irigaray (secondary sources such as Rosi Braidotti, Tamsin Lorraine and Elizabeth Grosz).

<sup>4</sup> Extended review of the *Communion* project in Chapter Five, Section 5.10

## INTRODUCTION

“The relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence (that much any ecologically sensitive account would maintain) but also, more radically, of constitutive coingredience ... In effect, there is *no place without self and no self without place* ... Just how, then, is place constitutive of the self? How does it insinuate itself into the very heart of personal identity?”

Edward S Casey. *Between Geography and Philosophy*<sup>5</sup>

This project was originally generated by the formulation of a series of research questions that have their origin in my creative practice as it draws on references from a range of disciplinary sources broadly related to place. I have progressed the enquiry by conducting a range of visual art projects that have enabled me to reflexively explore various theoretical concepts and concerns relevant to that practice. These questions, reformulated as a series of specific aims, are examined here in and through my own practice in the context of those of other artists. This is done so as to pursue a line of critical enquiry that relates to an interdisciplinary field of clear contemporary concern – that of suitably reflecting the inter-relationship between a self and a place in practice through the process of performative research.<sup>6</sup>

### Aims of the Project

“... the walk sought to activate a space and time within which I might engage with and explore issues of landscape, subjectivity and corporeality ...”.<sup>7</sup>

“I regard embodiment as a movement of *incorporation* rather than inscription, not a transcribing of form onto material but a movement wherein forms themselves are generated”.<sup>8</sup>

1 Taking its orientation from the quotations above, this study aims to adopt and adapt a

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<sup>5</sup> Edward S Casey 2001, *Between Geography and Philosophy* (Annals of the Association of American Geographers 2001, 91:4, pp683-693), p684

<sup>6</sup> A research field that critically examines and explores, via embodied practice, intersections between self and place *and* between practice and theory: for reference to method see cross disciplinary examples such as Barrett & Bolt (2010), DeLyster, Herbert, Aitken, Crang & McDowell (2009), Leavy (2009), Crang & Cook (2007), Roth (2005), Ellis (2004) and Reed-Danahay (1997). In performance studies, see Pearson (2010) and composite texts from Etchells (2004), Heathfield (2000) and Goulsh (2000).

<sup>7</sup> John Wylie (2005); *A single day's walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path*; Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 30 (2), 234-247.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Ingold: *The Perception of the Environment* (Routledge, 2000), p193

phenomenologically-oriented walking-based practice in order to explore and examine the inter-relationship between a self and a place, and to provide a series of strategies through which to offer new understandings of the experiential landscape, with walking serving as the interface between self, place and artwork.

- 2 To critically analyse the concepts of *dwelling* and *becoming* from a cross-disciplinary perspective and investigate how they might relate to issues of belonging and identity – in theory and in (art) practice.
- 3 To explore and examine via a performative practice how a multi-sensory bodily understanding of the complexity of place might be articulated through works presented and, in this respect, how the gender of the artist (here female) is implicated and subsequently reflected.
- 4 To examine the Deleuzian concept of *affect* and to consider how affect might be strategically invoked as a means of assisting inter-subjective readings of artworks produced.
- 5 To use a performative writing style throughout the thesis in order to reflect the non-linear progression of engagement in and with specific places that is in part analytic, in part experiential, in part intuitive.

### **Objectives of the Project**

- 1 To undertake a series of site specific projects in predetermined locations on the Hebridean Isle of Mull and in Gloucestershire.<sup>9</sup> Using diverse media and means (still photography, film, sound recording, temporary landscape intervention and performance), to explore the inter-relationship between body and place, with theoretical and archival research being carried out alongside affect-led practice.
- 2 To position the projects within inter-disciplinary theoretical concerns and understandings of embodied experience with a focus on the concept of *dwelling* and notions of home, and with an emphasis on feminist studies that focus on *becoming*, belonging and identity.
- 3 To position the artwork within the broad genre of landscape arts practice and, more specifically, within visual arts practices that similarly examine the inter-relationship between a self and a place, that explore alternative temporalities and identities, and that invoke affect through sensitive application of media to situation.
- 4 To adopt a performative writing style in order to model an alternative approach to presenting practice-led research that challenges more orthodox academic practice and dissemination formats. Drawing on cross-disciplinary examples,<sup>10</sup> to explore and assess

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<sup>9</sup> These two particular locations are chosen due to their significance in the context of my research concerns – Mull being home to my maternal ancestors and Gloucestershire being my regular domicile.

<sup>10</sup> For example from cultural geography, Wylie (2005); art history/cultural studies, Wolff (1995); visual culture/feminist critique, Phelan (1997); performance studies Heathfield (2000); feminist theory Irigaray (eg 1993, 1992) and Cixous (1996)

the efficacy of such a strategy for textual documentation of a visual arts practice and to consider how a hybrid writing style can, in turn, be employed to underline the context (the experiential landscape) of this particular research study.

### **Form and Purpose of the Different Elements within the Project**

Given the aims and objectives set out above, this doctoral research analysis offers two overarching concerns (as indicated below) that together serve:

(i) as a means of continuing to develop and challenge, appraise and contextualise a practice – an indicative method for exploring cross-disciplinary understandings of dwelling and becoming as the ontological interface between a self and a place. This will allow me to critically examine the phenomenal landscape through the lenses of feminist theories of ‘materialist becoming’<sup>11</sup> and the poststructuralist concept of affect, with an understanding of subjectivity as a multiple hybrid;<sup>12</sup>

and

(ii) to disseminate research in such a way that, as a contextual tool, the project serves to expand and extend the remit of research as practice by moving toward a new paradigm – a model that adopts a performative writing strategy to blur the boundaries between the corporeal and the conceptual, ie between lived and learned knowledges. I propose that such an example reflects the processual reality of practice-led research (in this instance in the visual arts) and, as such, offers strategies that can be adopted, adapted and further developed by practitioners across the disciplines.

In short, this thesis will argue for a re-evaluation of the concepts of dwelling and becoming in the context of a performative visual arts practice *and* a re-visioning of dissemination of practice-led research more generally founded on the two perspectives outlined above. Both of these distinct perspectives are considered key to the overall project – reflecting an integrated, professional and ethical practice and offering a significant contribution to new knowledge, ie a critically informed practice-led project in the visual arts as originally presented through innovative dissemination.

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<sup>11</sup> A materialist theory of becoming is proposed by Rosi Braidotti (2002) and, as I understand it, used to underline corporeal processes/embodiment in a move away from more abstracted notions of becoming.

<sup>12</sup> Subjectivity as a multiple hybrid - reflecting my understanding that identity is not singular and that individual subjectivities are complex, the result of heterogeneous influences and experiences.





## **Practice as Research**

In this project, practice-led research is taken to be an active, embodied research process continually open to question, re-negotiation, re-interpretation and ultimately re-presentation, drawing on phenomenological experience as well as conceptual understandings. Such an orientation is understood to maintain the potential to both *inform* and *transform* practice and to offer new understandings via appropriately chosen and diverse media forms and formats. The research process is understood as a critical and creative developmental tool and not as any definitive or predetermined outcome; a tool through which to explore alternative routes into place and, more generally, to address the efficacy of cross-disciplinary methodologies and the theoretical concepts and concerns that underpin them.<sup>13</sup> To reiterate, research as performative practice; as a means to further develop the dialogue between theoretical understanding and practical projects through continued exploration and reassessment as reflection and application demand.

In the context of my visual arts practice, research is therefore recognised here as reflexive practice *through* art – a course of critical investigation carried out in action. Such a project evolves through processual practice toward unpredictable outcomes; the value of research being the reflexive exposure and analysis of working methods and the challenges and/or the opportunities this affords for critical examination of adopted strategies. Equally important is rigorous attention to their resultant efficacy – for the individual practice, for the sub-field of contemporary art practice within which it is located, and for practice-led doctoral projects within the visual arts more generally. In this instance, an understanding of research as embodied process as well as theoretical analysis has been adopted – as echoed in the performative writing strategy employed throughout this thesis. As such, I propose that this project constitutes a model that can be applied not only within the visual arts but also in relevant cross-disciplinary contexts.

## **Working Through Practice: The Relevance of the Body in this Research Project**

“Because we have a body and are ensconced in a landscape, place and self alike are enriched and sustained, enabling us to become enduring denizens of the place-world to which we so fatefully belong.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> My understanding of the role of practice in research is informed by Biggs & Karlsson (Eds) 2011 (in particular Chapter 20), Barrett & Bolt 2010 (in particular Chapters 2 and 8), Smith & Dean 2010 (in particular Chapters 6 and 12), Elkins 2009 and MacLeod & Holdridge 2005 – for further explication, see Chapter One, Sections 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6.

<sup>14</sup> Edward S Casey 2001, *Between Geography and Philosophy* (Annals of the Association of American Geographers 2001, 91:4, pp683-693), p687

## Embodied Practice: Walking as a Route into Place

The methodology adopted in relation to the visual arts practice under consideration here has a largely phenomenological orientation.<sup>15</sup> This practice-led research project explores the lived landscape and the experience, understanding and ensuing implications of an intimate acquaintance with place via regular and repeated journeys through familiar topologies on Mull and in Gloucestershire. Place in this instance is understood as location, situation, experience and/or identity, as rural and, more significantly, as plural.<sup>16</sup>

Walking is employed in this project as a *route into* place; walking as a consciously adopted strategy through which to examine, observe, investigate and ultimately interpret the locale.<sup>17</sup> The walk is thus understood as both event and advent;<sup>18</sup> a creative tool through which to explore the inter-relationship between a self and a place but, importantly, one that is considered primarily a vehicle (ie as means and not end). In order to focus attention whilst walking, to remain alert to the multi-sensory experience of place and the heightened awareness this can bring, yogic breathing methods are employed – simple exercises that centre on the inhalation and exhalation of breath, exercises that resonate with (but do not parallel) the rhythm of walking where: ‘Every breath we take is an exchange with our environment’.<sup>19</sup>

Walking as a strategic method of engaging with place has, over the past decade, become something of a cross-disciplinary focal theme.<sup>20</sup> Cultural geographer John Wylie states that a walking project can be used as a framework for experimental approaches to the ‘performative milieu’ of walking – a means of exploring and exemplifying ‘the possibilities of deploying a fragmentary and narrative, rather than thematic or schematic, structure’.<sup>21</sup> Wylie’s narrative style rhythmically echoes a walk; observations and corporeal encounters unfold with thoughts prompted by multi-sensory stimuli corresponding to elemental and environmental conditions, critical commentary and analyses flow into one another, propositions are explored and theoretical concerns developed. His walking practice proves apt for the purpose of experimentally exploring the experiential alongside and against phenomenological and

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<sup>15</sup> Casey 2007, 2005, 2002, 2000, 1997, 1993; Young 2005; Merleau-Ponty 2005, 1968; Sobchack 2004; Deleuze & Guattari 2004 and Heidegger 1971

<sup>16</sup> Practical projects being situated primarily in and between the rural landscapes of Gloucestershire and Mull – and yet this is a practice that is also attentive to other sites and situations as/when demanded or applicable (a detailed analysis of the concept of place is given in Chapter 2)

<sup>17</sup> Solnit 2002 and de Certeau 1994

<sup>18</sup> See Irigaray 2004, p30, where she writes of proximity to the other as ‘event and advent’ where ‘something arrives which did not exist and that the bringing together of two worlds produces’.

<sup>19</sup> A thoughtful observation and pertinent quote from Erica Cole, my yoga teacher

<sup>20</sup> For example see Heddon, Lavery & Smith 2009; Heddon 2008; Ingold & Vergunst 2008; Whitehead 2006 and Wylie 2005

<sup>21</sup> John Wylie (2005); *A single day’s walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path*; Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 30 (2), 234-247.

cultural theories – and has provided a positive model for this project. His rationale for using walking to engage with concepts of landscape, together with his experimental style of writing, are echoed in my own creative and critical approach to the exploration, examination and analysis of the inter-relationship between self and place.<sup>22</sup>

Rebecca Solnit's work on walking (2002) provides a second reference point to situate this study. Solnit uses anecdotal and historical examples to describe the value of walking as a creative tool for loosening up creative thinking and expression. She writes of walking as 'the intentional act closest to the unwilling rhythms of the body' and the 'delicate balance' it strikes between 'being and doing'.<sup>23</sup> The interface between being and doing is critical to this research study and, as such, Solnit's argument serves to highlight the possibility that the walk might contribute to work in progress or prompt an insight and signal the start of a fresh direction, a new body of work and/or advancement of theoretical understanding and enquiry. However, it is important to reiterate that walking in this project is considered primarily as a means and not an end.

#### Embodied Practice: The Importance of Gender and Feminist Philosophies

In a research practice that focuses on the body and includes performance, the gender of the researcher has direct implications for the context and content of work/study and therefore demands explicit examination. As architectural historian Jane Rendell has observed, postmodern feminism uses spatial metaphors as 'powerful political devices' for the examination of relationships between identity and place.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, texts by feminist theorists are used to locate the work within informed conceptual analysis.<sup>25</sup>

On the issue of essentialism<sup>26</sup> it is important to note here that this thesis does not suggest that there is any essential link or privilege for women in terms of their relationship to nature and/or the landscape. This statement is necessary to distance this study from moves by some feminists who claim that the woman-nature connection is specifically gendered and unique. Barnes & Gregory (1997) state that some ecological feminists go so far as to 'suggest that one's view is not credible unless one is a woman', commenting that 'the privileging of certain groups risks false separation of people into categories' and 'assumes a

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<sup>22</sup> For further reference to Wylie and the experiential landscape, see Chapter Six, section 6.18.

<sup>23</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust* (Verso 2002), p5

<sup>24</sup> Rendell in Doherty 2009

<sup>25</sup> My research is inspired by the writing of Luce Irigaray and other writers that inform my work include Elizabeth Grosz, Peggy Phelan, Rosi Braidotti, Sara Ahmed and Vivian Sobchack. Judith Butler might have been cited, particularly in relation to the strong performative strand within my practice and in terms of embodiment/agency more generally. However, I have chosen to focus on those theorists that directly inspire, provoke and most positively feed into my research practice; that reflect the key concepts, concerns and understandings of this project and that I have the most affinity with.

<sup>26</sup> See Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (Routledge 1989) for a balanced analysis of essentialist debates

single, unfractured identity; a simplistic assumption in this world of multiple sites of oppression and identity formation'.<sup>27</sup> I would distance myself from any such simplistic stance.

Any gendered polarisation and notion of identity as fixed or singular runs counter to the understandings of this project – where the focus lies on the relationship between a self and a place, body and landscape, and not between genders, and where identity is understood as non-unitary. In this project, the sex of the artist/scholar is more indicative of difference (and an acceptance of and respect for difference) than any gendered schism or bias. Indeed, a respect for difference here applies to the consideration of any polarisation or hierarchy – for example of race, class, religious or political allegiance.

### Embodied Practice: Visual Arts Context

Although I have worked with place in a variety of contexts and locations, in recent years my practice has centred on the woods, hills, fields and river valleys of Gloucestershire and the rural and coastal landscapes around the north western peninsular of the Hebridean island of Mull. Examples of images and texts from projects undertaken in these locations are included throughout this thesis in order that theoretical analysis is clearly situated in the context of a visual arts practice. My engagement and (family-related) affinity with these particular locales has developed over time and the inter-relationship between Mull and Gloucestershire, as well as between myself and both of these locations, continues to develop and deepen. As these places affect me, they enrich my understanding of the peoples and processes that combine to make them what they are and, in turn, continue to influence and propel new practical projects (in these locations and beyond) and to challenge abstract knowledge.

It is in this context that the works of Ana Mendieta, Roni Horn and Tacita Dean serve as models for an embodied practice that examines emplacement in connection with landscape, the temporal, personal and social history, and memory. Mendieta and Horn are relevant to this project because, through their work, they explore identity, belonging, notions of home and becoming via continued engagement with specific landscapes. Another important link between the work of Mendieta and Horn and my own is the use of photography; the photographic image being the visible legacy of an encounter between self and place – either implicit or explicit in the resultant imagery.

Whether the ephemerality of the performative act and/or the document of the event is to be considered 'the work' remains contested, with no clear-cut critical consensus evident. In this respect, references to the documentation of performance and a clear understanding as to whether the photograph is considered as secondary document to original performance or

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<sup>27</sup> Barnes & Gregory, *Reading Human Geography* (Arnold 1997), p205

whether the image is the primary artwork is of vital importance.<sup>28</sup> In this project, the performance event is research in action (the embodied act performed to camera) with the resulting photographs (or indeed moving imagery) considered the artwork and used in installation works as part of a constitutive body of work that collectively '(re)performs' place.<sup>29</sup>

Mendieta's *Silhoueta* (1973-81) photographs serve to model a performative practice that, through the documentation of the artist's female body in personally significant places, explores issues of dwelling and belonging.<sup>30</sup> As such Mendieta's work has had a profound influence on my project. In this thesis I specifically engage with Horn's photographic installations *Pi* (1998) and *You are the Weather* (1994-5); series of images that have parallels and resonate with my practice in that they are composite works gathered over extended periods of time.<sup>31</sup>

The other artist whose work I examine in detail is Tacita Dean. In my practice, I strategically juxtapose images in order to create temporal disjunctions and within Dean's films there is similarly an altered temporal narrative evident in the imagery. Such a strategy, whether employed in still or moving imagery, serves to disrupt linear temporality and offers evocation rather than definitive reading. The films cited in this thesis are *Michael Hamburger* (2007), *Banewl* (1999) and *Green Ray* (2001) – all underline Dean's interest in the temporal but also reflect a concern with place, suggested through sensitive intimations heightened by the haptic quality of her imagery.<sup>32</sup> Such concerns are echoed and evidenced throughout my own photographic projects; considerations that are vital to this project and eloquently evidenced in the work of Dean, as well as Horn and Mendieta – considerations echoed in the thoughts of performance artist Mike Pearson:

“Just as landscapes are constructed out of the imbricated actions and experience of people, so people are constructed in and dispersed through their habituated landscape: each individual, significantly, has a particular set of possibilities in presenting an account of their own landscape: *stories*.”<sup>33</sup>

The significance of the works of Mendieta, Horn and Dean to this project is clearly complex but can be summarised as relating, broadly, to a shared concern with identity (of self and of place), the inherent temporality of the imagery, and a particular interest in and attention to

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<sup>28</sup> For more on this debate see Phelan 2001 and Sayre 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Although I state that the performance event is not considered the finished work, I would like to stress that the embodied act is research in process (whether observed or unobserved) and vital in that it serves not only as the basis of the final art work but as an important critical tool in that it informs further development of my performative practice as well as the structure and content of the final work.

<sup>30</sup> Blocker 1999, Rogoff 2000 and Viso 2004, 2008

<sup>31</sup> Tate 2009 and Neri, Cooke & de Duve 2003

<sup>32</sup> Royoux, Warner & Greer 2006; FVU 2007 and Tacita Dean 2003

<sup>33</sup> Pearson, *In Comes I* (University of Exeter Press 2006) p12

localised particularities of place. The philosophical orientation animating this research project is related to an experiential understanding of place and self (as multiple, hybrid and inter-connected, as co-constituted and continually in process) and the works of Mendieta, Horn and Dean are considered integral to the critical and practical concerns of this project.

### **A Situated Practice**

In order to contextualise the thesis and ground my research firmly in the materiality of place, the first part of **Chapter One** outlines the background to this project. Indicative early research projects are analysed via detailed expansion on the locations and ambitions of embodied practice. Having specified the contextual and conceptual focus of my research study, Chapter One then responds to the issues addressed and outlines the particular methods and methodologies employed in this project. Building on a thorough review of the current debate around the constitution of practice-led research in the visual arts,<sup>34</sup> alternative dissemination strategies appropriate to my project are considered and the rationale behind these particular methods and methodologies examined in detail.<sup>35</sup> I propose that these are strategies that can be adapted and developed by practitioners in the visual arts (as well as other disciplines) where research is formed and informed by lived as well as learned knowledge.

### **Disciplinary Crossings**

Over the past decade, academic interest in auto-ethnography has provided an alternative methodology for many engaged in practice-led research as it offers a suitably rigorous cross-disciplinary model.<sup>36</sup> Within the broad field of landscape/place-centred studies, there has been what is termed an 'ethnographic turn', particularly in site specific visual arts practices where artists have used, documented and presented their own embodied histories as their artwork.<sup>37</sup> There has similarly been increased exploration in cross-disciplinary practice – for example in performance studies, cultural/human geography and cultural theory.<sup>38</sup> The creative arts practice deployed in this research study might be considered auto-ethnographic

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<sup>34</sup> Biggs & Karlsson 2011; Barrett & Bolt 2010; Smith & Dean 2010; Elkins 2009 and MacLeod & Holdridge 2005. See also MacDonald 2009; MacLeod 2000 and Frayling 1993.

<sup>35</sup> There are a diverse range of on-line journals and magazines that similarly explore alternative writing strategies in visual arts practice – see, for example, *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, *Working Papers in Art & Design*, *The Happy Hypocrite or Rubric*. Such resources have provided useful guidelines and inspiring models.

<sup>36</sup> Crang & Cooke 2007; Roth 2005; Ellis 2004; Bocher & Ellis 2002 and Reed Danahay 1997.

<sup>37</sup> See Coles 2000 and Foster 1999 for reference to the 'ethnographic turn' in the visual arts; artists adopting this approach include Sophie Calle, Mark Dion, Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller.

<sup>38</sup> For performance studies see Pearson 2010, 2006 or Heddon Lavery & Smith 2009; for cultural geography see Lorimer 2008 or Wylie 2005; for cultural theory Phelan 2001, 1997 and Wolff 1995. These examples all reflect a concern that the experiential is 'written out' of academic text and include subjective description with theoretical analysis, teasing out inter-connecting threads in the context of current critical discourse.

where auto-ethnography is understood as ‘the ethnography of one’s own group’, as ‘autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest’.<sup>39</sup> Auto-ethnography provides an apt model for an embodied practice concerned with becoming and identity and a project that is informed as much by subjective experience of place as it is by philosophy, critical theory, the humanities, visual culture and material culture studies. As such, auto-ethnography both informs and endorses my predominantly phenomenological methodology and positions the personal in the socio-cultural.

In this practice-led project, subjective and objective realities are seen in partnership rather than opposition and my roles as performer/artist and theorist/scholar interweave, inform, combine, collide and balance or challenge each other in and through embodied research. To quote critical theorist Vivian Sobchack, ‘the lived body is ... both objective subject and subjective object’ – a rich amalgam of sentient, sensual and sensible – with complex ‘materialised capacities and agency that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others’.<sup>40</sup>

#### Performative Research and Subjectivity

Throughout my thesis there is an emphasis on the performativity of practice; a performative practice is enfolded and works in the interstices between lived, autonomous and culturally encoded roles, between tacit and learned knowledges, between the personal and the social. As such, performative practice understood here as active physical process and abstract thought – as an active blend of the corporeal and the conceptual in practice. A performative practice is exploratory and intentionally situates itself between a series of questions and a multiplicity of possible answers, a practice that is neither unproblematic nor easily categorised. As such, it constantly challenges binaries – as well as the practitioner and (hopefully) her audience.

“Despite our desperate eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak.”<sup>41</sup>

Acknowledging non-unitary subjectivities and following an auto-ethnographic approach, this thesis is poly-vocal and adopts a strategic and *performative* style of writing.<sup>42</sup> The rationale

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<sup>39</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997, p2 (where she details her understanding of the concept of auto-ethnography as a means of questioning ‘the binary conventions of a self/society split, as well as the boundary between the objective and the subjective’ as a ‘move toward new forms of theory and writing’.

<sup>40</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California Press 2004), p2

<sup>41</sup> Trinh T Minh-ha (*Woman Native Other*) quoted in Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body* (Indiana University Press 1993), p.vii

<sup>42</sup> In *Mourning Sex* (Phelan 1997; p11/12), Peggy Phelan describes performative writing as ‘different from personal criticism or autobiographical essay’ and states that ‘performative writing is an attempt to find a form for what “philosophy wishes all the same to say”.’ Rather than describing the performance



behind this move reflects a concern that the processual dialogue between subjective understanding and the conceptual analysis that underpins such observations in embodied research be articulated in order to adequately reflect the context of practice-led research. Building on Phelan's conceptualisation of performative writing and following the rationale outlined above, a performative practice is understood and translated here as a dialogic practice formed out of a cross-fertilisation of ideas continually passed between practice and theory.

As we have seen, such an approach reflects contemporary research in other disciplines. The alternative strategy adopted in this thesis is primarily informed by models from cultural theorists Janet Wolff and Peggy Phelan although strategic texts from other writers are also cited.<sup>43</sup> As Jane Rendell observes this approach 'challenges criticism as a form of knowledge with a singular and static point of view located in the here and now' by drawing on 'the remembered, the dreamed and the imagined, as well as observations of the 'real'<sup>44</sup> – a stance echoed within contemporary visual culture where the role of the cultural critic is questioned and alternative writing strategies are (increasingly) examined and explored.<sup>45</sup> As such, performative writing reflects current academic debate and is presented in this thesis as an alternative paradigm; a challenge to accepted models of presentation, a bridging strategy intended to echo an on-going dialogue between theory and practice.

### **Place and Research Crossings**

Using my practice as a concrete example, **Chapter Two** explores and examines the concept of place and the relationship between location and dislocation. The significance of place in this project is underlined and the concept clarified via cross-disciplinary consideration – with place being understood as *process* (as continually unfolding in and through time) and as deeply implicated in the fabric of personal, social and cultural identity.

### **Site Specificity or Sensitivity to Site**

As we have seen, a 'site specific' locus for research practice is integral to this thesis. The notion of site-specificity first emerged in the late 1960s/early 70s (as reflected in the artworks

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event in 'direct signification,' she states that it is the aim of performative writing to 'enact the affective force of the performative event again'.

<sup>43</sup> Wolff 1995 and Phelan 1997 (plus Phelan in Heathfield 2000, 2004 and in Lepecki 2004) with for example texts by Heddon, Lavery & Smith 2009; Lorimer 2008; Wylie 2008, 2005; Pearson 2006; Butt 2005; Goulsh 2000; Lippard 1998; Cixious 1997, 1996; Kristeva 1987.

<sup>44</sup> Jane Rendell as quoted in Claire Doherty, *Situation* (MIT Press 2009), p23

<sup>45</sup> See Gavin Butt (Ed), *After Criticism* (Blackwell 2005) for an overview, a series of indicative texts and performative writing examples.

of Robert Smithson) from a clearly defined founding principle.<sup>46</sup> Over the following decades, site-specificity has evolved into a range of creative practices involving, to a greater or lesser degree, sensitive attention and adherence to the specifics or singularity of site.<sup>47</sup>

Contemporary site-specific practices cannot be easily categorized or separated but Miwon Kwon suggests they fall into three broad categories: (i) *phenomenological or experiential* (grounded in the materiality of identified locations), (ii) *social/institutional* (primarily serving the ideologies/economies of the art market) and (iii) *discursive* (practices having a more fragmented, nomadic itinerary).<sup>48</sup>

I do not position myself/my work exclusively within any one or other of these general categories and, although my methodology is largely phenomenological, I do not adhere (or restrict my practice) to the site-specific genre as defined in the early period, that is to say as only relevant when presented in the location of conception/execution. It is important to add that many of the tensions in site specific practice highlighted by theorists<sup>49</sup> as a result of this evolving (and contested) art form have proved productive and instructive – some being positively transformative to the genre as well as to my practical enquiry. But, both critically and practically, I advocate the importance and positive implications of clear and focused attention to site (as physical, imaginal and social crossing<sup>50</sup>) and question the ethics of nomadic practice against a celebration of the local.<sup>51</sup> In short, this research practice is ‘located, but not fixed; mobile, but not rootless’.<sup>52</sup>

Cultural geographer Doreen Massey’s conception of a *global sense of place*<sup>53</sup> is taken up in the underlying concerns of the project in acknowledging that (i) people need some sense of rootedness but that a sense of belonging and attachment to place need not necessarily be considered as (or indeed become) exclusive; and that (ii) mobilisation, migrations and more fluid boundaries need not necessarily be viewed as threatening.<sup>54</sup> A global sense of place proposes that instead of viewing place as already given and having a particular inherent and stable identity, it is understood as processual – as open and implicitly related to other places and social, political, cultural and economic influences. Such understandings are echoed in this project where the specificity of place is best understood as primarily the result of a series of complex particularities and myriad crossings in a specific location at any given time – crossings that are natural and cultural, human and non-human, historical and contemporary, material and immaterial, political and ethical, geographical and geological.

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<sup>46</sup> The principle of original site specific practice stated that any work generated by engagement with a specific site should remain (or be exhibited) only in this location.

<sup>47</sup> Doherty 2009, 2008, 2005, 2004; Dell 2008 and Kwon 2004

<sup>48</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another*, p8

<sup>49</sup> For instance Miwon Kwon 2004, Claire Doherty 2009, 2008, 2005, 2004 and Dell 2008

<sup>50</sup> The term ‘crossing’ is used here to reference multiple trajectories of movement in and through place.

<sup>51</sup> Casey 2005; Mels 2004; Frampton 1992

<sup>52</sup> Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art & the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (Routledge 2011), p20

<sup>53</sup> Massey 2006, 1994

<sup>54</sup> Massey 2006, 2005, 1994; Cresswell 2004

With regard to practical projects and place-based practice, the installation *Neither Here nor There* addresses location and dislocation, representative imagery from the *Asides* series highlights the significance of place in my research and the rationale behind selection, juxtaposition and scale of photographic re-production is detailed.

### The Temporality of Place

Time is vital to our experience of place and the temporal is implicated throughout this project. **Chapter Three** draws attention to the dichotomy between constancy and change as experienced in the phenomenological landscape and, in this respect, examples from my research practice are evidenced together with artworks from Tacita Dean and Roni Horn. Multi-disciplinary references explicate embodied practice and the temporal is considered here as a focal device through which to reconsider our understanding of aspects of place and facets of ourselves. Via artworks presented, I advocate an in-habitation of place that offers continuity but also accepts change – one that provokes an altered, potentially renewed understanding of our relationship with place, with time, with ourselves and with each other.

Temporal scales, as reflected in the phenomenological landscape, underline the notion of place as process<sup>55</sup> and the temporal is understood here as non-linear – composed of rhizomic intersections between official histories and local knowledge, memory and oral history, myth and poetry, lived and archived knowledge. Such intersections rub up against geological, geographical and cartographic knowledge; socio-cultural understandings; past experience, contemporary observations and future projections – a rich and dense fusion of material and immaterial trajectories.<sup>56</sup> In this project, such understandings are echoed in embodied experience and explored through practical projects – with attention focused on specific locations on a regular, repeated basis and with artworks that are presented in sequences or series, in performance or in installation in an attempt to echo and evoke the complexity and multiplicity of place as evidenced over time.

### Key Concepts

In response to the experiential context of my project, the concepts central to what is explored and examined in this thesis are *dwelling*, *becoming* and *affect*. In embodied practice these concepts are experientially inter-woven but for the purposes of this thesis are detailed and discussed here in three consecutive chapters.

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<sup>55</sup> Massey 2006, 2005, 1994; Mels 2004; Thrift & May 2001; Ingold 2000

<sup>56</sup> Massey 2005

## Dwelling

Focusing on the concept of dwelling, **Chapter Four** draws on cross-disciplinary research to explore dwelling in practice. In this project, dwelling (after Heidegger) is reappraised from the paradoxical twin roots of the verb to dwell – defined as *both* to wander *and* to linger (Casey 1993). In the light of recent cross-disciplinary debate, dwelling and notions of home<sup>57</sup> have received considerable attention in cultural geography<sup>58</sup>, in visual cultural studies<sup>59</sup>, feminist critique<sup>60</sup>, anthropology<sup>61</sup> and phenomenological philosophy<sup>62</sup>. Building on the twin roots of the verb to dwell and giving examples of my artwork alongside works by Ana Mendieta and Roni Horn, the contemporary relevance of dwelling and understandings of home are analysed and explored – the term ‘dwelling’ is employed here as a means to expose binary assumptions, explore (sexed) identity, and to propose/present alternative visions of situated, embodied modes of dwelling.

## Becoming

Building on my analysis of dwelling, **Chapter Five** examines the concept of becoming in order to further explore the inter-relationship between a self and a place with an emphasis on issues of identity and belonging. With reference to artworks from my *Communion* project, the concept of becoming is examined alongside the concept of affect and this chapter exposes the dynamic potential of attentive consideration to alternative understandings, interpretations and representations of contemporary subjectivities that cross both discursive and non-discursive domains.

Understood as a continual unfolding/reforming of identity, becoming is examined here in the context of the experiential landscape and is informed by both primary and secondary sources.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, and importantly as my project includes using my own female body in performance, becoming is informed by and understood in relation to feminist theory.<sup>64</sup> Building on extensive critical analysis of the concept, the potential of becoming is further examined through a performative practice that pursues ‘connections that defy commonsense’<sup>65</sup> and offers the possibility of ‘genuinely creative’<sup>66</sup> responses.

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<sup>57</sup> Meskimmon 2011; Massey 2006, 1994; Blunt & Dowling 2006; Young 2005; Sobchack 2004 and Naficy 1999

<sup>58</sup> Massey 2006, 2005, 1994; Cresswell 2004; Mels 2004; Ingold 2000 and Rose 1993

<sup>59</sup> Meskimmon 2011; Sobchack 2004

<sup>60</sup> Young 2005; Irigaray 2004 and Grosz 1995

<sup>61</sup> Auge 2006

<sup>62</sup> Casey 2005, 2002, 1997, 1993; Merleau-Ponty 2005, 1968 and Bachelard 1994

<sup>63</sup> Robinson 2006; Colebrook 2006; Irigaray 2004; Deleuze & Guattari 2004; Buchanan & Colebrook 2001; Lorraine 1999 and Whitford 1992

<sup>64</sup> Irigaray 2004, 1993; Braidotti 2006, 2002; Phelan 2001, 1997 and Grosz 1995, 1994

<sup>65</sup> Lorraine 1999, p145

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p182

An extended review of *Communion* details the mutation of my practice over the period of doctoral study, the choice and conjunction of media, and outlines how collaboration has informed the project (as well as my practice more generally). The performativity of my practice is underlined and, in this respect, the body is considered as a site of cross-fertilisation for a multiplicity of influences and references (lived and learned).

### Affect and Haptic Visuality

The concept of affect is discussed in **Chapter Six** via critical examination of the medium of photography (the primary medium employed in this research project). Issues of the photographic image are addressed and, in this context, I examine affect together with haptic visuality in order to investigate the relationship between theoretical enquiry, the phenomenological landscape, my research practice and the photographic image – discussing how each aspect of my praxis/project serves to inform and develop the whole.

The Deleuzean concept of *affect* (Deleuze & Guattari 2003), as a reflection of multi-sensory receptivity to the experiential, is fundamental to this research study due to the context of study. Affect has been the subject of considerable interest as well as broad interpretation and debate in contemporary cross-disciplinary research.<sup>67</sup> However, it must be noted that several theorists are critical of what is known as the ‘affective turn’ and that, as such, affect remains a contested concept, embraced by some theorists and arousing cautionary critique in others. Affect should not therefore be considered a neutral term and context remains crucial to both understanding and application.<sup>68</sup> In this project, research practice draws on various interpretations of affect noting tensions between different understandings and applications as well as between disciplines<sup>69</sup> although particular attention is paid to texts that directly connect with and give examples from visual culture.<sup>70</sup> Affect is considered a pivotal concept in this project because of the phenomenological methodology employed, the context of the enquiry, the concepts explored and the performative dissemination of my practice – a practice that continually searches for a suitably inter-subjective articulation of lived experience.

Affect is discussed here in relation to haptic visuality, a theorisation that has come under scrutiny over the past decade particularly in film studies and digital imaging.<sup>71</sup> The appraisal

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<sup>67</sup> DeLyser, Herbert, Aitken, Crang & McDowell 2010 (in particular, see Dewsbury); Thrift 2008; Hemmings 2005; Wylie 2005; Ahmed 2004; Sobchack 2004; Sedgwick 2003; Massami 2002 and Marks 2002, 2000

<sup>68</sup> Parr 2005; Hemmings 2005

<sup>69</sup> For example, abstract and philosophical understandings (Massumi), politicised translations (Thrift), interpretations that argue for more creative, personal academic interpretation of the phenomenological landscape (Wylie and Lorimer) and readings that stress multi-sensory embodiment (Young, Ahmed, Sedgwick and Marks)

<sup>70</sup> Meskimmon 2011; Sobchack 2004 and Marks 2002, 2000

<sup>71</sup> Butt 2005; Deleuze & Guattari 2004 and Marks 2004, 2002, 2000

of the qualities and efficacy of haptic visuality in practice is activated by building on the work of Roland Barthes (*Camera Lucida* 1993), by drawing on the propositions of Jean Luc Nancy (*The Ground of the Image* 2005), by making a comparative reading of Deleuze & Guattari and Marks, and by following the aesthetic observations of Marks.<sup>72</sup> Critical awareness of the haptic is subsequently employed when considering the presentation of research understandings in practice – both in the editing of imagery and in the juxtaposing of individual pieces within installation works.

### **Selected Media and Methods of (re)Presentation**

As we have seen, this research practice explores, questions and critically examines the inter-relationship between a self and a place, investigating dwelling and notions of home together with becoming and identity through the medium of a performative practice that employs photography, landscape intervention, performance and installation. As an established medium for documentation, photography (as well as film) offers an intriguing opportunity to explore and problematise the interface between fact and fiction,<sup>73</sup> the subjective and the critical, and, as such, is considered an apt means through which to examine pathways between exterior and interior landscapes.<sup>74</sup>

The images that form an integral part of this study are presented as series and sequences that reflect observations and connections made whilst working in the experiential landscape; images that explore surfaces, probing and/or blurring the delicate veil between perception and interpretation. The juxtaposition of imagery in installation (or the use of stills in film) is deliberate, a strategy through which to suggest (but not form) narratives that echo different aspects of a multi-sensory experience of place – the perceptual gaps between images to be bridged by the viewer rather than given by the artist. The intention here is to encourage inter-subjective engagement and multiple interpretation by offering different entrance/exit points – layers which can be read in different ways depending on individual knowledge, past experience and the personal sensibilities of each individual viewer.

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<sup>72</sup> See also Butt 2005, pp170-173 with regard to the performativity of artworks and affect/the haptic

<sup>73</sup> An example of a similar approach in practice is demonstrated by Pearson & Shanks in their concept of 'science/fiction' which they state is 'a mixture of narration and scientific processes, an integrated approach to recording, writing and illustrating the material past' (Pearson & Shanks 2001, p131 – see also pp132-146).

<sup>74</sup> Flusser 2007; Nancy 2005 and Barthes 1993

## Summary

This thesis will propose that attentive and informed research that examines the inter-relationship between a self and a place in practice, with an awareness of the affectivity of place and an understanding of the concepts of dwelling and becoming, is strategically placed to interrogate the interface between self, place and artwork. From the same standpoint of corporeal *and* conceptual understanding, this thesis will explore alternative methods of expanding and extending the remit of research as practice through the adoption of a performative writing style – a move that is considered necessary in the context of this project. In this respect, the contribution to new knowledge will comprise a practice-led visual arts project which is originally presented through innovative dissemination. As such, this project evidences both a rigorous examination of concepts and debates applicable to the context of the research project in question and a method that can be adopted and adapted by others in the visual arts as well as other disciplines where research is performative and/or conducted in the field.

In brief, quoting Elizabeth Grosz, in this practice-led research project it is my aim to:

“... experiment with and produce the possibility of occupying, dwelling or living in new spaces, which in their turn generate new perspectives, new bodies, new ways of inhabiting”.<sup>75</sup>

In addition, it is my intention to offer an example of artworks that reflect the understanding that neither place nor subjectivity is unitary or static. In this respect, and echoing the words of Luce Irigaray below, I propose that attention to alternative considerations and representations of both subjectivity and place can be productive – personally, socially and culturally – and carry the potential to stimulate new modes of reception in the viewer.

And to sum up, in the words of Luce Irigaray:

“The transition to a new age requires a change in our perception and conception of *space-time*, the *inhabiting of places* and of *containers*, or *envelopes of identity*”.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion* (Routledge 1995), p124

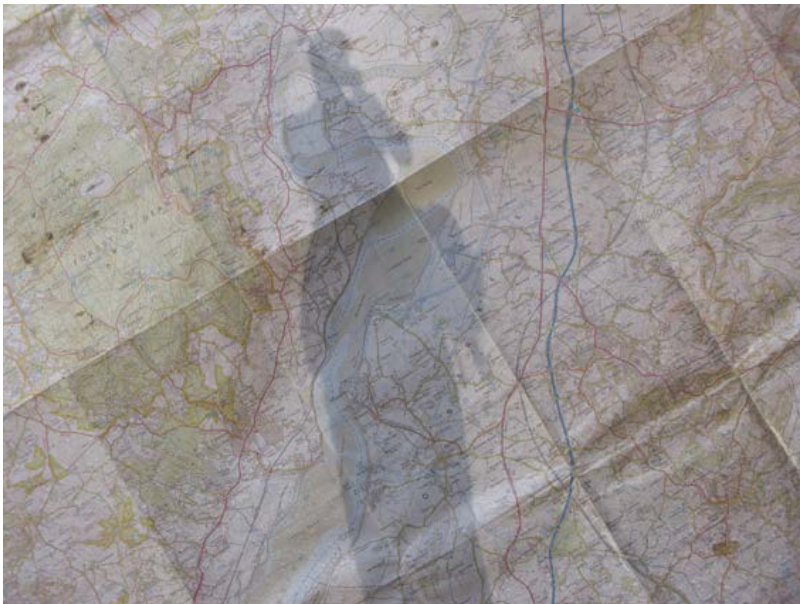
<sup>76</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Continuum 2004), p9

Mull ...



... toward Treshnish

Gloucestershire ...



... across the Severn

*Location, Dislocation, Translocation (2006 – on-going)*



## CHAPTER ONE: POSITIONING THE PROJECT

“Thinking of place as performed and practiced can help us think of place in radically open and non-essentialised ways where place is constantly struggled over and reimagined in practical ways. Place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than the *a priori* label of identity. Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice ... Place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence”.<sup>77</sup>

### 1.0 The Issue of Place: Locating practice

In order to ground this thesis firmly in the materiality of place, the first section of this chapter outlines the background to my research project and details the locations of embodied practice. Distinctions are given as to how differences between place and space and between place and landscape are understood here.

The second section, *Subjectivity and Performative Practice*, responds to questions raised by the first section and, echoing the premise of the above quote, outlines the particular methods and methodologies employed in this project and considers alternative dissemination strategies appropriate to practice-led research in the visual arts. Bringing together propositions outlined in the earlier sections, the final section of this chapter, *Echoes of Humanity: Making meaning out of feeling*, examines in detail the rationale behind the strategies adopted in my research project. Via consideration of alternative writing methods (after Janet Wolff) and an examination of narrative identity (after Paul Ricoeur), I suggest that a performative writing style that blends description with analysis, the personal with the theoretical, is productive in order to reflect the performativity of practice-led research, in this instance in the visual arts.

### 1.1 Place and Practice

“...place as an analytical concept that involves the process of shaping meaning and practice in material space”.<sup>78</sup>

As indicated above and underlined in the title of this thesis, the concept of place is integral to my research. The understanding of place as reflected in this project makes two important distinctions – between place and space and between place and landscape.

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<sup>77</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place* (Blackwell 2004), p39

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p81

Phenomenological philosopher Edward S Casey stresses the distinction between place and space, and outlines space as being the 'encompassing volumetric void in which things (including human beings) are positioned'; ie space as *volumetric positioning*. Casey differentiates place as being the 'immediate environment of my lived body – an arena of activity that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural';<sup>79</sup> ie place as *a set of located, specific and immediate environmental elements actively linked to the body and the socio-cultural*. This follows my understanding of the localised specificity of place; an understanding, echoing Casey, of a complex assemblage of inter-acting elements that – including (and experienced by) the lived body – together combine, collide and collude to form place. In this study, place is therefore considered as specific arena of activity and not simply as position.

Human geographer Tim Cresswell distinguishes between place and landscape, observing that the contemporaneous emergence of landscape painting and the science of optics during the Renaissance together served to construct landscape as an 'intensely visual idea'. He states that 'in most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it' (as evidenced in much traditional landscape representation) whereas he observes that 'places are very much things to be inside of'.<sup>80</sup> Such is the experience and interpretation of place in this project - not landscape, as visually observed from a distance, but place as experienced: as multi-sensory proximate environment, as localised situation, as specific site of embodied engagement.

"Places are never finished but produced through the reiteration of practices – the repetition of seemingly mundane activities on a daily basis ... People are creating places at all scales and everywhere in a myriad of different ways".<sup>81</sup>

Cresswell further underlines places as 'things to be inside of' by stressing the importance of memory (personal and social) in the materiality of place as lived. He quotes Casey who similarly implicates memory by describing place as a 'container of experiences'.<sup>82</sup> Both Cresswell and Casey connect place with identity (personal, social, cultural) by suggesting that echoes of the past are prompted by embodied engagement, multi-sensory observation and a variety of encounters in and with place – not only the creation and reproduction of place 'at all scales' and 'in a myriad of different ways' but also, I would suggest, the creation and reproduction of self, the becoming of self in place. As Cresswell poignantly and, I would argue, accurately states, place is 'right at the centre of humanity'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Edward S Casey, *Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does it Mean to be in the Place-World*; *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 91:4; p 685

<sup>80</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place* (Blackwell 2004), p10

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p82

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, p85/6

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p123

## 1.2 Background to Practice: Gloucestershire and the Isle of Mull

In order to clarify my position, I outline below the background to my project. I came to doctoral research through my visual arts practice and sustained engagement within personally significant rural landscapes. This project was primarily generated by a body of work produced for my Masters degree (June 2006) and after many engaging and challenging conversations, I was encouraged to take my research forward. My practice centres on exploration of the inter-relationship between people and place and, as detailed earlier, focuses on notions of home, dwelling and becoming in place – of becoming implaced; *I'm placed*.<sup>84</sup>

Concentrating on two specific locations, my work continues to explore and address experiential and conceptual issues of landscape and place. My interests lie around the curious and complex co-constituency of place and self, and through my practice I explore ways in which I might express such concerns. My work grows out of and is moulded by repeated performative engagement with the hills, valleys, waterways and woodlands of Gloucestershire and the north-western peninsular of the Hebridean island of Mull. I carry peat-rich soil in the deep tread of my walking boots, I take mud on my wellingtons across the Severn. Earth regularly travels between Mull and Gloucestershire – as it dries, crumbling onto the floor of the utility room in Tabernacle Road or falling out on the rug in East.<sup>85</sup>

My regular domicile is Wotton-under-Edge where I live with my husband and two children. My father lives down the road in Bath. I have several on-going projects underway in Gloucestershire; these centre on the Severn plain and are sited on both sides of the river, on hillsides overlooking the vale as well as on the banks of the Severn itself – the river being a major feature of the local landscape, its snaking silver course running through the county from north to south.

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<sup>84</sup> In Chapter One of his book, *Getting Back into Place*, phenomenological philosopher Edward S Casey writes of implacement in relation to time and place and states: “To exist at all as a (material or mental) object or as (an experienced or observed) event is to have a place – to be implaced however minimally, imperfectly or temporarily” (p13). He adds that implacement is a form of anchoring, of orientation, and that places thus become an integral part of one’s identity (p23). He counters his observations on implacement in the following chapter with a discussion on displacement, expanding his (and our) understanding of the inter-relationship between body/self, place and time. As such, Casey has both informed and inspired this project.

<sup>85</sup> Tabernacle Road is located in Gloucestershire and East at Haunn, Treshnish, Isle of Mull.

then/now

I live in a locale whose past wealth was built on the textile industry.

This industrial wealth is etched on and in the landscape,  
is interwoven in our daily lives and experience of place;  
old mills have been appropriated for light industry and technology,  
industries which support many of the local populace;  
the mill owners' houses elegantly proportioned  
(still inhabited by those of means)  
and set apart from the terraces of weavers' cottages,  
each row headed by a slightly larger property for the manager.

Rusty nails between the bricks,  
nails upon which yarns were hung to dry.  
The alms houses, the many streams, the sheep.

An image of a loom;  
the tension of the threads,  
the closeness of each individual line to its neighbour  
(like the weavers themselves in their cottages –  
back on back, one room atop another).  
The rise and fall of the treadle,  
lifting and separating the lines for the cross-weave, making room  
for another to pass between and, as the treadle falls, to be held firm,  
adding strength and structure to the whole.

I used to live in one of the weavers' cottages.  
I used to wash in a four-footed bath,  
I used to count the nails  
and wonder about the lives of those before me, other women  
bringing up children in these houses,  
other families inhabiting these walls and, like me, hearing the voices  
of their neighbours between the one-red-brick-thin walls of the cottages.

Warf and weft;  
inter-woven threads, inter-woven lives.

The Isle of Mull is home to my maternal ancestors and since the death of my mother, I have travelled to the island several times a year to explore family connections within the parish of Kilmore and Kilninnian and to learn more about my ancestors at the museum in Tobermory. Remembering my mother and her attachment to the island, I spend much of my time on Mull in places she knew and loved – walking up to S'Airde Beinn, out to Langamull, to Croig, Treshnish and Calgary. I visit old and new friends, I have several on-going projects. I am a resident migrant and stay in the same cottage each time I visit; 'East' being located on land my family once farmed. I now visit not only for my mother but for myself and my children.

Field Note

here/there

I think of the family stories that constituted my early knowledge of Mull and the game of 'whispers' comes to mind.

The mutable series of tales that formed my childhood understanding echoed in the various interpretations offered as a sentence passes round a circle; words get lost and others are altered or (re)invented, the sentence emerging at the other end as something altogether different.

My maternal ancestors came from Mull, my great grandfather John Morison was a Muilleach.

He was born (one of 7) in 1860 at Treshnish Farm, a tenancy in the north west of the island held by many generations of Morison beforehand.

The family later moved across the peninsula to Dervaig, settling firstly at Kengharair and later at Antuim.

Educated at the village schools of Reudle and Dervaig, John went to the mainland to high school and later to university to study medicine.

After a period in general practice, he moved south to London where he settled with his wife Mary

to pursue his interest in early exploration and development of X-ray, apparently keeping a large weight of radium in one of the drawers of his desk.

Several generations of later Morison's lived with 'Pop and Grannie' and although under strict instructions not to touch the radium, my mother and aunt of course did.

Is this linked to the high incidence of cancer in the following two generations, to the cancer that invaded my mother's body?

Mull has been in my consciousness since early childhood; this mythical land where boys walked to school with baked potatoes in their pockets to keep their hands warm, potatoes they would later eat cold for lunch. So it was related (or perhaps this was only as I remember it told); in the manner of whispers, this potato was in truth a slab of peat carried to school in the oxtar;<sup>86</sup> a necessary daily contribution to school life, added to the pile for the classroom fire.

Mull,  
the island where my mother and aunt went each summer to join other members of our extended family, the Morison clan; an island full of magical names that kept recurring, names of people and places I could only imagine, people and places that all seemed somehow connected although I could never work out exactly how or why. And as I grew older, I grew none the wiser, in fact the 'stories' of Mull just seemed to get thicker, the ancestral relationships ever more complicated; the names of people and places forever lodged in my imagination, deeply etched into the memory plates.

The many descendents of John and Mary Morison still visit Mull on a regular basis. My first visit was aged eighteen when the island finally became a physical reality, a series of places recalled made tangible. My great aunt, my mother, my aunt, my sister and I made the long journey north, the pilgrimage to Mull. I remember the thrill of driving my aunt's old Citroen on the highland roads; the narrow loch-hugging routes curling left then right, right then left, the single-track lanes with regular passing places and, ever so slowly, inching our way along the side of Calgary Bay, the sheer drop to the sea on one side, the cliffs on the other. And wherever we drove, being constantly wary of sheep wandering blind across our path.

I was taken to meet friends and relatives on the island, we went 'calling' and we went on walks where the waterfall flowed 'faster than ever before'; where the hidden loch was revealed; where the family cairn was saluted; where 'Grauntie's stone' was indicated; where family picnics were relived and where old friends were remembered.

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<sup>86</sup> The oxtar – the armpit

Stories retold but here, on Mull, coming to life;  
those absent (re)gaining a presence in our midst,  
in the places they once stood. Names were attached to  
rocks, beaches, farms, paths, lochs and lighthouses;  
names were (re)found after picking out the moss on gravestones.

With only my aunt remaining to answer my questions,  
I make the journey to Mull several times a year;  
walking in the footsteps of my mother with my own family,  
repeating the tales as I remember them in places that have  
borne witness to my forebears. More recently I have returned alone;  
walking, observing, documenting, reflecting; handling letters  
and Gaelic poems by Uncle Donald 'the Bard' at the museum in Tobermory;  
calling on old family friends, making new connections and friendships,  
exploring and recording my walks, wandering and wondering.  
The Morisons (one 'r'<sup>87</sup>) live on; ghosts abound,  
myths are passed on as a history of sorts, new stories come into being.  
The land remains inhabited; threads retraced, echoes overheard,  
wind in my hair, waves on the shore, ancient rock,  
twisted trees, moss and lichen ... new imprints, fresh voices.

My boots are dirty again

The projects on Mull inform my work in Gloucestershire, and vice versa. The intimacy of my acquaintance with both places serves to make me as well as my work. I call both these places 'home'; I am at home, I feel a sense of belonging and identify with them both, intensely here and intensely there – *I'm placed*.

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<sup>87</sup> The one 'r' Morison has been chronicled as two 'rr' Morrison in the past just to add to confusion. Other spelling variations have similarly been recorded with reference to names of people and places. The one certainty is the cemetery at Dervaig where many of the Morisons have been laid to 'rest'.

### 1.3 Early Research

In the early stages of doctoral research, I conducted a series of exploratory practical projects in Gloucestershire and on Mull. These took the form of photographic essays, walking diaries (visual and textual), installation works, temporary landscape interventions and performances; several of these being exhibited or performed in the public domain. Each project explored and examined the inter-relationship between self and place, between body and environment. Some of these investigative projects proved extraneous to key research concerns, others inappropriate, unclear or too literal in translation but there are two bodies of work that together proved formative to the development of my practice at that time and served to progress and expand the core concerns underpinning this study. The projects that I would like to highlight here are the *Home without Walls* project and the *Walking with Chair* project.

#### The *Home without Walls* project<sup>88</sup>

I was beginning to examine the concept of *dwelling* (see Chapter 4) alongside that of *becoming* (Chapter 5) and to question how these might be explored in connection to the notion of 'dwelling in the landscape'<sup>89</sup> underlining, in performative practice, the integral link between place and identity. Drawing on these concepts, this project involved working in two wooded locations in Gloucestershire and the (temporary) securing of domestic fittings (hooks, light switches, power sockets) to trees plus the wallpapering of selected trunks and branches. The idea fuelling the project was to allude to the domestic in the landscape – to prompt questions around notions of 'home' by blurring divisions between internal and external domains.

This work originated in woodland on the Cotswold escarpment to the east side of the River Severn and was developed through temporary interventions on the Forest of Dean Sculpture Trail to the west side. The work on the east side was unannounced but by translocating to the Sculpture Trail, the project became one of public (and media) interest. The work was well received but I was unconvinced whether this translation of 'dwelling in the landscape' carried the meaning I intended. The work was, perhaps, rather literal and instead of serving to evoke a sense of belonging and becoming, I wondered if the opposite might have resulted in that, in some sense, it appeared as if I was domesticating the landscape. Although I had reservations as to the efficacy of the work with regard to my original intentions, it served to inform and progress research. In this respect, I wondered if I might better translate my aim by

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<sup>88</sup> This project was the result of a formal proposal to the board of the Forest of Dean Sculpture Trail; <http://www.forestofdean-sculpture.org.uk/>

<sup>89</sup> The notion of dwelling in the landscape alluding to a feeling of being at home, of belonging and becoming in place – see Chapter Four for more on the concept of dwelling and notions of home



including myself in the work in order to intimate becoming and underline issues of belonging and identity – a development carried forward in later projects.<sup>90</sup>

By working in two sites on either side of the River Severn, I was left with a haunting impression of my regular crossings over the Severn. Why, and what might it mean in terms of my practice? I realised that as well as crossing the river in my car, I was also carrying earth on my boots from one side to another. This begun to underline the importance of working between sites – that this could be a way of alluding to the immanence of becoming and to place as plural, especially if images of the resulting works were to be brought together in installation (a consideration also carried forward in later projects).<sup>91</sup>

### The *Walking with Chair* project<sup>92</sup>

Building on the *Home without Walls* project, this project explored alternative references to the domestic in the landscape through installation and the incorporation of performance. I had been invited to join a residency at Westonbirt Arboretum and I wanted to use this opportunity to develop the notion of dwelling in the landscape. I chose to use a wooden chair in my performance as this had connotations with the domestic (highlighting issues of dwelling as well as gender) but also political, ecological and broad socio-cultural connections in the context of the residency (ie the arboretum). The work shown in the gallery space as part of a group exhibition consisted of two chairs commodified by the addition of genus tags (identical copies of those used in the arboretum with the wording altered to '*sedes sedes; taxa domestica*; 'common chair') thus building on my inadvertent domestication of the landscape in the *Home without Walls* project and, at Westonbirt, underlining issues of enculturation.<sup>93</sup>

The performative part of the project involved my carrying one of these wooden chairs into the arboretum itself and placing it within a glade – the idea being to return the object to its point of origin in the landscape. The performance was enacted in front of a large crowd – those present at the opening of the exhibition as well as other visitors to the arboretum who witnessed the event. During my passage through the arboretum, I felt like the pied piper as a trail of visitors followed me along the path and over the grass to the glade. I settled the chair carefully beside a tree and remained still (a guardian of sorts) by its side for some time before walking on through the trees. The wooden chair remained, returned to the elements in the company of other trees (although seriously reconfigured/disfigured).

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<sup>90</sup> See Chapters Four and Five for examples in practice

<sup>91</sup> For example, see the images of *Mesa* included later in this chapter – a body of work coming out of performances in Gloucestershire and Mull, with images from both locations forming the finished piece.

<sup>92</sup> This project was generated by a six week residency at Westonbirt Arboretum with Walking the Land. Walking the Land are a Stroud-based collective who invite others to join them in collaborative projects and I have worked with them over a period of 6 years; <http://www.walkingtheland.org.uk/>

<sup>93</sup> The exhibition, *Arboreality*, contained work by 9 artists and resulted in a publication which can be viewed at: <http://www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/226540>

Following conversations with witnesses and analysis of photographic documentation of the event, I remained unsure as to the clarity of the message given by the performance itself but the photographs did prompt me to consider the possibility of performance to camera and the viability of including such documentation in extended installation works. Further reflection on the *Walking with Chair* project led to the *Communion* series of collaborations.<sup>94</sup>

As outlined above, tensions and contradictions observed between practical exploration, critical concerns and resulting artworks were becoming apparent. How to translate my understanding of the inter-relationship between a self and a place; how to suggest a multi-sensory lived experience of place that is at once actual and imagined, is personal, social and cultural, and is riddled with temporal junctions? How might my research project, in image and text, be articulated accurately, honestly and effectively? Attention to these issues was required and in the following section, I closely examine such questions in order to consider alternative methods of articulation and dissemination of embodied research practice reflecting the twin ambitions of this doctoral project.

#### **1.4 Subjectivity and Performative Practice**

“If performativity and embodied practice, in their different nuances, can reconstitute life situations, or constitute the transgressive, then there is the possibility of their being constitutive of a refiguring of identities”.<sup>95</sup>

Doctoral research, as I understand it, is an active process of exploration and of critical examination. When such research is carried out through a visual arts practice – ie when critical examination rests on embodied, subjective understandings as well as rigorous contextual analysis and as much on creative intuition as on calculated attention to the particularities of materials and media – it is, I propose, important not to ignore, underestimate or overwrite the valuable contribution the integrated *process* of practice makes to any outcome, textual and/or visual. As such, if explication is to truly reflect the dialogic nature of this relationship, it is vital that all aspects of the research process are articulated in any subsequent dissemination. Therefore, in this project my argument is presented in the form of an on-going exchange between practice and theory – a process *informed* by corporeal as well as conceptual understandings and *performed* via the thesis and the accompanying exposition of artworks.

So how do others in the visual arts approach this conundrum? How might writing itself parallel the process of practice-led research? How might the role of the artist as scholar be

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<sup>94</sup> See Chapter Five and the accompanying DVD for further reference to the *Communion* project

<sup>95</sup> David Crouch, *Flirting with Space* (Ashgate 2010), p49

explicated and performed in the wider context of theoretical debate? The basis for such a move has already been outlined and in order to situate my project, I now discuss other indicative forms of innovative exposition of practice – firstly with regard to research in the visual arts and secondly within a range of cross-disciplinary contexts.

### 1.5 Practice-led Research in the Visual Arts: in debate

The constituency of practice-led doctoral research in the UK has been critically reviewed by MacLeod & Holdridge who state that the implications of the relationship between writing and making in dissemination of research remain the ‘predominant issue’. Although noting that ‘no overall consensus’ between institutions has yet been reached, they suggest case studies indicate that ‘the conventionally written academic thesis does not always seem appropriate for the doctorate in fine art’.<sup>96</sup> The twin roles of the art and the writing within doctoral research are then considered – what role does each play and does the writing reflect the process of making? How are embodied understandings articulated with critical knowledge and how might the production of one reflect the other?

Underlining the conundrum of practice-led research in the visual arts, Barrett & Bolt argue that it is often the very strengths of the particular approaches/methodologies of the discipline – ie that they are ‘personally situated, interdisciplinary and diverse and emergent’ – that serve to problematise the issue of dissemination by contradicting traditional expectations and challenging familiar models. As we have seen, I have found myself in a similar position. They further state that in order to recognise the ‘philosophical and knowledge-producing role’ that such approaches offer, alternative methods and models need to be found within which the potential of these processes to generate knowledge might be articulated and developed within and beyond the discipline.<sup>97</sup>

The potential of practice-led research in the arts and the generative strength of the interactive process between critical enquiry and embodied practice similarly concerns Smith & Dean. They state their objective as wanting to ‘discuss the methodological, theoretical, practical and political issues’ surrounding practice-led research and to reflect ‘new forms of research and creative work’.<sup>98</sup> Here again the issue of subjectivity and alternative writing strategies that

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<sup>96</sup> Katy MacLeod & Lin Holdridge, *Thinking Through Art* (Routledge 2005), p2

<sup>97</sup> Estelle Barrett & Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research* (IB Tauris 2010), pp2-3; Barrett & Bolt give useful models of practice-led projects (See Ch 3 & 8 in particular for projects that intersect with my own through incorporation of auto-biography and alternative writing strategies – as well as Ch 9 which includes an outline of a ‘multi-faceted approach based in bricolage’ as reflection of a hybrid practice pp127/8). This publication also offers an extensive appendix as guide/reference for alternative routes

<sup>98</sup> Hazel Smith & Roger T Dean, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh University Press 2010), p9

adequately reflect the lived with the learned is raised.<sup>99</sup> When research seesaws between practice and theory and when corporeal as well as conceptual concerns are of concern, the demands of tensions and contradictions as experienced in the process of research become apparent. In such a way, valuable new insights and reflexive understandings are produced alongside (and are embodied within) the artworks; new understandings (lived and learned) that form an integral part of the research process, new understandings that, I propose, require alternative dissemination strategies in word as well as image to reflect their contribution to the project. As such, I suggest a model with permeable parameters that permit an argument to expand and develop as questions are raised and tensions emerge – a framework that offers potential for further advancement of the performative relationship between practice and theory rather than starting with or arriving at any definitive, pre-determined or premature close. In this respect, a model that allows the revealing of new knowledge disseminated in an appropriate, equally new, form.

In a recent publication, James Elkins surveys practice-led doctoral research across the globe via a collection of invited essays and selected student examples/interpretations.<sup>100</sup> In a chapter entitled *On Beyond Research and New Knowledge*,<sup>101</sup> he critiques current terminology in use in the field as 'administrative'<sup>102</sup> and inadequate to the task of effectively representing such research (and there is some substance to his claim). In so doing, Elkins underlines divisions in thought and understanding between departments within the academy by highlighting the inability of practice-led research to 'fit' within more orthodox translations of research.

Elkins then offers alternative interpretations of existing terms and although it is interesting how many others he offers, I am not sure that replacing terminology is a viable alternative to the conundrum of practice-led research in the visual arts. Perhaps what might be more helpful, as I am proposing in the example I present here, are research models by artists for artists rather than efforts to translate or evaluate research so as to fit existing models in other disciplines (scientific or otherwise). As such, new paradigms that engage with other disciplines yet, in doing so, underline their own specificity and offer examples of alternative frameworks and methodologies that can be adopted and further developed by others – both within the discipline and, if appropriate, in other disciplines. I propose that the particular

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<sup>99</sup> Hazel Smith & Roger T Dean, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh University Press 2010); see in particular Chapter 6, pp126-149, where performativity of practice is discussed and where resonance with the concerns of this project may be found. Chapter 12, pp229-25, gives a broad (and useful) overview of practice-led doctoral research in the visual arts over the past 25 years in the UK.

<sup>100</sup> James Elkins, *Artists with PhDs* (New Academia Publishing 2009); please note that Elkins edits this publication from a distinctly North American academic perspective

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, pp111-133

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p111

model I perform here via adoption of an alternative writing style is one that could well be developed in cross-disciplinary contexts where research is based on both experiential and theoretical findings.

Elkins admits that in his critique<sup>103</sup> he is trying to find 'ways to argue that art production has a place in the university' but that this is 'immensely difficult'.<sup>104</sup> He continues and offers hope in his consideration of the 'disjunction between making art and studying it' (and the point he adds regarding practice as process) but he fails to consider the possibility that writing is also a creative practice, a process that might become an integral contributing part of artworks. This is exactly where I propose my project (thesis and artwork together) intervenes.

In a later chapter, Elkins further considers interpretations of practice-led research according to the three categories identified by Christopher Frayling in 1993 – ie research *into* art (research informs art practice), research *through* art (research/thesis is equal to artwork) and research *for* art (thesis is artwork and vice versa).<sup>105</sup> Although the third option Elkins advocates might appear to equate to my project, I would argue that Elkins still does not fully consider the potential implications of the 'vice versa' of thesis/artwork as a dialogically creative process where both interweave and serve to advance each other – where both have recognisable individual strengths that together contextually perform and conceptually develop the argument via the combined practices of thesis writing and art making. As can be seen, my project performatively suggests just such an alternative.

Elkins concludes by stating that in his opinion the best option would be to radically reduce the written component of the doctorate and that the visual art practice/artworks become the PhD. This is perhaps somewhat simplistic as well as idealistic (and, as he notes, would be hard to evaluate effectively). But, more importantly, why dismiss the possibility of a more integrated practice? It is interesting, and I suggest hardly surprising due to the highly individual nature of practice-led projects, that no consensus is apparent in current debate with regard to terminology, method, dissemination or evaluation. What I do propose is abundantly clear is that, as indicated above, models by artists for artists that actively demonstrate the relationship between theory and embodied practice, the conceptual and the corporeal, via the twin processes of writing and visual arts practice might be helpful to others in the discipline and beyond.

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<sup>103</sup> Elkins' critique is largely aimed toward MacLeod & Holdridge (2005) and UK interpretations of practice-led research in the arts

<sup>104</sup> James Elkins, *Artists with PhDs* (New Academia Publishing 2009), p128

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, pp145-165

## 1.6 Practice-led Research in the Visual Arts: in practice

“It has become clear that as the seams of what is considered to be writing have (lightly, gently and substantially) burst, the matter that has emerged is no longer separable into orthodoxies: creative/critical, discursive/poetic, or even functional/imaginative”.<sup>106</sup>

Writing, in my project, is a process carried out in tandem with a visual arts practice – part of an integrated creative, analytical and theoretical act where there is no hierarchical distinction between practice and theory as both are understood as constitutive elements within one overarching intellectual process. In this respect, practice does not illustrate text nor theory serve to defend practice.

As an artist I write; observations, encounters, details and textures, reflections on elemental conditions and localised particularities.

As a scholar I write; theoretical understandings, critical analyses, conceptual associations.

As artist scholar I write; descriptive and critical, observational and analytical, corporeal and conceptual.

Where does one begin and the other end? In actuality, they don't begin or end; they overlap and work together, each informing the other, each tempering and changing one another – sometimes delicately with subtle undercurrents, sometimes radically and directly.

Writer/critic Katy MacLeod notes a 're-emergence of the artist scholar' and, in her position as educator, indicates three broad typologies of writing in practice-led research in the visual arts.<sup>107</sup> The first (Type A) she defines as 'positioning a practice' where the text serves not only to position but often to renew the practice; it also, she states, serves to encourage 'appropriate reading' of artworks presented. The second (Type B) is defined as 'theorising a practice' and that by setting out the 'theoretical groundwork', the text prepares the ground for the artworks themselves which, in turn, 'demonstrate the research proposition'. The third (Type C) MacLeod defines as 'revealing a practice' which she explains as the 'seesaw effect of working on the written text and on the art projects'. Here she states that the text is 'instrumental to the conception of the art projects' but that the projects themselves enact 'a radical rethinking' of the written because the making of the work itself alters what has been previously defined – MacLeod's 'seesaw effect'.

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<sup>106</sup> Claire MacDonald, *How to do things with words: textual typologies and doctoral writing*; *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* 2:1, pp 91-103 (Intellect 2009), p92  
<http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-issue,id=1719/> (accessed 22.05.10)

<sup>107</sup> Katy MacLeod, *The functions of the written text in practice-based PhD submissions*; *Working Papers in Art and Design* 1 (2000);  
[http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes\\_research/papers/wpades/vol1/macleod2.html](http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research/papers/wpades/vol1/macleod2.html) (accessed 24.05.10).

This is an effect I similarly experience through the combined (sometimes complementary, sometimes antagonistic, always challenging) process of writing and making, doing and thinking involved in my research practice. Although I would underline that there are aspects of all three typologies present as my project performs through Type A and works toward Type B en route to effecting Type C. As such, there is an integral intertwining of practice with theory which, I propose, produces a depth, breadth and critical reflexivity to my project as it simultaneously advances and develops the inquiry.

Arguing with MacLeod whilst presenting her own alternative model, writer/critic Claire MacDonald considers the possibilities offered by an opening of the boundaries of writing in research practice and talks of locating a means of ‘articulating the particularity of research that puts the creative process back together in a process of re-membering’.<sup>108</sup> She states that this re-membering is not limited to the constituency of writing and making but to the subjectivity of the maker who, in the process, is in a state ‘of being produced and of producing’. Here the importance of clearly situating the project and the self is evident.<sup>109</sup> In underlining the potential offered by a clear understanding of the relationship between the combined text and art practice that constitutes a doctoral project in the visual arts, MacDonald states that:

“We are beginning to understand art as intellectually and theoretically composed when we also understand that writing is a *practice*, part of the provenance of the artist scholar, and that the writing artist is conceptualising as a *writer*, within art’s terms”.<sup>110</sup>

### 1.7 An Affect-led Practice

I now examine the particular methods and methodologies of this research project; outlining the rationale for adoption of such strategies and detailing how they are applied in practice. I propose that these are strategies that can be adapted and developed by practitioners in the visual arts and other cross-disciplinary contexts where research is (in)formed by lived as well as learned knowledge.

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<sup>108</sup> Claire MacDonald, *How to do things with words: textual typologies and doctoral writing*; Journal of Writing in Creative Practice 2:1, pp 91-103 (Intellect 2009), p96  
<http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-issue,id=1719/> (accessed 22.05.10)

I would recommend reading the entire text of this paper as it clearly states the argument at the same time as performing the proposition via adoption of an alternative writing strategy and appropriate use of textual devices – as such it has informed this project and served as a model

<sup>109</sup> This relationship is examined in detail in the third part of this chapter – Section 1.6 onwards

<sup>110</sup> Claire MacDonald, *How to do things with words: textual typologies and doctoral writing*; Journal of Writing in Creative Practice 2:1, pp 91-103 (Intellect 2009), p102  
<http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-issue,id=1719/> (accessed 22.05.10)

In an essay focusing on performative and affect-led research practice, cultural geographer JD Dewsbury suggests the analogy of a 'laboratory' for 'testing out theories' or a 'studio for flexing embodied modes of empirical apprehension', struggling as 'experiments fail or always fall short in the attempt'.<sup>111</sup> The above analogy reverberates with my project; a performative practice that is always stretching for the *just out of reach* – that takes sideways glances, that explores the sensed with the seen, and that recognises the corporeal with the conceptual. This is a research project that experiments with alternative writing strategies as a route toward embedding the lived body in the text as well as the practice. This thesis therefore reflects the inter-relationship between self and place by focusing on 'fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers' through an inquiry that combines 'practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions'.<sup>112</sup> This is a research practice that recognises the value of the as yet unknown and that attentively approaches landscape as a locus of discovery. In this respect, I consider the approach taken in this project offers a positive model for practice-led research, a strategic example upon which others can build.

Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart writes of 'the ways in which a reeling present is composed out of heterogeneous and noncoherent singularities'<sup>113</sup> and it is precisely such an emergent, dynamic present that I am attempting to approximate. I am not attempting to fix, define or explain the complexities of embodied experience but, in the words of Stewart, to build 'an idiosyncratic map of connections between a series of singularities'.<sup>114</sup> Therefore to reflect my practice, this thesis combines the abstract with the concrete in the form of a (partial) narrative that attempts to evoke something of the 'assemblage of disparate scenes'<sup>115</sup> that together comprise an experience of place. A strategy that seeks to incorporate affects 'by performing some of the intensity and texture that makes them habitable and animate'.<sup>116</sup>

### The personal (is) in the social

In consideration of the context and methodology of this project (the phenomenological landscape), I propose that by including concrete particulars (in the form of subjective, descriptive texts and photographic images) alongside the abstract concepts that inform this inquiry, the practitioner has the potential (and tools) to better evoke the experiential and to prompt (indirect) connections between individual and collective experience. Here I refer to the performativity of the researcher (autobiographical enquiry), the research itself (process)

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<sup>111</sup> JD Dewsbury, *Performative, Non-Representational, and Affect-Based Research: Seven Injunctions* – from *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Geography* (Sage 2010), p323

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, p325

<sup>113</sup> Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Duke University Press 2007), p4

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p4/5

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p5

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, p4



and the audience (dissemination) as an inter-related triangulation through which questions can be raised, evocations inferred, alternative connections and tentative threads woven.

“We can miss a trick if we solely task ourselves in our research to live up to reality, when it is precisely about finding alternative methodological strategies for living *with* reality.”<sup>117</sup>

Following the call of JD Dewsbury above and adopting a performative writing methodology in this thesis, I would underline that it is not a question of subjectivity alone but of a specific subjectivity that, in this project, is carefully and deliberately positioned within the socio-cultural domain.

### 1.8 Performative Writing and Subjectivity

Visual and cultural studies theorist Janet Wolff identifies that certain developments, particularly in feminist studies, have manifested in ‘a desire to address intellectual topics in a more personal mode’ reflecting ‘a marginality that makes possible the flight from objectivity and the integration of experience into intellectual work’.<sup>118</sup> And, although stating that such concerns are now commonplace, she underlines that subjectivity remains ‘not unproblematic’ and that personal narrative in academic research continues to raise ‘issues’. Wolff suggests that the problem is not the ‘legitimacy’ of including subjective commentary but of ‘assuming *typicality* for any kind of evidence’.<sup>119</sup>

“In other words, what is at issue is whether the fragment – the memory, the concrete instance – can be said to stand for something beyond itself, to be somehow typical of a moment in cultural history”.<sup>120</sup>

Wolff stresses that the memoir needs, in some way, to evidence a relevance to, and engagement with, contemporary cultural debates. She continues to state that the ‘narrative of the fragment and the memoir, motivated as it is by those who have reclaimed their ‘buried selves’ ... is one worth telling’<sup>121</sup> – ie that subjective experience once contextually positioned is therefore worth sharing (via, here, artworks, personal observations and academic text). Wolff highlights her interest in ‘breaking down the barriers between academic and personal writing’ and positions her work ‘at the meeting point of cultural theory, gender studies and

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<sup>117</sup> JD Dewsbury, *Performative, Non-Representational, and Affect-Based Research: Seven Injunctions* – from *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Geography* (Sage 2010), p333 (my italics)

<sup>118</sup> Janet Wolff, *Resident Alien* (Polity Press 2005), p3

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, p16

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, p16

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, p17

memoir'.<sup>122</sup> This is a position my work increasingly shares and yet if the work is to be of more than personal value, how might I ensure that the performativity of an auto-biographic/auto-ethnographic practice becomes firmly embedded within the socio-cultural?

#### Performative writing (as applied) in my research project

“Performative writing is an attempt to find a form for “what philosophy wants all the same to say”. Rather than describing the performance event in ‘direct signification’, a task I believe to be impossible and not terrifically interesting, I want this writing to enact the affective force of the performance again ...”<sup>123</sup>

Critical theorist Peggy Phelan’s interpretation of performative writing as carrying the ‘affective force of the performance again’ is embraced in my research practice. Following the tenet of her quote, and adhering to an understanding that echoes that of Wolff, this thesis is structured between subjective description and critical cultural theory. As such, my practice offers an inter-disciplinary research project with an auto-biographic/auto-ethnographic focus as a route into the socio-cultural domain. As a move toward achieving my intention, a poly-vocal narrative framework (after Paul Ricoeur) is adopted and a performative writing style employed. The poly-vocal conversation evidenced in this thesis is an attempt to evoke the lived and tacit knowledge which is constitutive of empirical research and embodied practice. Therefore, a performative writing strategy is considered appropriate to this practice-led project – a route toward evidencing the performativity that is an integral part of the experiential via a bridging of practice and theory through inclusion of auto-biographical accounts with critical analysis.

My aim in this thesis is to make explicit intersections between the lived and the learned; to reveal the relevance, application, breadth and depth they can add to a research practice, to understanding and to dissemination. Wolff serves as an inspiration, an affirmation and a model – her narrative style echoing her argument for a combining of concrete detail with theoretical critique in academic texts which contain subjective fragments together with rigorous analysis. The other concrete details woven into this particular research study are the significant bodies of artwork presented as vital ingredients in this accumulative doctoral project.

In Chapter Two of *Resident Alien*, one of the clearest examples of Wolff’s use of performative writing, she talks through three personal, historically and culturally situated episodes to intelligently and creatively illustrate her proposition, using the personal to ‘explore more

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<sup>122</sup> Janet Wolff, *Resident Alien* (Polity Press 2005), p50

<sup>123</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex* (Routledge 1997), p11/12

general features of a cultural moment'.<sup>124</sup> Although Wolff's personal references are very different to my own, as is the timing and field of her study, the strategy she has adopted is one that might be used to explore other instances of the personal in the social, other encounters between lived experience and academic research. In this thesis, such a strategy is translated as the crossing of a performative visual arts practice with cross-disciplinary critical inquiry; a grounding of the conceptual in the corporeal effected via a performative writing strategy.

Wolff states clearly that she is not claiming that subjective fragments in any way stand in for theory but that her text is 'the *meeting point* of theory, social history and the particular'.<sup>125</sup> This is important and I underline that I share her rationale on the understanding that it is via considered positioning that the 'meeting point' has relevance beyond the auto-biographical and carries into the socio-cultural rather than being a lapse into either solipsism or essentialism. Performative writing, in this project, is employed as a means toward showing 'ways in which we might use bits of culture in the incessant production of self', ways of illustrating the co-constituency of the lived with, and within, political systems and representations.<sup>126</sup> And, as applied in my practice, a reflection of how socio-cultural movements and structures are explored and expressed through auto-biographical performance informed by feminist critique and situated alongside cross-disciplinary theoretical analysis.

As evidenced in this thesis, a device repeatedly used in a move toward performative writing is the Field Note which incorporates subjective observations (experiential encounters, sensory notations, temporal shifts, remembrances) used here to evoke the phenomenological landscape. The Field Note is understood as a key constituent of this thesis although extracts from my journal or from presentation papers are also included as further evidence of articulations reflecting embodied engagement. Insights generated by reflection on theoretical or practical considerations whilst walking are combined with involuntary prompts (jottings, notes and memories) – all part of my research and all vital to an understanding of this project as a whole.

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<sup>124</sup> Janet Wolff, *Resident Alien* (Polity Press 2005), p28

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p29

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, p32



S'Airde Beinn, Mull

Field note

I hear voices,  
children's voices - gentle, lilting, laughing ...  
I turn but no-one is visible, nothing  
but rocks and sky, the water at my feet. The laughter turns to wails;  
the air chills, the atmosphere changes ... there is nobody else here but I know I am  
not alone

Voices call, take me back in time, converse on the whispering wind;  
time ruptures, lines of thought are broken; I am left distracted and somewhat disturbed.  
I want to hear but do not understand, maybe it is not me they are speaking to ...  
whispers on the wind, a haunting uncertainty; I am disorientated, disassembled,  
vulnerable

The voices, are they without or echoes caught from within?  
Where do the sounds, the words come from?  
Are they suggested by the elements and recalled from the psyche; voiced fears, remembered  
states, echoes of earlier trauma and separation, traces of Others and of  
past identities invoked in the present.

Traces of disunity, of hybrid complexity and multiplicity;  
the divisive cut of binaries brought into focus – embodiment and lived experience  
contradicting any such easy division ... subjective understandings and knowledge  
misunderstood, misinterpreted and mistrusted due to  
centuries of polarised conditioning and socio/cultural role play.  
I hear voices, echoes of humanity

## 1.9 Echoes of Humanity – Making Meaning out of Feeling

Drawing on the model given by cultural theorist Janet Wolff, this section examines in detail the creative and critical potential of the relationship between subjectivity, feminist critique and the concept of narrative identity (after Paul Ricoeur). Throughout, this is related to strategic use of alternative writing styles and, using my practice as an example, the performativity of practice-led research in the visual arts.

### Subjectivity and Performance or: “How do I make this work?”

By adopting a largely phenomenological methodology that embraces the performative and by blending/adapting structural models borrowed from *écriture féminine*, feminist writing and other cross-disciplinary texts, my thesis is able to follow a specific format purposely crafted to reflect the concerns of my project.<sup>127</sup> In order to explore the potential of performative methodologies together with the possibilities offered by a narrative approach, I am presenting my research in the form of a polyvocal, multi-disciplinary study. In this respect, to offer an alternative research model, a possible new paradigm, specifically formed to reflect the ambiguities and tensions of practice-led research and the problematic assembly of a multiplicity of eclectic material (subjective and critical, lived and learned).

This approach is deemed necessary in the context of my project (and practice-led research in the visual arts more generally) so as to allow contradictory and complementary research findings to sit with critical analysis in a dialectic relationship (visually and textually). I am presenting a model that recognises that ‘we are always more and less than the categories that name and divide us’;<sup>128</sup> a model that demands a structured yet flexible framework that can loosely contain a heterogeneous assembly of information in a format that permits corporeal and conceptual understandings to converse with theoretical analysis and yet, importantly, retains clarity and legibility throughout.

## 1.10 Subjectivity and Autobiography

In her introduction to *Walking, Writing and Performance*, Roberta Mock critically addresses the autobiographical bias of three research practices that adopt walking methodologies (Dee Heddon, Carl Lavery and Phil Smith). These are practices that have affinities with my own

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<sup>127</sup> Namely an examination of the inter-relationship between a self and a place – a critical investigation carried out in action via practice-led research in the visual arts; a practice grounded in the phenomenological landscape that explores the concepts of dwelling and becoming and examines our experience of time, belonging and identity at the interface of the corporeal and the conceptual.

<sup>128</sup> Geraldine Finn, *Why Althusser Killed his Wife* (Humanities Press 1996), p156

research as they similarly adopt performative methodologies in an attempt to cross personal, social and cultural domains – traversing and permeating boundaries as they, each in their own unique manner, perform place and self, self in place.

Mock observes co-constitutive links between the ‘construction of narrative self’, the specific locations within which embodied exploration is carried out, a blending of temporalities, and ways in which such practices inter-link ‘personal, cultural and collective memories’.<sup>129</sup> Each walking practice discussed is of course vividly distinctive and yet there are common threads that bind them – as Mock observes, they all include and overtly express a complexity of ‘networks between histories, storytelling, imagination, site, and autobiography’, effectively folding together ‘time, space and body’.<sup>130</sup> As such, I propose that they share territory with this project in that such concerns and associations are examined through practical exploration in specific locations where a range of influences and temporalities create a dynamic web of allegiances and critical tensions.

The task here is to find the most appropriate method of (re)presenting lived and learned understandings in the joint, and co-producing, contexts of a visual arts practice and academic research. Equally important, to quote Phil Smith, is to ‘bring the autobiographical into a play of generalities’;<sup>131</sup> to situate the personal in the socio-cultural and expose the personal in a format that will encourage inter-personal reading as well as prompt an empathic understanding that, as Dee Heddon says, will create echoes of ‘my story in your story’.<sup>132</sup> In what way might a *narrative self* be strategically constructed in order to open maximum potential for transferral and encourage receptive socio-cultural understanding? How might poetic expressions of a situated, embodied practice be assisted by references that include intimations and observations that extend beyond the personal, the location and the time of making?

In order to explore the potential of a ‘narrative self’, to situate the personal in the socio-cultural and create echoes of ‘my story in your story’, I examine the issue of subjectivity in the context of narrative identity (after Ricoeur) before further considering subjectivity in relation to feminist critique.

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<sup>129</sup> Robert Mock (Ed), *Walking, Writing and Performance* (Intellect 2009), pp7/8

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p10

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p12

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p13

Redacted due to copyright



Morison family tree  
(compiled by Neil Morison in the late 1970s)





from 'my story': *Mesa*  
(a collaborative performance of many parts)<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *Mesa* (2009) is a project performed (to camera) on Mull and in Gloucestershire. Performed by myself and my daughter, these embodied acts explore female genealogies through place and the tangible memories of family cutlery – for more on female genealogy in practice see Chapter Five, Section 5.4



*Mesa* (performance to camera, Mull and Gloucestershire 2009)

### 1.11 Narrative Identity and Subjectivity

In *Life in Quest of Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur states that it is commonly understood that 'life has something to do with narrative' but that it is an assumption that 'must first be submitted to critical doubt'.<sup>134</sup> He expands on this doubt as one that 'appears to distance narrative from lived experience and to confine it to the region of fiction' and instead suggests the possibility that 'fiction contributes to making life, in the biological sense of the word, a life'.<sup>135</sup> This is a provocative statement and one I would suggest has an important political implication – one that is taken up in this research project in order to animate dissemination of research practice. Narrative, as political stance and strategic tool, applied as a thread on which to hang a range of binaries that highlight and challenge the hierarchy between fact and fiction – for example between archival material and oral histories; actual and imagined landscapes; presence and absence.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Paul Ricoeur in David Wood (Ed), *On Paul Ricoeur* (Routledge 1991), p20

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, p20

<sup>136</sup> As indicated in the Introduction (p22, footnote 73), the blurring of any divide between fact and fiction is anticipated in practice by Pearson & Shanks' notion of 'science/fiction' (Pearson & Shanks 2001, p131). They write of 'incorporations'; describing 'juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual ... [that] do not necessarily cohere'. Importantly, they add that this 'leaves space for the imagination of the reader', that the 'interpretative instinct of the visitor is not denied: meaning is not monopolised' (p159). As can be seen here, this is a conceptualisation and understanding I share – an understanding put into practice in my performative artworks and in this thesis.

Narrative is employed in my project as a vessel in which to bring together multi-sensory affects and contingent temporalities, narrative as a process of emplotment – effectively, narrative emplotment as a vital move toward situating the personal in the social. Ricoeur states that narrative is not a ‘static structure but an operation, an integrating process’, a process completed in a ‘*living receiver*’.<sup>137</sup> He continues:

“... it is the *act of reading* which completes the work ... with its zones of indeterminacy, its latent wealth of interpretation, its power of being reinterpreted in new ways in new historical contexts”.<sup>138</sup>

Narrative, after Ricoeur, viewed here as a process that integrates various subjectivities and yet allows each voice to be heard, each component adding to the whole without being subjugated to one another or a plot. Ricoeur acknowledges that bringing together multiple, hybrid elements into one single story makes emplotment ‘a totality which can be said to be at once concordant and discordant’.<sup>139</sup> This ‘concordance and discordance’ is the result of each individual component being given equal weight and retaining distinction even within one overarching narrative. Importantly, it is one that suggests further alliances and inter-plays in receivership and tensions that might be strategically invoked. In relation to my research (and artworks) concordance and discordance translates as location, dislocation, translocation and it is precisely this tension of concordance and discordance in the content of the work that, I suggest, gives the practice its authority and that serves to attract the attention of an audience. It is the potential of this tension to temporarily hold the viewer and prompt completion of the work by each individual viewer that is of interest here; a potential that carries the work from the personal into the socio-cultural, a tension that stresses the complex temporalities of narrative. Ricoeur notes that there are ‘two sorts of time in every story told’ – one being of the nature of a succession of incidents and the other the ‘particular configuration’ of the various ingredients, a ‘poetic act’ that creates ‘a mediation between time as passage and time as duration’.<sup>140</sup> As such, his observations prove pertinent and instructive to an arts practice that pivots on fluctuating temporal realities.

After identifying what he sees as the three main strands of narrative (‘emplotment’, the bringing together of a multiplicity of elements to be presented as one; ‘concordance and

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<sup>137</sup> Paul Ricoeur in David Wood (Ed), *On Paul Ricoeur* (Routledge 1991), p21; here Ricoeur acknowledges the influence of Aristotle

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, p27; Ricoeur’s observations here bear close relationship to Barthes’ *Death of the Author* (*Image Music Text* 1977) in understanding that reading/interpretation is not a passive process and that texts are completed via active reception/translation by a subject with a personal and a social history. In other words, that meaning is found/made by a culturally-conditioned receiver, and not defined by the writer

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p21

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p22

discordance'; and the friction between 'succession and configuration'), Ricoeur proposes that stories not only 'teach something' but that they reveal 'universal aspects of the human condition'.<sup>141</sup> As such, he situates narrative firmly in the socio-cultural domain and, I propose, also swings the pendulum toward poetic, embodied understandings instead of solely historic or strictly rational translations of the experiential. Indeed, Ricoeur suggests a narrative identity that speaks through the creative imagination of the maker to the viewer, from author to reader, stating:

"It is the function of poetry in its narrative and dramatic form, to propose to the imagination and to its mediation various figures that constitute so many *thought experiments* by which we learn to link together the ethical aspects of human conduct and happiness and misfortune".<sup>142</sup>

I believe such a poetic function to be ethically important – a poetics that, drawing on my understanding of the concept of affect together with strategic use of haptic visuality in practice, translates in a receptive viewer as empathetic recognition of common fundamentals of being and becoming.<sup>143</sup>

In his analysis of narrative identity with regard to the *ethical imagination*<sup>144</sup>, Richard Kearney references Ricoeur and states that 'a narrative approach argues for an ethics that involves affective as well as intellectual capacities'.<sup>145</sup> Kearney suggests that, 'as a form of analogical imagination – opening us to foreign and unfamiliar worlds of others', narrative has the potential to 'transfigure the ego into a representative subject' and quotes Ricoeur who writes that 'the self-same (*moi*) is transfigured into a self-for-another (*soi*)'.<sup>146</sup> It is, as such, an understanding I share and draw on through my research practice as a 'representative subject' who re-presents herself in performative artworks.

It is the potential of multiple and hybrid syntheses of imaginative association, the inter-subjectivity of narrative identity and the possibility of opening up 'foreign and unfamiliar worlds', as recognised by Ricoeur and Kearney, that is pertinent to this research project. It is the action (and in my view the duty) of an artwork to 'propose to the imagination ... ethical aspects of human conduct' reflecting aspects of complex and evolving individual subjectivities recognised in the inter-personal of shared experience – aspects of the human condition recognised in and by others through shared inhabitation of the world. As Kearney observes,

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<sup>141</sup> Paul Ricoeur in David Wood (Ed), *On Paul Ricoeur* (Routledge 1991), p22

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p23

<sup>143</sup> See Chapter Six for detailed analysis of affect and haptic visuality in practice

<sup>144</sup> Richard Kearney, *The Poetics of Imagining* (Edinburgh University Press 1998) – in particular, the section entitled *Narrative imagination – the ethical challenge*, pp241-255

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p243

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p246

the 'singularity of human experience' in a shared world.<sup>147</sup> 'Thought experiments' recognised by others and, importantly for the authority of the artwork, an element of the personal reflected in the social – a hook to readability and transference, 'a narrative understanding stemming from the creative imagination' of author and reader, maker and viewer.<sup>148</sup>

It is acknowledgement of such readability that is of interest here – an understanding of the poetics of narrative, and the relationship between viewer and maker, that assists in my telling of visual 'stories'. The performativity of practice understood here as a creative re-telling and re-interpretating of the experiential; lived experience informed and produced as a result of past experience, cultural conditioning, present understanding, accumulated corporeal and conceptual knowledge, and future projections, imaginings and desires. Such is the multi-sensory and complex blend of temporalities and encounters in lived experience – factual and fictive meanderings that impact to form evolving subjectivities; what Ricoeur terms narrative identities, what Luce Irigaray or Gilles Deleuze might call becoming.<sup>149</sup>

It is this recognition of inter-readability that Ricoeur highlights when he states that it is the '*intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader*' that gives meaning to a narrative and that 'makes possible the reconfiguration of life by narrative'.<sup>150</sup> When Ricoeur speaks of 'the world of the text' he says he is referring to the way a text opens 'before it a horizon of possible experience' so that the reader inhabits both the imaginative world of the text and the materiality of the world. The horizon of becoming. It is thus, as outlined above in relation to personal practice, 'the narrative's capacity to transfigure the experience of the reader' that is pertinent to this research project.<sup>151</sup> In this sense, narrative is understood to function as a two-way bridge between the lived and the learned (between fact and fiction, presence and absence) spanning author and reader, maker and audience via the specific configuration of text (performative writing) and the accompanying artworks (images and installations) evidenced in this thesis – a configuration that is reconfigured in the act of receivership.

"A text is not something closed in on itself, it is the projection of a new universe distinct from that in which we live. To appropriate a work through reading is to unfold the world horizon implicit in it ... As a result, the reader belongs at once to the work's horizon of experience in imagination and to that of his or her own real action".<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Richard Kearney, *The Poetics of Imagining* (Edinburgh University Press 1998), p242

<sup>148</sup> Paul Ricoeur in David Wood (Ed), *On Paul Ricoeur* (Routledge 1991), p24

<sup>149</sup> For further reference to becoming in relation to Irigaray and Deleuze see Chapter Five

<sup>150</sup> Paul Ricoeur in David Wood (Ed), *On Paul Ricoeur* (Routledge 1991), p26

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p26

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p26

Ricoeur continually stresses that it is the ‘*act of reading* that completes the work’ through its ‘zones of indeterminacy, its latent wealth of interpretation, its power of being reinterpreted in new ways in new historical contexts’.<sup>153</sup> This statement underlines the potential of narrative to move across time and to take the personal into the social and, as such, echoes the premise that is the foundation of my research – that is, the value and potential of the personal when proposed as a reflection of the social.



*Mesa* (performance to camera in many parts, Mull 2009)

So, how does this work in my project? In addressing how narrative might translate in lived experience, Ricoeur asks: ‘are we not inclined to see in a given chain of episodes in our life something like *stories that have not yet been told?*’<sup>154</sup> (intimating that an unspoken narrative already exists in accumulations of the everyday). Drawing on this supposition and by consciously (re)figuring places and times and composing these historical ‘episodes’ with actual events from my own experience (as informed by conceptual analysis), I build on Ricoeur’s suggestion in practice. I am effectively adopting a narrative identity and proposing

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<sup>153</sup> Paul Ricoeur in David Wood (Ed), *On Paul Ricoeur* (Routledge 1991), p27

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, p30

the possibility of alternative 'realities' (as evidenced in and through my artworks); realities that are built on personal and communal pasts, realities that therefore have the potential to resonate in personal and socio-cultural domains. Ricoeur states that it is the 'quest' for subjective identities that 'assures the continuity between the potential or virtual story and the explicit story for which we assume responsibility'.<sup>155</sup> And that, as such, the importance of narrative attaches to 'self-understanding'. But, in the context of my practice, it must be remembered that it is when these narratives are presented in textual and/or visual form to an audience that the work of the narrative is completed – ie that it is in and through the assimilation of the reader or viewer that 'my story' becomes 'your story'.

Ricoeur stresses that he refers to an understanding of subjectivity that is 'neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution', advocating that 'we attempt to discover and not simply to impose from outside the *narrative identity* which constitutes us'.<sup>156</sup> This is a subjectivity espoused in this thesis; a subjectivity that is continually reinvented and reinterpreted through lived experience – a reflexive understanding of self that is fluid and that constitutes multiple diverse aspects of lived experience reflected in an evolving understanding of self and others. Ricoeur states that 'what we call the subject is never given at the start'<sup>157</sup> and I propose that narrative identity can help make sense of an unravelling subjectivity, in the writing and making as well as in the reading and viewing. It is the *process* of making and writing that helps (in)form the author/artist and it is through the reading and viewing, in the 'living' narrative, that the story is continually rewritten and reformed – elements of a narrative identity (the personal) recognised, refigured and reflected in the socio-cultural.

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<sup>155</sup> Paul Ricoeur in David Wood (Ed), *On Paul Ricoeur* (Routledge 1991), p30

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p32

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p33



*Mesa* (performance to camera  
in many parts, Gloucestershire 2009)



### 1.12 Feminist Critique

I have identified the subjectivities of Ricoeur and Mock as relevant to my project, but how do these *performing narratives* relate to feminist theory? If, as is the case here, the subject in question is a woman, how might the performance of narrative be influenced by, and be reflected in, gender?

“The female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting any universal, neutral and consequently gender-free understanding of human embodiment”.<sup>158</sup>



*Mesa* (performance to camera in many parts, Mull 2009)

With regard to subjectivity, cultural theorist Rosi Braidotti draws on the concept of *becoming* (after Irigaray and Deleuze), reflecting an understanding which accepts the multiplicity of identity as a given and becoming as an affirmative repossession of embodied subjectivity.<sup>159</sup> As we have seen, an understanding echoed in this project. Such affirmation of ‘open multiplicity’ resists ‘the separation of self from society, the psychic from its outsides, the symbolic from the material’ through on-going engagement with the material world in all its guises.<sup>160</sup> Braidotti asserts that ‘the embodiedness of the subject is a form of bodily materiality’ and continues to state that she sees the body as a ‘complex interplay of highly

<sup>158</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* (Polity 2002), p22

<sup>159</sup> For more on becoming after Irigaray and Deleuze see Chapter Five

<sup>160</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* (Polity 2002), p113

constructed social and symbolic forces'; a subjectivity formed 'within a complex interplay of social and affective forces' and not an essence.<sup>161</sup>

As such, Braidotti's understanding corresponds to the conceptualisation of subjectivity and narrative identity put forward by Ricoeur. In relation to the particular project discussed here, I propose that an affirmation of the multiplicity of self (as prompt to potential becoming) might be invoked through inter-personal recognition via the cultural artefact. As outlined above, it is a bridging of the personal with the social that my research explores in practice and that removes the projects (and the content of the artworks) from simply solipsistic desire. This is an understanding that acknowledges and accepts a level of responsibility to its audience and it is with an informed acknowledgement and understanding of the potential of dialogic narrative to perform culture in the social domain that personal research proceeds.

Just as Ricoeur stresses the role of the imaginary, so Braidotti underlines the importance of the unconscious, stating that: 'fantasies, desires and the pursuit of pleasure play as important and constructive a role in subjectivity as rational judgement and standard political action'.<sup>162</sup> It is my understanding that a narrative structure might be a positive way of temporarily aligning these paradoxical partners in order to evince the complex contradictory nature of subjectivity and to offer alternative readings (via the cultural artefact) of the personal in the social. As such, my position aligns that of Braidotti who states that she takes 'the unconscious as the guarantee of non-closure in the practice of subjectivity' as it 'undoes the stability of the unitary subject by constantly changing and redefining his or her foundations'.<sup>163</sup>

Feminist/cultural theorist Sara Ahmed writes of a recognition that 'we are with others' before we are defined as 'apart from others' arguing that 'each of us, in being shaped by others carries with us 'impressions' of those others'.<sup>164</sup> Ahmed considers the influential part these 'impressions' play in the formation of subjectivity and notes that they are as influential in memory, thoughts and dreams as they are (or were) in lived actuality. This is pertinent to my research in that it further suggests (and links with) the importance of the role of the imaginary and unconscious as underlined by Ricoeur and Braidotti and, importantly, concurs with intersections between the lived and the learned in practice as well as with inter-actions between personal and socio-cultural domains as proposed and performed through my artworks.

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<sup>161</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* (Polity 2002), p21

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, p39

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p39/40

<sup>164</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press 2004), p160. Such an understanding is echoed in Jean Luc Nancy's concept of *singular plural* (see Nancy 2000)



*Mesa* (performance to camera, Mull and Gloucestershire 2009)

Crucially in the present context, Ahmed also observes that such ‘impressions’ may be prompted via ‘conversations with others or through the visual form of photographs’. The inclusion of the possibility of transferral via narrative or photography further underlines the particular relevance of her observation to (the methodology of) my research project. Ahmed continues, stating that impressionability may also affect ‘our bodies, our gestures, our turns of phrase’ as we ‘pick up bits and pieces of each other as the effect of nearness or proximity’.<sup>165</sup> Although Ahmed accepts that some of these qualities prompted by proximity are reflected in physical likeness, she underlines that ‘the hybrid work of identity-making is never about pure resemblance’ – the forming of subjectivity is not that simple or passive; it is dynamic and intense, what Ahmed terms a ‘process of perpetual resurfacing’.<sup>166</sup>

“The creation of a subject hence depends upon the impressions of others, and these ‘impressions’ cannot be conflated with the character of ‘others’. The others exist within me and apart from me at the same time. Taking you in will not necessarily be ‘becoming like you’, or ‘making you like me’, as other others have also impressed upon me, shaping my surfaces in this way or that”.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press 2004), p160; for further reference to photography and affect see Chapter Six

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, p160 – for further reference to identity and resemblance, see Chapter Six

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, p160



*Mesa* (performance to camera, Gloucestershire and Mull 2009)

Informed by an understanding of subjectivity as non-unitary and drawing on the particular approach I have proposed and argued for in this chapter, in Chapter Two I explore and examine the concept of place in relation to the issue of site specificity in the visual arts. The significance and understanding of place in this project is underlined via consideration of the co-incidence of location and dislocation in practice – as evidenced here through analysis of an artwork I exhibited as the result of a brief visit to Budapest and as informed by the conceptualisations of writer/curator Miwon Kwon.



Mull and Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire and Mull

## CHAPTER TWO: SPECIFICITY OF PLACE

### 2.0 Place: Location and Dislocation

“... a plea for a new conceptualisation of place as open and hybrid – a product of interconnecting flows ... calls into question the whole history of place as a centre of meaning connected to a rooted and ‘authentic’ sense of identity forever challenged by mobility. It also makes a critical intervention into the widely held notions of the erosion of place through globalisation and time-space compression”.<sup>168</sup>

This chapter of my thesis examines the relationship between location and dislocation via discussion of site specificity in the visual arts. Firstly, I outline and examine the theorisation of place and site in contemporary arts practice as specifically put forward by writer/curator Miwon Kwon. Informed by the conceptualisations of Kwon, I then consider the implications of *Neither Here nor There* (2009) – an artwork I executed as a result of an overnight stay in Budapest, a visit I experienced as a dislocation. Building on a detailed consideration of this work, I then return to Kwon and critically analyse her notion of the ‘wrong place’ with regard to location and dislocation in practice. Finally, I show visual examples from the *Asides* series (1995 on-going); a collection that explores the experiential landscape within the framework of the co-constituency of location, dislocation, translocation.<sup>169</sup> The overall purpose of this chapter is to clarify and underline the understanding and significance of place in this project – an understanding of place as process and as deeply implicated in the fabric of personal, social and cultural identity.

“The mobile world of practice teases apart place in its orthodox form”.<sup>170</sup>

### 2.1 Site Specificity and Location

Site-specificity in its contemporary form in the visual arts refers both to the site of engagement and/or performance, ie the original impetus for and condition of the work, and the problematising of the relationship between maker/performer, audience and site. Either way, the location becomes paramount and is underlined through the action of the artist and the artwork itself. How the inter-relationship between site, audience and maker/performer is interpreted is of course in no small part due to the approach of the artist (intention, concepts explored, sensitivity to site, individual sensibilities etc) and, as such, forms an integral part of the mediation between site, artwork and audience.

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<sup>168</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place* (Blackwell 2004), p53

<sup>169</sup> In this respect, a detailed explication of the rationale for selection, juxtaposition and scale of photographic imagery in re-presentation is included (Sections 2.6 and 2.7)

<sup>170</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place* (Blackwell 2004), p39

In her book *One Place after Another*, Miwon Kwon sets out to establish the ground for a re-assessment of the criticality of site specificity in arts practice. She states that she is not concerned so much with the 're-definition of an artistic genre' (although she acknowledges diverse interpretations and differing agendas) but instead with the often problematic arena of activity between the meeting of practices, ideas and theories; the negotiation between space and place; and between culture and nature. This is precisely the contested territory in which this research project is located.

Kwon identifies the aim of her book as 'countering both the nostalgic desire for a retrieval of rooted, place-bound identities' and the 'antinostalgic embrace of a nomadic fluidity of subjectivity, identity, and spatiality'. Instead Kwon suggests we imagine 'a new model of belonging-in-transience'.<sup>171</sup> Based on the understanding that self and place are mutually constituted and that both are *in process*, I propose that in many ways 'belonging-in-transience' aligns with the concerns underpinning this research project. The critical difference being that my argument rests on the proposition that a sense of belonging not only accommodates movement between places but, importantly, sustained relationships with the particularities of specific places, ie to an oscillation between dwelling and transience, the local and the global. As such, I propose that 'rooted, place-bound identities' form a vital enabling part of a 'belonging-in-transience'; the *between* of location, dislocation, translocation – a point Kwon appears to overlook in her polarisation, instead suggesting a belonging in transience itself, a form of suspended belonging found in the act of moving from place to place.<sup>172</sup>

My project expands on Kwon's 'belonging-in-transience' by considering becoming and belonging in *and* between places (actual, remembered and imagined) where the relationship between identified places is significant but remains formed out of, and because of, the specific identities of these places and from lived experience of them over time (in this example, Mull and Gloucestershire). An understanding of the relationship *between* being in and out of place, ie between location and dislocation is, I propose, vital if places are not to be considered 'opposed polarities' or indeed be overlooked in their continually overwritten and fluid states. Kwon states that her text 'can only conjure up the critical capacity of intimacies based on absence, distance, and rupture of time and space'.<sup>173</sup> This appears to me to exhibit a particular bias that I contest via attention to the particularities of place. In this context, my performative project becomes a critical tool that serves to develop (and expand) Kwon's theoretical foundation by 'conjuring' further suggestions of place-sensitive and place-bound 'intimacies' through an understanding of location, dislocation, translocation in practice. In this

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<sup>171</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another* (MIT Press, 2004), p8

<sup>172</sup> Such an idea of belonging in transience at its extreme has echoes in Marc Auge's concept of non-place where a place only exists due to the constant flow of people through its corridors, streets, and/or platforms (Auge 2006).

<sup>173</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another* (MIT Press, 2004), p9

respect, the landscape becomes an exploratory site for embodied examination/engagement. As writer/curator Adrian Heathfield states:

“Performance enacts a felt and interrogative transgression of boundaries, a process of breaching that throws into question the very oppositions by which place is formed ... a set of emotional, psychological and political associations that cohere around spatial divisions may be revealed and challenged: the present and the absent, the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the urban and the wild, the restrained and the free, what is ‘ours’ and what is ‘theirs’”.<sup>174</sup>

Site-sensitive associations are evoked in my project by re-considering the balance between just such dualities – presence and absence, inside and outside etc – and by placing less emphasis than Kwon on polarisations such as absence and distance. Instead, I focus on the critical tension *between* these dualities and the potential this offers for a reassessment of our relationship with place by paying particular attention to the generative power of the inter-relationship between specific locations as well as between place and identity (personal and socio-cultural).

## 2.2 In and out of place

In order to further explicate the relationship between location and dislocation in practice, I now detail an artwork formed out of a brief visit to Budapest in 2008 and follow considerations generated by conversations around this work when exhibited – conversations that:

- led to a more developed, deepened understanding of the interlacing of my research concerns and concepts in practice;
- reinforced the centrality of the specificity, materiality and inter-connectivity of the individual locations of practical exploration to the criticality of my project;
- underlined the import of attention to detail when striving to convey the complex range of factors and oppositions underpinning practical research and the subsequent re-presentation of location in finished works.

The piece of work to which I refer is *Neither Here nor There* (2009) – the title reflecting the experience that generated the work. With regard to my practice, *Neither Here nor There* gave me an insight into the possible value of feeling ‘out of place’ as a (strangely) beneficial and strategic counterpoint to a sense of being ‘in place’. As such, the work served to reinforce the

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<sup>174</sup> Adrian Heathfield (Ed), *Live: art and performance* (Routledge New York 2004), p11



implications of place in my project and underlined the dynamic relationship between location, dislocation, translocation in practice.

- *Neither Here nor There*; conventionally a colloquial saying, an off-hand remark.

- *Neither Here nor There*; produced as a result of preoccupations that highlighted awareness of a constant shifting of position – of personal identity, of embodied research, of practice and of (re)presentation.

- *Neither Here nor There*; the tangible result of a new inflection in practice, not fully located either here or there but somewhere in between – a work that in content and concept oscillates between the two, a work situated both in *and* out of place.

- *Neither Here nor There*; a re-presentation of location, dislocation, translocation in performative research: of self (dislocation and translocation), of place (location) and of art work (location, dislocation, translocation).

Field Note

One day in Budapest  
(sensory stimuli; an assault or a feast?)

Cobbled streets, reverberations;  
construction, electric wires,  
graffiti, advertising,  
trees, leaves,  
birds.

One-way traffic, grids:  
cars, buses, trams, bicycles, taxis, vans;  
speed, noise, holes, piles.

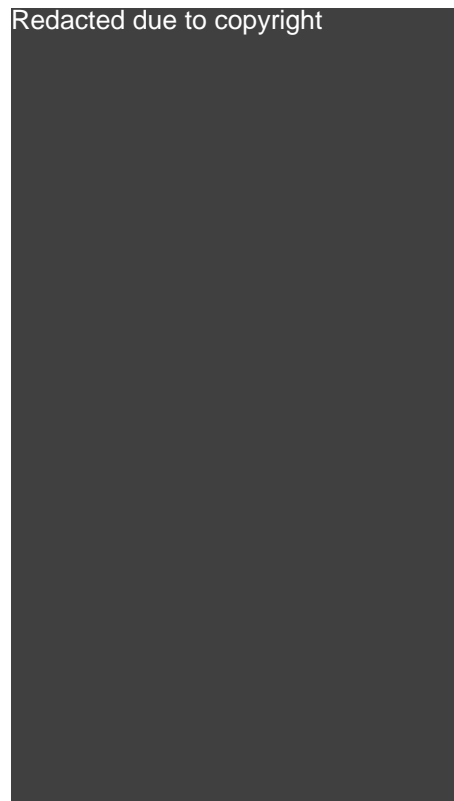
The river;  
bridges, parks, benches, the castle  
thermal baths  
(red lockers, white-clad assistants)

Coffee, hospitality, laughter;  
smoke, nicotine:  
smoking all the time, smoking everywhere  
Walking, swimming, resting  
drinking, eating; looking, thinking  
sensing

Hot rooms, cold shadows;  
windy, sunny  
moon, stars:  
street lights, national flags, men fishing  
Art, architecture,  
history, politics  
capitalism, multi-culturalism;  
transfer, transfers, transferral

### 2.3 *Neither Here nor There* (2009)<sup>175</sup>

*Neither Here nor There* is a work in two parts; comprising a photograph of a printed reproduction of the city of Budapest and a photograph of a cup of coffee – both images digitally recorded during my brief visit to the Hungarian capital in November 2008. The first photograph is mounted on board and presented flat on a waist-high plinth. This plinth sits below and to the right of the second photograph which is framed and hung on the wall. The different methods of presentation are intended to exaggerate layers of meaning within the photographs and invite further enquiry; layers that cross between the two photographs and the individual components of each image – suggesting connections yet simultaneously frustrating easy entry to the imaged and, as a result, inviting engagement.

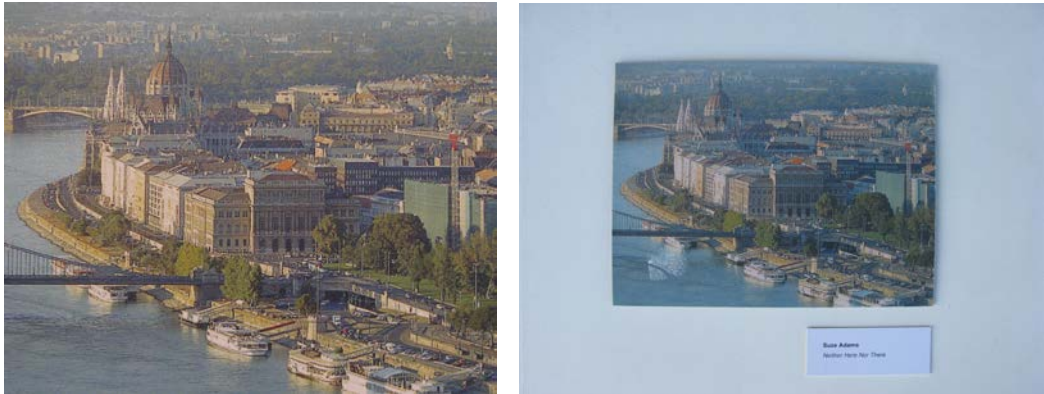


*Neither Here nor There* (2009) – as presented in exhibition format

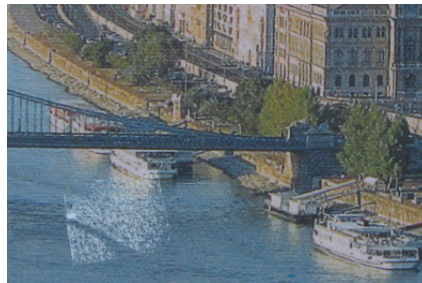
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<sup>175</sup> This work was produced for the *Crossroads* exhibition in F Block, UWE Bristol, in March 2009

Image 1



An image that hung above my bed in the hostel in Budapest; a photograph, perhaps taken in the 1960s or 70s, reproduced as a print on canvas and then framed as a 'painting' behind glass. This image was subsequently re-photographed (by myself), mounted on board and presented as an object on a plinth. The object/image is (deliberately) flawed by surface marking, a marking that by sitting on the surface creates a literal layer in the imaged – the flaw both a marker of time and of material intervention.



In this way, the corporeal is echoed in the material tactility of the image via both the surface flaw and the texture of the canvas reproduction seen as a grain in the surface of the photograph. Haptic visuality is important to the reception of this image and seen as a means to further engage the senses of the viewer.<sup>176</sup> The centrality of the temporal is heightened via the content of the image – ie the colouring (slightly off-key, faded) and the architecture (the more modern buildings are not quite contemporary, the architecture a little dated). The 'original' image reproduced as a canvas print and then re-captured in a further photograph and presented anew (as integral part of *Neither Here nor There*).

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<sup>176</sup> The concept of haptic visuality as means to invoke affect is discussed in detail in Chapter Six

Image 2



A photograph of the ubiquitous cup of coffee; a cup of coffee that is as instantly recognisable as it is 'foreign' – is it the unfamiliar text on the cup and mat, is it the image on the sachet of sugar or is it that a cup of coffee is a such a global commodity that is it always foreign as it no longer has a 'home' except within café culture? Is it the café setting that makes it foreign, however familiar, even in its global 'home'?

The coffee in the image was served (to me) after a visit to the thermal baths in Budapest, in a café on Dobrontei Ter, and was enjoyed with a couple of oatcake biscuits. The coffee is personalised by the addition of the half-eaten oatcake; a coffee that is here (is owned, is 'here' with the remains of my oatcake) and a coffee that is at the same time there (is other, is 'there' in its slight foreignness, in its global café and in re-presentation). Layers for the viewer to unravel, questions to consider; a piece titled in the spur of the moment and made out of a brief visit to a previously unknown city yet a piece that manages to define both a moment and a place. But what place does it define – is it Budapest (located) or is it global culture (dislocated) or is it both (translocated)?

In answer to my questions above, *Neither Here nor There* does not define either one or other of the places suggested and yet alludes to them all – here, there and *there*. This work of course infers dislocation with its allusions to transitory passage as much as any specific location (Budapest). *Neither Here nor There* is unusual within my practice due to its reference to a brief and passing encounter with place rather than to sustained engagement. This is a piece, therefore, that served as counterpoint to normative practice. As such, the work reflected a significant shift in understanding; an important step that, by apposite means, served to underline the anchor points of site sensitivity, particularity of place and specificity of situation in my practice. A piece that suggested the possibility of including strategic counterpoints in future installation works as a means of underlining the connections, material and temporal, between location, dislocation, translocation.

The centrality of the medium of photography in my practice was also brought to the fore through the re-photographing of a photograph (already in reproduction) and the possibilities offered by further adaptation in presentation (possibilities that can be transferred to other works in future). The idea of a cup of coffee simultaneously embodying both the global and the local – as specific to time and place (personalised via the addition of an oatcake) and yet unhinged via cross-cultural association – has also been carried forward. A growing series of images of personalised cups is in progress – these images are significantly situated and will, similarly, be presented alongside other indicative motifs of place as appropriate. The notion of a cup as motif or metaphor has already been developed in a project on Mull where the cup is a tea cup with, again, an oatcake on the saucer.

Tea was and is a standard conversational medium (as well as a global commodity). Local lore on the island suggests that the dark, heavily lined skins of the women in the black houses on Mull were so dark not because of the harsh weather endured or the drying out of facial skin by the fire but due to numerous cups of tea consumed day after day. The oatcake, a traditional symbol of Scots fare, is a staple ingredient of my daily diet – a packet of oatcakes appearing at regular intervals throughout the day wherever I am. On Mull, I have placed the cup and oatcake on significant windowsills where the background gives a further clue as to location and occasion of the image. The teacup and oatcake used as personal and socio-cultural referent – indicating a specific place and a personal idiosyncrasy but also echoing social tradition and global culture/trade. Here and there.



Work in progress (2009 – on-going)

## 2.4 A Wrong and a Right place?

Out of a coincidence of events and influences – a brief visit to Budapest, a piece of work titled *Neither Here nor There* and reflections on an essay by Miwon Kwon<sup>177</sup> – the ramifications of the centrality of place in my research practice became ever more apparent. In *The Wrong Place*, Kwon considers the notion of ‘wrong’ and ‘right’ place and what the difference between an experience of being in the wrong place, as opposed to the right place, might feel like. She questions what might be meant by these ‘qualifying adjectives’ and what the effects of such ‘mis/displacements’ are for ‘art, subjectivity and locational identities’.<sup>178</sup> Kwon identifies a ‘right’ place as being a place where we feel we belong, where we might say we are *at home*, where we ‘reaffirm our sense of self’ and where a sense of ‘grounded identity’ emerges.<sup>179</sup> This she positions against her conceptual analysis of a ‘wrong’ place – which she outlines as being somewhere ‘unfamiliar, disorientating, destabilising, even threatening’, as somewhere therefore where one feels out of place, decidedly not *at home*.<sup>180</sup>

Similar questions underpin my project but are positioned quite differently and without any polarisation between qualifications of place. Instead there is an inflection that focuses on the effects and affects of embodied attention to the lived landscape and to more definitive, specific and sensitive placement for ‘art, subjectivity and locational identities’ within a ‘mobilised capitalist economy’.<sup>181</sup> This research practice recognises the imperfections of any singular understanding or idealisation of place and instead proposes an experiential oscillation between being in and out of place. Following Kwon, my work acknowledges our predicament and contradictory desires but, while Kwon states that she ‘bears the burden of the necessity and impossibility of modelling new forms of being-in-place, new forms of belonging’,<sup>182</sup> I can only accept the necessity of the burden and not the impossibility. In fact, via direct embodied engagement with the specificities of place, through strategic intervention and performative enquiry, my research practice actively explores such possibilities – as evidenced via analysis of the *Neither Here nor There* artwork discussed above.

Kwon observes a contemporary prevalence toward increased validation of ‘successful’ individual art and academic profiles as a result of (and in direct proportion to) an increase in international travel and exchange. She acknowledges her part in this prevalence and, as such, identifies a subsequent accumulation of air miles to profile due to the pressures of global economies that ‘culturally and economically’ reward such a lifestyle.<sup>183</sup> There is always

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<sup>177</sup> Miwon Kwon in Claire Doherty, Ed. *From Studio to Situation* (Black Dog 2004), pp29-41

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, p30

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, p38

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, p30-9

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p30

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, p41

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, p30

a price to pay for increased status and the finger can always be pointed but it is important to remember that there is always a choice as to what price should be paid and whether or not to pay the price. Mobility is a much used word for a multiplicity of far-reaching applications and consequences which, in turn, have socio-cultural, ecological and ethical implications as well as visible political and economic impacts that can be considered positive, negative or even denied. The impact of mobilisation on our understanding of the inter-relationship between self and place also serves to raise important psychological as well as physical questions around issues of belonging and identity.

Alongside (and maybe partly as a result of) the increased status of artists and theorists due to increased international movement and cultural exchange, Kwon identifies a tendency to lay increased value on the 'nomadic condition' – a condition where phenomenological methodologies are replaced with 'intertextually coordinated, multiply-located, discursive fields of operation'.<sup>184</sup> This is a tendency that personal research addresses via firmly grounded, localised projects. The unhooking of site from specific and individual local situation to more fluid and open considerations encompassing multiple exit and entrance points is not necessarily to be considered altogether a negative conceptual move. But, I suggest, we should not ignore or forget the localised and the (added) value of phenomenological orientations and methodologies where attention can productively be paid to material considerations alongside more permeable, conceptual and discursive interpretations of place. Why is set out below.

I propose that a sense of continuity combined with a knowledge and understanding of lineages and genealogies<sup>185</sup> (whether social, cultural and/or personal) within located practice might be considered *together with* embodied attention to place where there is simultaneously an awareness of multiple crossings and flows in and through place. Place therefore understood as being continually made and re-made, and viewed as inclusive and progressive rather than threatening or regressive; place understood as process and not as static entity.<sup>186</sup> Arguably, what this points to is the underlying significance of place to our experience of the world; a sense of located identity in our daily lives reflecting the inherent physical and psychological vulnerability of the human condition. Perhaps a research project that explores the oscillations between becoming, belonging and identity might in some respects share Kwon's consideration of 'wrong' and 'right' place. Both point to a concern with how we interact, physically and psychologically, with place and what the implications and impacts of multiple mobilities, influences and interactions could subsequently have on our sense of location and of self – personally and socio-culturally. But I must underline that there is a significant difference in emphasis.

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<sup>184</sup> Miwon Kwon in Claire Doherty, Ed. *From Studio to Situation* (Black Dog 2004), p30

<sup>185</sup> For detailed examination of lineages and genealogies as related to this project see Chapter Five

<sup>186</sup> For further reference to place as process, see Chapter Three



I propose that attention to localised landscapes and rooted identities *alongside* a recognition of mobility and transience values the sensibilities and particularities that combine to make, and continue to form, the identities of specific places and their inhabitants. As such, to promote inclusivity and an appreciation for the heterogeneity of localised places and communities *within* recognisably mobilised, globalised cross-cultural understandings. Art historian Lucy Lippard writes of a sense of location and of self that fulfils ‘the geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere’.<sup>187</sup> A sense of locatedness that gives coherence and adds meaning to place; that reflects an embodied condition that desires physical mobility and yet nevertheless retains a basic psychological need for some sense of place-based grounding. As Kwon observes, ‘at the very least, we have to acknowledge this vulnerability’.<sup>188</sup> A sense of located identity that is not the result of impulsive reactions to changing conditions and situations via a return to entrenched parochialism or nationalism but, instead, recognised as sensitive, aware and informed acknowledgement of our vulnerability and our geographical materiality.

This is a research practice that explores and examines, via performative research projects, alternative ways in which we might inhabit place and yet still somehow maintain the ability to move freely in and out of place without leaving ourselves overly vulnerable to spatial and/or temporal dislocation – how we might embrace belonging and becoming and remain materially grounded as well as mobile. A question that remains and continues to haunt me is how can a society without any attachment to place ever begin to respect and care for all that place (as lived location, as geological phenomenon and as concept) can both embody *and* promise? Edward S Casey cautions that ‘the placeless is the thoughtless; and if we fail to honour and remember places, this is a direct reflection of our unthinking and increasingly ill condition’.<sup>189</sup>

## 2.5 In practice: visual acknowledgement of location, dislocation, translocation

“Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there”.<sup>190</sup>

The above quote from Lippard intimates continued movement and underlines the complexity and temporality of place. It also suggests the deep connection between people and place. As such, this quote parallels the understanding of the co-constituency of place and self as detailed in this thesis. I have included the following images to underline the central

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<sup>187</sup> Claire Doherty, Ed. *From Studio to Situation* (Black Dog 2004), p31

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, p36

<sup>189</sup> Edward S Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Indiana University Press 1993), p38

<sup>190</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* (The New York Press 1997), p7

significance of place to this study – an understanding of place as process and as deeply implicated in the fabric of personal, social and cultural identity.

These images are part of an on-going body of work that represents sustained exploration of the landscapes of Mull and Gloucestershire and, as such, represents a body of work that:

- (i) straddles two locations, bringing them together in re-presentation;
- (ii) abuts images taken in different conditions, photographs taken at different times;  
and
- (iii) through the inclusion of multi-locational and temporal references, challenges the notion of place as singular, static or closed;

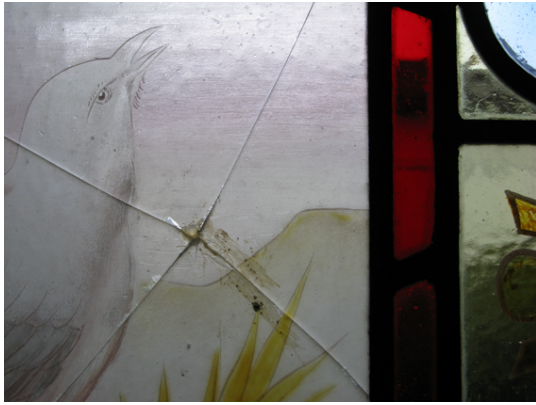
As such, the composites echo the tenets of my inquiry by working betwixt and between locations, recognising (and presenting) a series of possible inter-connections between embodied understandings of place(s) and experiential time in practice.

The following (digital) photographs form part of an extensive range of imagery, *Asides* (2005 on-going). Through regular embodied engagement with(in) the landscapes of Mull and Gloucestershire, this collection continues to grow and is drawn from as appropriate. Here the images are re-presented as groups of individual photographs.<sup>191</sup> The differences between the images that follow and the *Neither Here nor There* piece are many – largely due to the temporal span of engagement, an accumulation of place gathered over time. My overnight visit and a feeling of being temporarily dislocated, between arrival and departure, whilst in Budapest allowed no such accretion – there was no time for intimate engagement, for further exploration and examination of this historic city or its peoples, its intersections and particularities, seasonal variations, social cohesions/tensions and cultural traditions. The resulting work (*Neither Here nor There*) was therefore less about the place than about me – whereas the images that follow (from the *Asides* series) re-present long-term acquaintanceship with two specific places and therefore reflect more about the landscapes of Mull and Gloucestershire and much less about me (although of course I am inferred).

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<sup>191</sup> The presentation here references and draws from the exhibition format of photographer Wolfgang Tillmans. In photographic installation, Tillmans brings together different sized images and a range of content matter encouraging audience members to make their own connections between the images, to find their own meaning in the work, as there is no definitive or cohesive narrative given by the artist. When presented in installation format, the images shown here would be brought closer together (ie not separated over two pages or indeed walls) in order to underline possible connections, as well as distinct similarities and differences, between the two locations as evidenced through and between the individual images.





## 2.6 In Practice: Selection and Juxtaposition of Imagery in Photographic Re-Presentation

It is important to outline here the rationale behind my selection and juxtaposition of particular photographic images as well as the variety of scale in re-presentation – when published or exhibited in installation. When walking in the landscape experienced phenomenologically, my attention is drawn to particular features – the effects of light, curious shapes and colours, small wonders and distant horizons – and I record my finds on camera. I use the lens and the frame as compositional tools, zooming in and out, altering focus and changing angle, until I find an image that reflects my ‘vision’. Digital technologies help in this respect – I am never sure whether I have managed to capture anything close to the experience (anything that approximates the affect of place). However the fact that I can take so many variations of the same image (exploring different angles/focal lengths, adjusting composition/ tonal quality) helps considerably in my attempt to carry the phenomenological into my work and suggest something of an experience of place.<sup>192</sup>

It is when I am later editing the imagery and deliberating between many similar shots that I am able to more clearly determine which particular image (if any) of those taken might become part of a body of work or contribute to an installation, a film or a publication. Initially there are aesthetic considerations – is the image ‘clean’; is it in focus, is it over/under exposed etc – but final selection is always made with conscious awareness of the original experiential impetus for the image. Do any of the images I see on screen take me back to the landscape of practice, do any of these images invoke the affect of place, hold something of the elemental pull, the tactile proximity of lived experience? Or, alternatively, does the image evoke echoes of past experience, stir my memory and remind me of other landscape encounters, does the photograph transport me to other times and other places? Does the image affect me; does it spark my imagination, does it touch me, make me wonder or prompt a shiver of recognition? The images (if any) that positively answer such questions are added to project files for future use, these are the images I consider ‘successful’ and that might (or might not) become part of a later work.

## 2.7 In Practice: Scale (attracting attention and engaging the imagination of an audience)

It is important to state that the camera is employed as a tool in my practice, one of a range of media used to ‘capture’ an experience of place, and that it is an image that reflects the phenomenological encounters/observations of attentive practice (as outlined above) that is of primary value in my work.<sup>193</sup> With regard to scale in re-presentation, this depends primarily on context – is the work for publication or installation, what question/s am I asking, what is the

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<sup>192</sup> Please see Chapter Six for further reference to photography, haptic visuality and the concept of affect

<sup>193</sup> See also Chapter Five, Section 5.10, for reference to use and conjunction of media in my practice.

focus of the body of images I am presenting, what message or narrative am I suggesting and, if for installation, what is the configuration of the available space (the height of the room, the length of the walls) and how best can I negotiate between the space and the imagery? There is also the issue of what concept particular images are interrogating, what are the specific references to which the work responds, and many other aesthetic and formal considerations such as the colouring, shape and similar concerns related to the content of the imagery. Sometimes I chose to add tension by deliberately thwarting normative scales of comparison, on other occasions I highlight correspondence by echoing the scale, shapes or colour of other images.

Additionally, there is the question of intimacy – is the subject matter itself evocative, does it have inter-subjective reach? Does the image have a resonance that would benefit from sensitive handling and an appropriately diminutive scale? Do I want the viewer to become ‘intimate’ with particular images, to echo something of my own attachment and enchantment? Do I want to draw attention to certain details and landscape features in order to heighten emotional engagement, to invoke affect by accentuating individual particularities of place?

Alternatively, how might these intimate details translate if printed large-format as oversize representations - would such a move add tension, paradoxically heightening the poignancy of contact with the imaged? Or is the subject matter more akin to the sublime, enhanced if viewed large-format when the physicality of scale itself physically arrests, echoing something of the phenomenology of the location/experience re-presented? When printed ‘larger than life’, photographs have a physicality that assaults the senses, accentuating haptic visuality and adding to an invocation of affect.<sup>194</sup> As can be surmised, a key consideration when deciding on the scale of individual components in installation works is haptic visuality – strategic use of scale being one way of drawing attention to the haptic qualities of the work as well as of mobilising an audience (of bringing an audience closer to the work in order to look into the smaller images or of making them stand back to in order to view large-format imagery). In multi-scale installation, the viewer is forced to move back and forth and around the work in order not only to view individual images (large or small) but to begin to make sense of the whole. In this way, scale and conscious placement of individual images can be used to encourage the performativity of the viewer, to encourage audience participation in the making of the work.

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<sup>194</sup> Please see Chapter Six with regard to affect/haptic visuality as both are important to understanding my practice (particularly my use of photography and subsequent re-presentation of place).



To further explore the notion of place as process and building on temporal observations detailed in this chapter, in Chapter Three I examine the relationship between time and place, paying particular attention to the impact of the temporal on our experience of place. In this respect, I highlight temporal scales – exploring issues of change and constancy as evidenced in the phenomenological landscape with examples from my *Daily* series which image cyclic seasonal variations. Multi-disciplinary references explicate embodied practice throughout and the art works of Tacita Dean and Roni Horn are discussed.



Field Note

Tuesday 24

Warm, misty and damp; the black lamb with mother and twin, birds singing

Thursday 26

Cooler, overcast; cotton wool clouds overhead, thinning toward the horizon

Friday 27

Overcast, thin cloud gradually opening to blue; fresh, a gentle breeze rustles the leaves

Saturday 28

Bright and light, a cold wind dispelling any illusion of an early summer

Sunday 29

Hazy and warm, thin cloud lifting; lambs bleat, cowslips yellow the meadow

Monday 30

Bright and sunny with a soft breeze; sky blue, blossom out; glorious

Tuesday 01 May

Fresh and bright; the rising sun behind the hill, grass a lurid chlorophyll green

Wednesday 02

Fresh and bright; the wind blowing fine layers of low cloud across the sun; see the black lamb

– does she know she is different?

Thursday 03

Overcast, a cool wind; a slow, quiet start to the day

Friday 04

Cool and overcast; light winds and hazy blurred horizons

Saturday 05

Dull and cloudy, a bit cool; the grass up to my calves, the cow parsley to my thighs

Sunday 06

Cloudy; mild and dull; most of the lambs have been moved to another field – I miss them

watching me as I watch them ...

Monday 07

Damp and dull, a stiff westerly brings rain; the trees writhe against each other in the wood,

low cloud skirts the hills

Tuesday 08

Dull and wet; blustery, the wind forcing the showers on; new growth glistens and sways

(Journal extract: from my *Diary of an Englishwoman*)

## CHAPTER THREE: TIME AND PLACE

### 3.0 The Temporal Landscape

“... thinking about time, about newness, about history in the sense of individual lived-experience and about the re-drawing of boundaries and possibilities in the social sphere ...

“... emphasise and to some degree champion the everyday and the personal, the value of real, complex and transient communities and forgotten or discarded biographies.

“... the experience of time, and the relation between lived experience and its shadows in various spaces of cultural representation”.<sup>195</sup>

As the above quote suggests, time is the focus of this chapter and, to this effect, cultural geographer Doreen Massey's notion *a global sense of place* is examined in relation to temporal experience in the phenomenological landscape. Building on observations made in the previous chapter, an understanding of place as process, as unfolding in and through time, is detailed. The dichotomy between constancy and change is underlined and evidenced via my *Daily* series of artworks and artists Tacita Dean and Roni Horn provide further visual reference to the consideration of non-linear temporalities in this chapter.

I have chosen to focus on Massey in this chapter (rather than on a more phenomenologically orientated source) because of her close attention to experiential time and the expanded conceptualisation of the relationship between time and place she offers. Massey discusses how such an expanded understanding of time might translate in experiential terms; 'what it does to the imagination' when time is considered according to different experiential and conceptual scales and when place is considered as process, ie as conceived across a range of temporal scales and through personal and social, as well as human and non-human, intersections of these scales. Massey writes of the landscape as 'provisionally intertwined simultaneities of ongoing, unfinished stories'; a conceptualisation that echoes the consideration of narrative (and 'broken' narratives)<sup>196</sup> in this project as well the paradox of cyclic repetition together with subtle change as evidenced via temporal observance and documentation of place as explored in the experiential landscape through my *Daily* series of artworks.

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<sup>195</sup> Extracts from Heathfield, A (Ed), *Small Acts* (Black Dog Publishing, 2000), p6/7

<sup>196</sup> See Chapter One, Section 1.11 on Paul Ricoeur and narrative identity

Other references could have been indicated in this chapter, for example Edward S Casey<sup>197</sup> whose work, I would argue, in some respects overlaps with the concerns indicated by Massey here (as well of course with my own research project).<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, I would propose that Massey's direct attention to the insider/outsider and the private/public issue, and the way she both underlines and unsettles divisions between the two, alongside her specific consideration of time, has direct implications for my project in terms of placing the personal firmly in the socio-cultural domain<sup>199</sup> – as echoed and underlined via her notion a 'global sense of place'. As such, this particular essay by Massey, and the broad range of issues it raises, reflects concerns (subjective and objective) that run parallel to the primary themes underpinning this research practice.

### 3.1 A Global Sense of Place

In an essay entitled *Landscape as a Provocation*,<sup>200</sup> cultural geographer Doreen Massey elucidates on the term 'place' and revisits her phrase *a global sense of place*<sup>201</sup> – a phrase that resonates with contemporary preoccupations surrounding the effects (social, political, economical and ecological) of increasingly globalised societies within a culture of hybrid migrations. Place is considered central to this research practice and the phrase *a global sense of place* informs the underlying concerns and understandings of the project with regard to the dynamics and intensities of the experiential landscape – ie to local particularities as well as cross-cultural issues/debates.

Massey expands on her understanding of 'place' as follows:

“... a concept that I had wrestled with for a long time, on the one hand rejecting the parochialisms and the exclusivities that a commitment to place can generate and yet

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<sup>197</sup> In particular I am thinking here of Casey 1993, *Getting Back into Place* – a complex and detailed text that has served (and continues to serve) as a central anchoring point for my research practice.

<sup>198</sup> The 'overlaps' that I am thinking of here relate to traces of human/non-human activity as evidenced in the perceptual landscape – traces of the past that reverberate in the present either via direct lived experience of the world or via reception of artworks encountered (for example the *Daily* series as represented in this chapter). I am referring in particular to traces of human and non-human intersection and interaction as evidenced in specific locations that might echo other intersections/interactions experienced elsewhere and, as such, have global relevance and reach. In this respect, attention to Massey is vital bearing in mind the context of this particular research project, ie to trajectories of intersection between the personal and the social, between the subjective and inter-subjective that might be realised via strategic invocation of affect and the use of haptic visuality in practice (see Chapter 6). Here I refer to intersections as evidenced in specific localised projects that re-present the experiential in substantial artworks (received in installation and/or performance) where echoes of similar experiences might be recognised by other people, reminding of other places and other times (ie rather than being culturally and physically isolated occurrences and phenomena, that such artworks, and encounters with these artworks, can serve to narrow the gap between local and global concerns and actualities).

<sup>199</sup> As outlined in Chapter One

<sup>200</sup> Doreen Massey, *Landscape as a Provocation*, *Journal of Material Culture* (Sage 2006); 11; pp33-48

<sup>201</sup> The concept emerged in 1991; see Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Polity Press 1994), pp146-56

on the other hand wanting to hang on to a genuine appreciation of the specificity of local areas. It was in an attempt to transcend the dismal apparent opposition between those impetuses that the notion of 'a global sense of place' emerged".<sup>202</sup>

When enlarging on what she meant by a *global sense of place*, Massey states her concern as wanting 'to evoke place as meeting place rather than as always already coherent, as open rather than bounded, as an ongoing production rather than pre-given', stating that she was aiming for an appreciation 'that did not entail parochialism'.<sup>203</sup> Her conceptualisation of place (and the relationship between people and place) suggests a dynamic process – an ongoing, unfolding socio-cultural event (albeit one that is often barely discernible in day to day life).

Following a similar understanding, it was with the intention of examining the 'ongoing production' of place that I initiated the *Daily* series of works in 2003. By recording elemental and seasonal changes on a daily basis in one deliberately unremarkable rural location (a flat field, a hedge, the sky above) over an extended period of time, I hoped to get an a fuller and more complete view of the (visual) effects of elemental cycles as reflected in my local landscape. Consequently, every morning I stood thirty paces from the stile by the cowpat and photographed the horizon. Dawn was chosen as the time of recording due to the continual sense of wonder prompted by this daily renewal; the marvel of light from darkness, day after day after day. The viewpoint remained recognisably the same yet elemental variety was distinctly visible in the resulting imagery. By presenting all the images collected over a period of eighteen months, a total of over 500 images in one piece, I aimed to heighten awareness of landscape as dynamic process – after Massey, 'landscape as a provocation'.

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<sup>202</sup> Doreen Massey, *Landscape as a Provocation*, *Journal of Material Culture* 2006; 11; p34

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, p34



*Daily* (detail), photographic composite (digital), 2003-06

Massey admits that her notion of a *global sense of place* was criticised for concentrating overly on the changing social relations of place and that she had lost ‘a sense of groundedness’ that related to ‘nature’ and ‘stable locatedness’. In an attempt to refute this accusation, in *Landscape as a Provocation* Massey focuses on ‘nature’, accenting the temporal, and considers the geological ‘making’ of a mountain in a thought-provoking reflection on place that attempts to prompt an expansive shift in our awareness:

“What is important here is not the formal knowledge (such tectonic wanderings are now part of popular science) but what one allows it to do to the imagination. For me, initially, this dwelt upon the thought that these are *immigrant* rocks, arrived ‘here’ from somewhere else. It was an imagination that was happily congruent, therefore, with the notion of a global sense of place”.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>204</sup> Doreen Massey, *Landscape as a Provocation*, *Journal of Material Culture* 2006; 11; p35

Here Massey is suggesting that a particular rock mass (a mountain in the Lake District called Skiddaw), although dominating the local landscape and therefore 'local on the one hand', is in terms of geological time 'foreign, an intruder' – the rock having originated in the southern hemisphere. Over the millennia, geological activity effectively mobilised the rock mass, translocating it from one side of the equator to the other. Massey borrowed this idea of 'immigrant rocks' from the people of Hamburg who unearthed an erratic boulder (a rock transported by glacial action) whilst working near the river Elbe. This migrant boulder became the symbol of a political campaign, a gesture to raise the issue and profile of foreign immigrants and to promote the idea of a more open and welcoming city. If 'even rocks are on the move ... what can be claimed as belonging'?<sup>205</sup>

I was initially prompted to ask: 'Is Skiddaw then to be considered an insider or an outsider, or both – and, more importantly, why?' On reflection and after further analysis, what I suggest is of import is not whether Skiddaw is viewed as an insider or outsider but that the question is asked and that attention is given to other questions it raises – such as those prompted by the migrant rock found on the bed of the Elbe, questions such as what do we mean by local and what might constitute belonging? It is, I propose, crucial that such questions are raised and important to consider what these questions might 'do to the imagination'. Massey strategically adopted Skiddaw in order to question our understanding of place by highlighting spatio-temporal issues (underlining the value and potential of such questions). In so doing, I propose that as well as raising important social implications, she creatively evokes a spatial permeability and more open-ended temporality whereby landscape as process might be considered and where past, present and future can possibly be imagined as less linear in configuration.

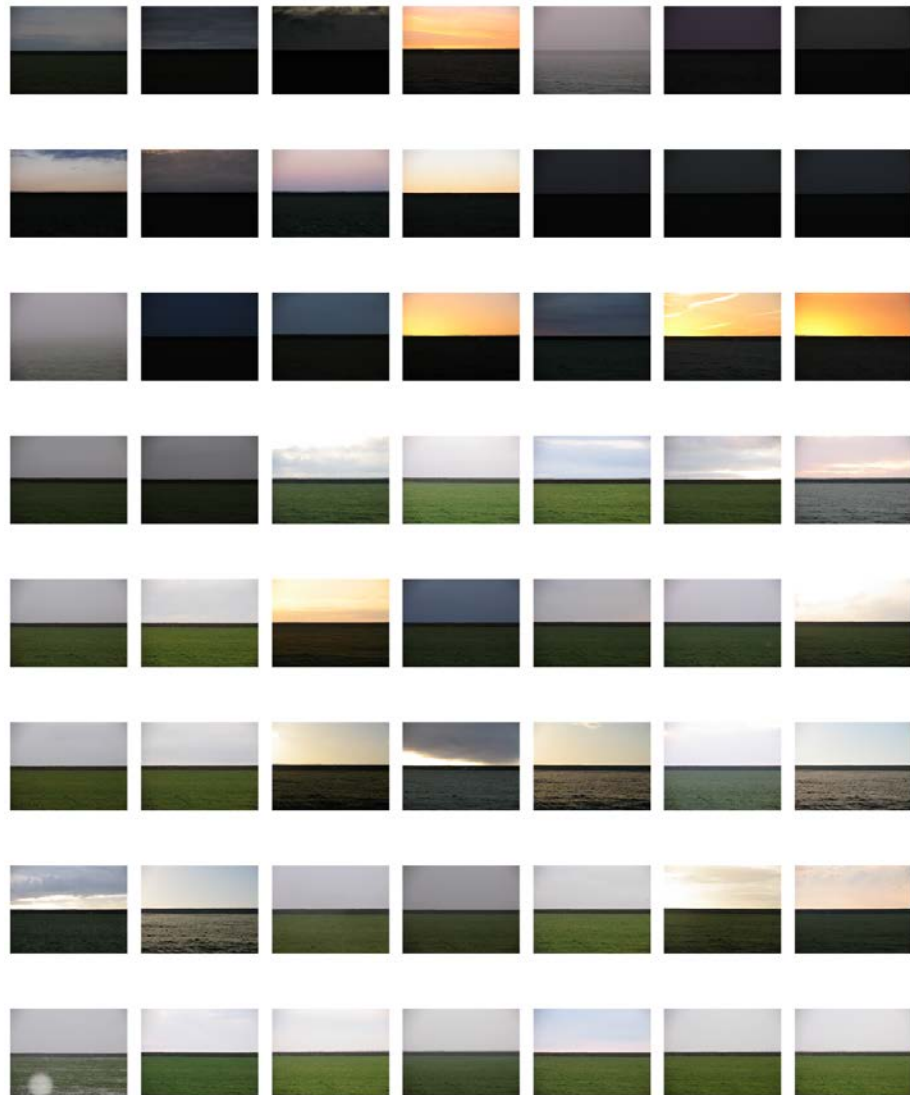
Massey continues to expand on her understanding of place as process, quoting Hinchcliffe who says that there are 'ways of engaging with landscapes and natures that refuse to see either as pure culture ... or as raw matter.'<sup>206</sup> By including this quote, Massey suggests that there are alternative, non-polar ways of understanding a relationship grounded in place and that this might include 'some element of human/nonhuman mutual construction'. By opening up the debate between nature and culture as well as hinting at different ways of viewing the inter-relationship between a self and a place, Massey is asking for critical engagement with any apparent polarisation or divide between the two (nature and culture). With similar intent, that of challenging Cartesian dualities and linear temporality, photography is employed as a primary medium in this research project. By selecting a medium traditionally associated with

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<sup>205</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage 2005), pp 149-151

<sup>206</sup> Doreen Massey, *Landscape as a Provocation*, *Journal of Material Culture* 2006; 11; p36

documentary (the camera never lies<sup>207</sup>) as a means through which to reconceptualise the inter-relationship between self and place, I invite the viewer to question the interface between fact and fiction, nature and culture, local and global, and to consider the possibility of a co-existence of both. Like Massey, I am asking for critical engagement – in this instance, via artworks presented and suggest, through the work, the choice of media and the presentation, that binary polarisations and oppositions be reconsidered, possibly reconceptualised.



*Daily (detail), photographic composite (digital), 2003-06*

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<sup>207</sup> Although the development and use of digital technology has opened up further possibilities for manipulation of imagery, it has not erased the ‘truth’ of reportage but has, I propose, considerably added to the tension and ambiguity between fact and fiction in the medium of photography – a tension that can be explored (and perhaps exploited) in practice

In her essay, Massey also quotes Tim Ingold who, referencing Breugel's *The Harvesters* when writing of temporality and landscape, states:

“We may reasonably suppose that over the centuries, perhaps even millennia, this basic topography has changed but little. *Set against the duration of human memory and experience*, it may therefore be taken to establish a baseline of permanence”.<sup>208</sup>

Massey suggests that by using the temporal standard of human lifespans against topographic time scales, Ingold effects a temporal ‘confinement’ (or, I suggest, even a closure).<sup>209</sup> She writes that ‘it is not, in any way, that history and the past are not crucial to the understanding of place and landscape’ but that ‘an intertwining of trajectories which also has a future ... would serve to counter the impression ... that the present is some kind of achieved terminus’. Her main objection being that ‘when this focus is combined with the human/nonhuman divide ... ‘the past’ can all too easily be reduced to human memory’. I would suggest that it is not only a question of memory but, as Massey reminds us, also of spatio-temporal awareness; a complex, fluid combination of aspects of embodied experience of the landscape that merge to give a sense of locality and ‘provisional’ groundedness, what might be termed ‘a sense of place’. Massey talks of distinct temporalities being ‘inter-woven’ and of how ‘these intersections ... continue ongoingly to make the landscape.’<sup>210</sup> This is precisely such spatio-temporal awareness – an expanded awareness and comprehension of landscape as dynamic process. As Massey writes:

“A memory of place, yes; but a more expansive one in time and in space. And a memory not just of ‘here’. Or rather maybe it is that the very constitution of ‘here’, of this landscape, and its magic, is precisely in the outrageous specialness of the current conjunction, this here and now”.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Doreen Massey, *Landscape as a Provocation*, *Journal of Material Culture* 2006; 11, p41

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, p42

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, p43

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, p42



Field Note

Saturday 17

Mild, grey and dull; the merest hint of pink tinging the clouds

Sunday 18

Bright with a fresh easterly wind; out of the sun it is cold, head down, increase the pace

Monday 19

Cold and overcast, leaden skies; a dusting of snow re-defines the scene, highlights of white, a landscape redrawn; an easterly wind sears exposed skin

Tuesday 20

Bright, the sun shining under the clouds; a cold northerly wind; trees creaking, buzzards screeching, lips numb

Wednesday 21

Clear and bright, limitless blue above, a frost below; cold

Thursday 22

Cold and damp, snow turning to drizzle; wind abating, wet

Friday 23

Milder, damp and murky; the clouds low, sitting on my shoulders

Saturday 24

Misty and murky, the grass wet, the air damp; two magpies dart across, two for joy

Sunday 25

Grey and dull, a cold northerly cuts through the mild air; violets and bluebells, the first few, on the edge of the woods

Monday 26

Cold and misty, the stars of last night lost; trees creak ominously

Tuesday 27

A soft mist and light dew; transparent blue above, a red sun tinting low cloud; the air fresh on the skin

Wednesday 28

Dense fog, the air chilled; walking through the vapour, familiar landmarks emerging out of the curtain of cloud; the woods feel primordial

Thursday 29

Mild and dull with grey drizzle, brightening from the west; a heron, three buzzards

(Journal extract: from my *Diary of an Englishwoman*)

Redacted due to copyright

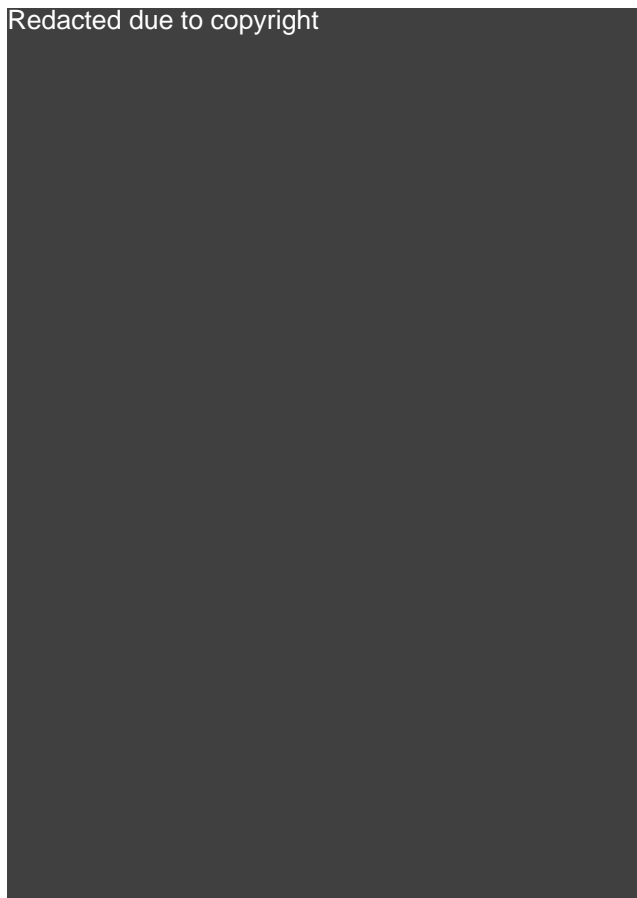


*Gateway* (detail) – from the *Daily* series;  
photographic composite (digital), 2006 – 2010

### 3.2 In practice: Temporal Considerations – The *Daily* Series

In the context of this research project, the ‘outrageous specialness’ of Massey’s conjunctions are evidenced in the *Daily* series. In these composite images many ‘here’ and ‘nows’ abut in an attempt to suggest intersections that ‘continue ongoingly to make the landscape’. The extended *Daily* series evidences multiple dawns, multiple seasons and multiple atmospheres and, as the series developed, multiple viewpoints – reflecting expanded temporalities and conjunctions that show rhythms and patterns, abrupt disjunctions but also more harmonious flows of colour and tone as a result of elemental conditions recorded over an extended period of time. With the addition of alternative viewpoints/locations, a further expansion is afforded – between the corporeal (location of body) and conceptual (location of art work).

These large-scale composite works, when presented in their entirety, do not ‘finish’ neatly at the end of a line but in mid flow (or remain hidden in paper as it unfolds onto the floor) in an effort to suggest continuity and a future beyond (as well as the possibility of a time before) the work rather than any terminus or conclusion in intent or presentation – an evocation that, in Massey’s words, might do ‘something to the imagination’.



*Daily* (detail), photographic composite (digital), 2003-06

Redacted due to copyright



*Daily*, photographic composite (digital), 2003-06

Massey writes evocatively of a temporal 'beyond':

"Beyond the relative immediacies of human memory and task-based experience we engage with knowledges and imaginations and with the cosmologies (including precisely political cosmologies) which frame them ... a kind of suspended, constantly-being-made interdependence, human and beyond human".<sup>212</sup>

This perfectly parallels where I intend the *Daily* photographic composites to be positioned; these expanded works serving to give a sense of provisional groundedness due to the repetition of location but counter-balanced with the unpredictability of climatic and seasonal change. The stability of a regular, rhythmic, repetitive event (a walk) at the same time (in this instance dawn) in an everyday (but recognisably revisited) location countered both with and against the 'beyond', the changing appearance and character of place due to weather conditions, seasonal change, localised use and growth/decay patterns. The resulting images are comfortingly familiar yet strangely unfamiliar, simultaneously the same but different; patterns emerge, visual comparisons are inevitable, connections are suggested, attention is focused then moves on again, imagination engages and questions are prompted.

Although the full *Daily* composites do not end neatly at the end of a printed line or are shown as a wall 'scroll' where there is no visual 'finish' to the work, the pieces might yet be considered linear in construction. What is intended is that visually the work should be read not line by line but as a whole; the eyes continually moving around examining different relationships, passing back and forth, up and down as they engage with the many individual images that come together to make the whole. The sheer physical scale of the artworks when presented en masse aids my intention as it is visually impossible to *both* examine each component in detail *and* to see the whole piece at once. The entire work, and the emergent colourations and patterns, can only be seen at a distance – close to, the eyes must move over and around the detail of the individual parts in order to try and make sense of the piece.

I do not consider the *Daily* series of photographic composites as works of 'pure' documentary or as quasi scientific reports. They are instead intended as reflective experiential pieces, as both provocations and evocations. Via the adoption of regular, cyclical walks and repeated daily observance and documentation, these works aim to highlight the coexistence of an apparent dichotomy – the changing and the seemingly constant. In this regard therefore, the series questions our understanding of time and any assumptions of a fixed, comfortably stable or confined, temporal 'reality'. Instead of fixity, a flow is suggested – an uneasy balance, an oscillation between movement and stasis, elemental forces and biological processes, set against the 'constancy' of regular acquaintance. Location, dislocation.

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<sup>212</sup> Doreen Massey, *Landscape as a Provocation*, *Journal of Material Culture* 2006; 11; p43

Field Note

Friday 10

Warm sun, hazy skies; sheep bleating as they are moved across the field

Saturday 11

Thick cloud in the valley, hugging the hills and enveloping the tops; the air full of moisture, smells damp; a warp of webs weaves threads across, through and over the undergrowth, tying, combing, covering

Monday 13

Overcast, damp with a cool breeze; the cloud opening to patches of blue

Tuesday 14

The smell of rain, the sound of wind, rustling through the trees; sheep unsettled and noisy as the rain drives diagonally across the fields; slippery

Wednesday 15

Overcast; warm, light rain bouncing off my hood; the woods dark and wet, the grass sodden, the sheep appear resigned

Thursday 16

Bright and sunny, breezy, the air fresh; a buzzard screeches

Friday 17

Thin cloud, hazy sunshine; a feel of autumn in the air, chill and earthy with heavy dew; a wood pigeon swoops and glides

Saturday 18

Overcast with mottled skies; a brisk wind sweeping the clouds along, a hint of salmon pink behind the grey; two buzzards calling, gliding high above

Sunday 19

Broken cloud, the sun behind streaking the edges with silver light; the air clear, visibility good; the ground muddy and slippery

Monday 20

Bright and sunny, hazy cloud, a cool breeze; the first signs of autumnal colour in the trees; a tinge of orange, some yellowing of leaves

Tuesday 21

Overcast, dark skies, a cool wind; the steep grassy meadow has been cut revealing irregular contours reminiscent of a bald head, a shorn sheep; swallows duck and dive at the head of the valley

(Journal extract: from my *Diary of an Englishwoman*)

The strategy adopted in the *Daily* series is a strategy that can readily be adjusted to any time frame, ie it can be employed at any time of day or night on a monthly, annual, or even minute by minute basis. Similarly, it can easily be adapted to different locations and different situations, as evidenced in the following example. In *Field*, a series of close-up photographs have been taken on a monthly basis over a period of years across the side of a limestone meadow in Gloucestershire, each image portraying one step along the side of the meadow. Attention in the *Field* imagery is directed to the changing vegetation, the variety of plants, the insect life and the growth/decay, over the months.



*Field* (detail) - from the *Daily* series;  
photographic composite (digital), 2008 – on-going

In order to progress my project and situate my practice within the contemporary visual arts, I examine other artists whose work evidences temporal considerations. I have selected two practitioners, Tacita Dean and Roni Horn, with whom my practice shares affinities in recognising non-linear temporalities (in content and presentation format). These artists have both inspired and informed my practice, and examples of their work are examined below.

### 3.3 Temporality in the work of Tacita Dean

The films of Tacita Dean evidence a preoccupation with time – her understanding of the potential impact of visual imagery to highlight the temporal and to suggest alternative relationships to, and readings of, experiential time can be seen in her handling of the medium. Two pieces that closely relate to the sequential unfolding of the *Daily* series are *Banewl* (1999) and *The Green Ray* (2001). I have chosen to focus on these two particular works because of the implications they embody and the questions they prompt – questions of interrupted linearity (of finitude and eternity, of the cyclic and the ephemeral, of the fleeting and the enduring, and a series of other such paradoxes); questions that unsettle any illusion of linear stability, alter perceptual understandings and suggest alternative temporalities. As such, Dean's work not only informs my research but close attention to the content and format of her films continues to prompt me to expand my practice.

#### *Banewl* (1999)

On the morning of 11 August 1999, just after 11am, a total eclipse of the sun was reported in Cornwall. In fact, this was not strictly accurate because at this time, on this day, it was cloudy and although the eclipse happened and was experienced by those present, human and non-human, the sight of the moon slowly moving over the sun was not actually visible, cloud cover allowing only fragmented and hazy glimpses of the event. Dean therefore chose to concentrate on the environment around her and the effect of the eclipse on the everyday life of those living there. She was one of many who had travelled to Cornwall; she was waiting, waiting for the eclipse, waiting at Burnewhall Farm, a dairy farm on the south coast only a few miles from Land's End. She was waiting in anticipation, waiting to record the event of the eclipse, an event unlikely to be 'visible' again in England for decades. *Banewl* is Dean's film of this waiting and the slow transformation of the landscape and its inhabitants over the period of the eclipse as experienced at Burnewhall Farm.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> The title of the film, *Banewl*, is a phonetic version of the name of the farm – the local pronunciation of Burnewhall.



Redacted due to copyright



Stills from *Banewl* (1999)

*Banewl* is the result of 2 hours and 40 minutes of footage selectively edited by Dean (who had of course herself experienced the eclipse) to 63 minutes in length. Although edited, Dean was aware of the importance of temporal sequence to the experience and meaning of this work and carefully preserved the exact sequential temporality of this extra-ordinary event in the finished film.<sup>214</sup> By retaining the temporal sequence of the eclipse, a real-time experiential, a sense of waiting is retained and present in the film, it becomes part of the work. It is this same sense of temporal unfolding in lived experience that I attempt to evoke through my work. Dean writes of waiting in the rain, waiting for totality, and of being surprised by the fact that the light remained 'remarkably unchanged' and that it was the swallows that first perceived the coming darkness.

"Suddenly they go crazy, swooping and darting in all directions, and then they disappear. The cows start to lie down one by one across the field. The temperature drops. When totality comes, it is rapid: a night darkness. The sun gone".<sup>215</sup>

Dean observes a 'mustard yellow horizon' and notes subtle changes as the light turns from 'strange translucent colours to mother of pearl and then imperceptibly back to grey', the grey of the weather on the morning of 11 August 1999 at Burnewhall. She writes of being 'still in a reverie' and of 'seeing the world again' after the experience of the eclipse, of how the silence was broken by 'the crowing of a cockerel', the call of daybreak, the transition of 'one phase of this phenomenon to the next'. Dean notes 'a strange intensity' due to the clouds and the fact that she had not seen either the corona or the diamond ring effect but that what she had seen was 'the place: the ground and the sky; the animals and the birds; and Banewl, the farm itself'.<sup>216</sup> She continues:

"The eclipse was about waiting for darkness to happen and then equally for the return of a normal sun. The clouds allowed us to experience this coincidence of cosmic time and scale on our terms and in our own human time, measuring it against the movements of animals and the fine detailing of our natural world".<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Reference Susan Stewart in *Tacita Dean: Recent Films and Other works* (Tate Britain 2001), p47/48

<sup>215</sup> Tacita Dean: Artist's Writing in *Tacita Dean* (Phaidon 2006), p130

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p130

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, p130

Stills from *Banewl* (1999)

The waiting, the altered perception, the altered temporality, the event of the eclipse evidenced in and as the film *Banewl*. Jean-Christophe Royoux comments on this 'long period of waiting' for the eclipse and states that the subject of the film becomes 'duration as an expression of presence'.<sup>218</sup> I would propose that such a statement could be similarly directed at the *Daily* series of imagery – that the experiential duration of the making of the artwork as well as the reception of the piece with all its component parts, becomes a part of that which gives the work presence; that it is the temporal span of the sequential that becomes a part of the *present* of the work and allows us to see the place *itself*.

“Here a fragment of reality freezes and becomes not only the image of a past moment, but also the synthetic representation of an enduring present ... By simply duplicating an unprocessed fragment of reality, it reanimates and reactivates: quite literally, it gives it a new life”.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Jean-Christophe Royoux in *Tacita Dean* (Phaidon 2006), p78

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, p62

*The Green Ray* (2001)

Dean describes the green ray as the 'last ray of the dying sun to refract and bend beneath the horizon'.<sup>220</sup> The green ray, a naturally occurring but rarely seen phenomena; a fleeting (and elusive) glimpse, a 'green splash' evident immediately after the sun disappears behind the horizon. The ray is usually seen over open seas, due to lack of obstruction and the necessary clarity of vision; the legendary green ray of sailors' tales, the privileged moment when a flash of green is seen on the horizon – 'harbinger of change or fortune'.<sup>221</sup> So ephemeral that doubts abound and questions of reality, such as: "does it exist, is it there, did I really see that?", are inevitably prompted. The green ray – a mirage or an observable actuality?

Dean travelled to Madagascar in order to see the green ray. She was due to tour the island but remained on the beach in Morombe on the west coast filming at sunset for three weeks; daily she filmed the horizon in the chance that she might be fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of the elusive ray – by eye and on film. Dean admits that the green ray is 'really a quest thing' and says of her quest to witness and film the ray:

"... I would not leave that beach. For three weeks I would film the sunset every day if it looked like it might produce a green ray. I was absolutely hooked ... I just had to get it, and that is the quest thing. And I got it. But only just".<sup>222</sup>

Dean says that the point of her film is that the green ray so nearly eluded her. She knew others had faked the ray and this increased her sense of quest, 'a quest to try to see, if not film, something that I could not imagine'. She believed she had seen it from the beach at Morombe looking out over the Mozambique Channel but that she 'was never sure'. It was when the film was processed, back in England, that she could confirm that she had in fact seen, and filmed, the green ray and that it existed in 'the fleeting movement of film frames'.<sup>223</sup> In a similar but distinctly different vein, I am also questioning the visible and our memory of the seen. By recording dawn on a daily basis, and then presenting months and months of consecutive dawns in one extended composite image, I am effectively revealing the impossible – the impossible memory of a multiplicity of dawns – by highlighting the doubt of perception and questioning our visual memory.

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<sup>220</sup> *Tacita Dean: Selected Writings* (Paris-Musees and Steidl Publishers, Germany 2003)

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*; the rarely seen event of the green ray carrying overtones of mystery and lore

<sup>222</sup> *Tacita Dean* (Phaidon 2006), p20

<sup>223</sup> *Tacita Dean: Selected Writings* (Paris-Musees and Steidl Publishers, Germany 2003)

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Stills from *Green Ray* (2001)

Even in the film, the green ray is 'such a trace' that viewers question whether they have seen it.<sup>224</sup> Dean comments that she thinks this is positive and important because the elusiveness of the ray means that the emphasis in the work is placed on 'the act of looking itself' and is about 'faith and belief in what you see' rather than being simply about the phenomenon.<sup>225</sup> *The Green Ray* is inevitably a short film, only 2 minutes 30 seconds long, due to the speed of the setting sun and the rapid passing of the 'green splash'. The sun is setting, the green ray is present, and then gone; film over.

The waiting of *Banewl* and the speed of *The Green Ray*; two contrasting temporalities, two films that question (i) our perception of the world, (ii) our experience of time and, as a result, (iii) touch on the almost imperceptible interface between fact and fiction – three key concerns

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<sup>224</sup> *Tacita Dean* (Phaidon 2006), p20

<sup>225</sup> *Tacita Dean: Selected Writings* (Paris-Musees and Steidl Publishers, Germany 2003)

echoed in my practice, in the works presented and in the contextual essays that together form this research project.

It is not surprising, considering the appropriateness and adaptability of the medium, that many other artists have similarly included photography and/or film in their practice and presented series or sequences of images as a means of highlighting the dichotomy of repetition and change, for example Roni Horn (see below), Hiroshi Sugimoto, Ann Hamilton, Olafur Eliasson, Francis Alys to name but a few. Through such works they ask us to think about matters temporal and experiential, about other rhythms and the way that 'the twin laws of impermanence and cyclicity dissolve oppositions, offering us a means of stepping outside the usual framework of our lives'.<sup>226</sup>

### 3.4 Temporal Considerations in the Work of Roni Horn

#### *You Are the Weather* (1994-5)

An example of a body of work that focuses on the temporality of place through strategic use of photography is *You Are the Weather* by Roni Horn.<sup>227</sup> The piece is comprised of (up to) one hundred photographs, each 10.5 x 8.5 inches, of the face of a woman bathing in hot water springs in Iceland. Horn states that this work 'had something to do with this woman I met, about her face revealing an idea of place'.<sup>228</sup>

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*You Are the Weather* (1994-5), detail

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<sup>226</sup> Catalyst Arts on Jason Oddy. This remark relates to an exhibition of *Varanasi* (2007), a large scale photographic work comprising a series of (inverted) images of the river Ganges taken over a 24 hour period. <http://www.catalystarts.org.uk/exhibitions/2007/oddjas/oddjas.html> (accessed 28.07.07)

<sup>227</sup> Other works by Horn reflecting such concerns include: *This is Me, This is You* (1999-2000), *Cabinet of* (2001) and *Still Water* (1999).

<sup>228</sup> *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn* (Tate Publishing 2009); Subject Index, p195

To make this work, Horn worked and lived with Margret for two months and says the piece came out of a 'very specific idea'; she wanted to see if she could 'elicit a place from her face – almost like a landscape'.<sup>229</sup> She states that it was a 'wordless interaction' and was 'about mutual trust'. *You Are the Weather* is one of several pieces that Horn started as a book (*To Place*, Book VI) and later extended into installation format because there was 'something else going on' in the imagery she had collected, something she called an 'experiential element', something linked to architectural, physical space. This is a comment I have remembered when considering presentation formats and, in this respect, Horn's work provides a valuable reference point for the re-presentation of multiple works.<sup>230</sup>

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*You Are the Weather* (1994-5), detail

*You Are the Weather* contains a series of individual portraits of Margret, 'one portrait of a person that is a multitude'. Another primary underlying theme running through Horn's work is that of identity – the subject matter may, for instance, be Iceland (as it is here where Margret's face *becomes* the place) but the overarching subject is identity; the identity of place and how it might be formed and the identity of individuals and how they might be shaped by a place (as indicated here by the model). Horn reflects that because Margret's face in *You Are the Weather* is 'not expressionless but is very contained' it increases attention to the face as a 'physical surface', to small differences in expression that invite our consideration.

In this work, Horn reflects something of the complexity of identity (that identity is never singular but multiple) and that it depends not only on who is identifying with the subject, what relationship they have (or think they have) with the person, but on the person's relationship to place, to their situation at that time. It is dependent on who is looking at whom, and where

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<sup>229</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/horn/clip2.html> (accessed 11.10.09)

<sup>230</sup> For further reference to Roni Horn, installation and presentation methods see Chapter Six, Section 6.20

and when. And, although there are many individual images of Margret, there is very little revealed about the person – which further troubles the relationship between subject and object, further blurs the boundaries between the two. Who is looking at whom through this work? Horn considers this ambiguity as being also about the viewer, about the viewer's relationship to the image and what they 'want from the subject'. Horn continues to say that the piece is about identity in a very broad sense and observes that there is:

“A moment-to-moment shift in image and identity. In a photograph, that shift in image is all you know from one sequence to the next sequence. I am not saying that those are mutually exclusive identities, but little parts of a whole that the viewer brings in their own”.<sup>231</sup>

The above quote is of interest because I feel that the *Daily* series are also very much about identity – the identity of place, reflecting the changing characteristics of a terrain over a period of time and, by implication, also the change in experience of the photographer through engagement with this environment in its various cyclic states. The shifting identity of the finished pieces also, I hope, portrays something of the relationship between change and constancy and prompts the viewer to reflect upon their own relationship to place, their experience of a changing world and an evolving personal identity. I propose that such works, by asking fundamental questions about how we live and how we engage with place (how we might think about our place in the world in relation to the experiential), point to the possibility of more fluid identities of self and of place and alternative experiential 'realities' of inhabitation and transience in personal, social and cultural domains. Location, dislocation, translocation.

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<sup>231</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/horn/clip2.html> (accessed 10.11.09)



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*Down the hill* (detail), from the *Daily* series;  
photographic composite (digital), 2006–2010

Field Note

Thursday 18

Clear skies, cold with pockets of frost and deep low-lying mist; the dawn light adding warm tones to the distinctly autumnal scene

Friday 19

Bright and sunny, cold; frost on the tops, mist in the hollows; 2 screeching buzzards glide out of the woods, 2 cock pheasants flap furiously to flight, 4 magpies dart through the trees

Saturday 20

Bright and clear, a cold easterly breeze; a couple of crows fly out from the woods in perfect parallel formation, 2 black darts against the blue

Sunday 21

Clear skies, the sun rising behind the hills; the autumn colours deepening, the air cool

Monday 22

Hazy; low broken cloud tinged by a rising sun; wind freshening; 3 wood pigeons rest on a nearly leafless birch branch that looks too fragile to support such big, plump birds

Tuesday 23

Clear and bright; a brisk easterly wind cuts to the bone, hands curled for warmth; a lime green blur glimpsed through the trees, a woodpecker perhaps

Wednesday 24

Thick mist, the tops of the hills rising above the sea below; damp and cold; two, three, four magpies

Thursday 25

Overcast, grey and dull with the finest of drizzle; the sound of a bird rustling through fallen leaves looking for food

Friday 26

Cloudy, grey and dull; so little light the sheep are still slumbering in the fields; a buzzard circles screeching, others call from across the valley

Saturday 27

Overcast, dull and grey; a bat flits between the trees in the early morning gloom

Sunday 28

Blustery, a brisk westerly, the smell of rain to come; walk through a shower of falling leaves, yellow and brown, twisting, turning, gliding on the wind

Monday 29

Bright, the sky a clear cold blue; a stiff cold wind hurts the ears; damp leaves

(Journal extract: from my *Diary of an Englishwoman*)

### 3.5 In Practice: Learning to be Affected and the Performativity of Practice

Massey asks that we 'follow Latour's injunction 'to learn to be affected' and allow that to extend into wider realms of thought and imagination'.<sup>232</sup> She writes of the temporal as 'the ineffable dimension of change, as internal to things and as intangible'.<sup>233</sup> It is with a similar understanding of the temporal and the spatial, and the relationship between them, that sequences and series of works are composed; the establishment of new relationships between individual images (and the affect of these new relationships) serving to expose other 'intertwined' stories and suggest alternative 'ongoing, unfinished' narratives.<sup>234</sup>

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*New horizons* (detail), from the *Daily* series;  
photographic composite (digital), 2006-2010

If, as Massey suggests, a sense of place is to be infused with an increased awareness of time and cyclic change, a contemporaneous unfolding of narratives grounded in and evidenced via localised landscapes, what does this mean and how does it alter our sense of belonging and identity, a feeling of being 'at home' in place? This is the core of my enquiry; a probing examination of the inter-relationship between a self and a place and it is through my artworks that I address such questions to my audience. Through the *Daily* series of images, grounded in the rural landscapes of Gloucestershire, practice-led research observes, examines and documents temporal rhythms and subtle cyclic changes. Other on-going projects in Gloucestershire and on the Isle of Mull continue to explore such questions and to investigate the oscillation between time and place, between dwelling and mobility, between becoming, belonging and identity through my research practice. These are projects that engage with the

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<sup>232</sup> Doreen Massey, *Landscape as a Provocation*, *Journal of Material Culture* 2006; 11; p44. For further reference to 'affect', see Chapters Five and Six

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, p46

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid*, p44

sensorium of landscape, that ask questions and that, in their attempt to visually translate the experiential, suggest the corporeally known *as well* as the conceptually understood.

I propose that the landscape serves as mirror to, as well as being marker of, the temporal; a non-linear, fragmented, experiential time that simultaneously encompasses the deep past, the recent past, the present and the future. A here and now that reflects the deep past through rocks and fossils that are millions, perhaps billions, of years old; scars on the landscape, old field patterns, evidence of terracing and former cultivation, abandoned buildings and settlements evoking those who have come before centuries beforehand; fallen trees, decaying vegetation and puddles that speak of a more recent past; the smell on the wind, the dampness of rain on skin, the colours in the sky that make the immediate present; small budding leaves, approaching clouds, the sound of footsteps getting louder, coming closer, that allude to an immanent future; and a series of observations and drifting, emergent notions that project further into the future and sit with memories that flash unpredictably from the past.

In the performativity of practice, awareness is heightened to the immediate environment, intuitive sensitivities and animal instincts come to the fore, and temporal 'realities' are challenged and radically re-figured through the body. Through practice-led research in the experiential landscape, corporeal understandings are brought together with, and up against, conceptual concerns and it is as a result of such tensions and/or insights that connections are suggested, alternative relationships prompted, and artworks might be 'found'. It is in this context, as a direct result of the performativity of landscape in practice, that artworks are made – sequences and series of works such as the *Daily* series evidenced in this chapter.

I would like to propose an expanded understanding of the temporal; a translation which considers time as continuum rather than readily assumed linear 'reality'. To suggest perhaps, the temporal as a focal device through which to re-consider our understanding of aspects of place and facets of ourselves; a device through which to unsettle presumptions and to re-examine the relationship that exists between place and self – an individual and often intimate acquaintanceship as well as a socio-culturally influenced construct. Through practice-led research, I question our understanding of experiential time and propose a revised temporal awareness which challenges linear time and offers alternative possibilities. Via artworks presented, I am suggesting a way of in-habiting place that offers continuity but also accepts change, one that aims to provoke an altered, potentially renewed understanding of our relationship with place, with time, with ourselves and with each other.

Field Note

Time matters.

Walking up the hill toward the quarry where past mining activity leaves the exposed rock face open and vulnerable to the elements. The valuable yellow-cream stone is scarred and weathered with fissures, is overhung by the roots of trees above.

Walking slowly with mud-heavy boots across the potato field; ridges of new growth above ground reflecting activity below. Into the woods, ducking under fallen branches and dodging nettle patches up to my waist.

The smell of wet undergrowth hits the nostrils and eyes adjust to shadows. The wind blows through the trees, birds rustle dry leaves in the undergrowth. Senses alert to a new environment; the body adapting. Bodily intelligence; awareness of surrounding woodland heightened, the sense of self in relation to immediate environment intense. The smell of rain on the wind, soon followed by the drumming of a thundery shower filtering through the leaves and branches, a sound that grows in volume as it approaches.

A dog erupts from the thicket disturbing my reverie, a voice calls in the distance. Another dog, more voices. I increase my pace before the future appears present.

Time matters

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*New horizons* (detail), from the *Daily* series;  
photographic composite (digital), 2006-2010

In the following chapter, I examine the concept of dwelling and consider what and where we might call 'home'. Drawing on the conceptualisation of self, place and time as put forward in this thesis, ie with subjectivity as non-unitary, place as process and time as non-linear, I further explore the co-constituency of a self and a place with reference to cross-disciplinary texts and introduce the concept of becoming in relation to performative practice in the phenomenological landscape.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DWELLING IN PLACE, DWELLING IN THE BODY

“Dwelling is both a noun (the place to which one returns) and a verb (the practice of dwelling); my dwelling is both my habitat and my habitual way of life. My habitual way of life, ethos or set of habits determines my character (my specificity or what is properly my own). These habits are not given: they are constituted through the repetition of bodily acts the character of which are governed by the habitat I occupy”.<sup>235</sup>

“Despite the oppressions and privileges the idea historically carries, the idea of home also carries critical liberating potential because it expresses uniquely human values ... However minimal, home is an extension of the person’s body, the space that he or she takes up, and in which he or she performs the basic activities of life ... These need not all be done in the same place or behind closed doors, in a house. But the individual is not allowed to be if she does not have places to live and perform the activities of life ...”.<sup>236</sup>

Following the intimations of the above quotes, Chapter Four examines the concept of dwelling and draws on cross-disciplinary research to explore dwelling in practice. The first part of this chapter, *Between Dwelling & Home* outlines the term dwelling and considers our understanding of ‘home’. The twin roots of the verb to dwell are detailed after Edward S Casey and the etymology of the word analysed through Casey and Heidegger. The notion of home is considered in detail and, in this context, the work of Ana Mendieta is discussed together with my research project *Of Being and Becoming*. The relationship between Mendieta’s *Silhoueta* series and my work is examined, in particular with regard to issues of belonging and identity.

The second part of this chapter, *Body and Place, Identity and Becoming* develops the propositions put forward in the first section. Cross disciplinary references further explore how the inter-relationship between body and place, the temporal, and between individual, societal and cultural understandings of dwelling and home are all constitutive of the building of personal and collective identities. In this regard, my understanding of place, home and identity as all being open and hybrid concepts is critically examined with reference to Doreen Massey. This section then considers the notion of dwelling in the body – explored through

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<sup>235</sup> Rosalind Diprose quoted in Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (Routledge 2011), p19

<sup>236</sup> Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience* (Oxford University Press 2005), p124, p152

later examples from the *Of Being and Becoming* research project and a reading of film theorist Vivian Sobchack's conceptualisation of the body as home.

#### 4.0 Between Dwelling and Home

"... cultural knowledge, rather than being imported into the settings of practical activity, is constituted within these settings through the development of specific dispositions and sensibilities that lead people to orient themselves in relation to their environment and to attend to its features in the particular ways that they do."<sup>237</sup>

In this study I have approached the experiential landscape with an understanding of dwelling as an ontological concept that moves with the body, in time and in place. Viewing the landscape of everyday practice as a locus of dwelling assumes a lived as well as learned understanding of dwelling as ontological state where multi-sensory embodied experience and meaning emerge via active engagement as well as passive observance. Dwelling understood here as formative state and not aimed toward any predetermined end. Dwelling, in this respect, is never a foregone conclusion but rather something that we must ever learn anew.<sup>238</sup> As such, in this project dwelling is understood as a form of potential *becoming*<sup>239</sup> – the result of located engagement generated by a series of unforeseen encounters and passive *as well as* active engagement. Not dwelling as intention but as unforeseen potential.

"Dwelling is not bound to a particular scale, but traverses scales from the domestic household to the globe".<sup>240</sup>

"... both the continuing accessibility and the familiarity of a dwelling place presuppose the presence and activity of the inhabitant's lived body. This body has everything to do with the transformation of a mere *site* into a dwelling *place*. Indeed, *bodies build places*".<sup>241</sup>

A dwelling approach resonates with thoughts of embodiment and in-habitation, containing echoes of identity and intimacy (physical and psychological). Dwelling is thus considered an apt descriptive for the verbalisation of an experience of place; dwelling as interface between a self and a place. In this instance, dwelling understood as an attempt to describe the inter-relationship between body and place as formed through my (largely) phenomenological

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<sup>237</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (Routledge 2000), p153

<sup>238</sup> Heidegger proposes that 'mortals ... *must ever learn to dwell*' (Heidegger 1975, p161; emphasis in original). For further reference to Heidegger on dwelling, see Section 4.1.

<sup>239</sup> For detailed cross-disciplinary analysis of becoming, see Chapter Five

<sup>240</sup> Tom Mels, *Reanimating Places* (Ashgate 2004), p6

<sup>241</sup> Edward S Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Indiana University Press 1993), p116



research practice. An awareness, simultaneously, of dwelling in place *and* dwelling in the body; an awareness of movement *and* stasis, change *and* constancy with dwelling understood as action and inter-action as well as passive reciprocation and observation. Although, as human geographer Tom Mels suggests, 'dwelling can never really be a convenient verb or concrete noun' because it 'remains a doubt' with an 'open-endedness [that] is deeply embedded in the etymology of the word'.<sup>242</sup>

#### 4.1 Dwelling: Casey and Heidegger

It is precisely the ambiguity that Mels outlines that suggests the appropriateness of dwelling for an exploratory visual arts practice that focuses on complex (and often contradictory) connections between people and place. The 'open-endedness' that Mels observes is underlined by Edward S Casey who identifies two apparently antithetical roots of the verb to dwell: Old Norse *dvelja*: to linger, delay, tarry and Old English *dwalde*: to go astray, err, wander.<sup>243</sup> The doubt of dwelling identified by Casey as stasis (lingering, delaying or tarrying) and movement (going astray, erring or wandering). He continues to state that 'dwelling is accomplished not by residing but by wandering'.<sup>244</sup> When multiple migrations mean more and more people are on the move globally, whether by choice, in necessity or through political coercion, dwelling might well be considered an appropriate term to use. In increasingly mobilised, diverse and fragmented societies, how do we 'dwell', what and where might constitute a 'home' place, and what might 'belonging' mean?

If the word dwelling is to be adopted in order to convey a definitive approach to the experiential, as a way of reading and relating self and place, there is a need to consider further terminological associations and philosophical precedents. I refer specifically to Martin Heidegger who asks the question: "what is it to dwell?"<sup>245</sup> I am asking a similar question but through a visual arts research project that employs a phenomenological walking practice as a tool through which to examine the experiential landscape.

Heidegger writes:

"We are attempting to trace in thought the nature of dwelling. The next step on this path would be the question: what is the state of dwelling in our precarious age? ... The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*".<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Mels, ed., *Reanimating Places* (Ashgate 2004), p7

<sup>243</sup> Edward S Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Indiana University Press 1993), p114; as echoed in my understanding of a dwelling perspective (see above)

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, p114

<sup>245</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (Harper & Row 1975), p145

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, p161 (italics in original)

This I believe is the crux, the intersection between Heidegger's examination of dwelling and my research project. As mortal beings, are we not always in a precarious age? My research project proposes that via the vehicle of an exploratory walking practice employed as a route into place where attention is focused on the localised particularities of place, dwelling can be continually learnt anew. In this respect, dwelling is continually revitalised and reinvented (by choice or in necessity), and retains the potential to offer new understandings of the inter-relationship between a self and a place within a global culture that is increasingly mobilised.

This is therefore also the vital difference and although Heidegger states that 'mortals' must 'ever learn to dwell', I would argue that he does not develop this question to explore alternative modes of dwelling<sup>247</sup> – something that I address in (performative) practice. Here the project diverts from Heidegger on the issue of application and practicality. This research study is not only concerned with a philosophical concept but is an active project that explores the creative implications of a re-examination of terminology in practice: one that reconsiders belonging and identity through dwelling and notions of home, and proposes alternative figurations of dwelling as a form of *becoming* (after Irigaray and Deleuze) through performative practice. As well as focusing on my own artworks in this respect, I shall be considering the abiding connection to specific landscapes of two other artists – Roni Horn and Ana Mendieta.

#### 4.2 Home?

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Roni Horn, *Lava* (from *To Place: Book III*, 1992)

For twenty years the American artist Roni Horn has been visiting Iceland. In *To Place: Book III*, she has photographed collected rocks on a plain white background, isolated from the

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<sup>247</sup> Rather than explore alternative modes of (embodied) dwelling, in his essay *Building Dwelling Thinking* (Heidegger 1975), Heidegger instead proceeds to relate dwelling to building and construction. This essay has informed my exploration of dwelling, especially Heidegger's observation that we, as mortals, 'must ever learn to dwell' but I do not follow his theoretical enquiries here as they diverge from the core of my own research. I am aware that my brief summary of Heidegger's essay in this thesis overlooks the extent (as well as tangential impact) of his consideration of dwelling, a complexity that I have given due consideration in the course of my study.

landscape and says: "I use these images to compose a surrogate island".<sup>248</sup> The artist Ana Mendieta, removed as a young girl from her native land, collected earth and sand on her first return trip to Cuba. According to her cousin, she used to keep them in her apartment in New York as one of the most important things she had in her life.<sup>249</sup> Drawing on the propositions of Horn and Mendieta, my research examines dwelling and notions of home exploring issues of belonging and identity – all the while questioning intersections between corporeal and conceptual understandings. Living in a society where mobility is valued yet roots are still considered important, what and where is home? In order to address this question, I now examine different understandings of home via theoretical and practice-based research.

Home is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary<sup>250</sup> as:

- (i) a dwelling-place, house, abode, the seat of domestic life and interests;
- (ii) the place of one's dwelling or nurturing, with the conditions, circumstances and feelings which naturally and properly attach to it and are associated with it ... connected with a generalised or partly abstract sense which includes not merely 'place' but 'state'; and
- (iii) a place, region or state to which one properly belongs, in which one's affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest or satisfaction.

So, home is 'a dwelling-place' and a place 'to which one properly belongs'. Interestingly, it can also be considered as 'state' in the abstract sense, ie as ontological. If home is such a dwelling-place, both concrete and abstract, does it follow that home could hypothetically be anywhere in the world? Might home be continually reinvented?<sup>251</sup> Quite possibly, but first perhaps we should consider what it is that makes a place home. According to the definitions above, home is not only 'somewhere one properly belongs' but 'in which one's affections centre'. Therefore perhaps home is not just anywhere in the world but *somewhere*, somewhere that is a *place* – a place or places of intimate and, importantly, meaningful dwelling. The 'place called home' to which I allude here is the ontological state of becoming (however temporarily) at home in the experiential landscape; a collusion between the physical and the psychological, the real and the imagined.

Writer/curator Adrian Heathfield states that 'performance operates by means of a performing subject testing out his or her relation to a site; as such it is the test-site of belonging'.<sup>252</sup> In practice, as performative test-site, the ensuing relation between self and place might be one

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<sup>248</sup> Roni Horn (Phaidon 2003), p113

<sup>249</sup> Olga M Viso, *Ana Mendieta* (Hatje Cantz 2004)

<sup>250</sup> Oxford English Dictionary (University Press, Oxford 1961)

<sup>251</sup> This is a question to be further explored post-doctorate with regard to the problematic notion of belonging – see Conclusion

<sup>252</sup> Adrian Heathfield (Ed), *Live: art and performance* (Routledge New York 2004), p11

of belonging, of feeling at home, but it should be understood that the experience could alternatively be one of distinct unease, of dislocation, or of an unsettling tension between the two. It is also important to remember that while the domain of landscape can be considered as rural idyll, as sensory pleasure ground, and that of home as constant, stable, safe and comfortable, I am aware that as such both are contested concepts. To some, home might signify comfort and security and landscape might allude to a refuge, a solitary and contemplative place – but for others either could translate instead as social isolation or as physically and/or mentally threatening. As Doreen Massey states, it depends ‘whose identity we are referring to when we talk of a place called home’.<sup>253</sup>

Home is a complex notion and means many things to many people – the term home can range in meaning from dwelling place to utopian dream, from animal burrow or cave to penthouse suite, from mortal body to questions of nationhood, from political or religious allegiance to ethical or moral stance. Home is a rich notion entangled with myriad associations, a term that ranges from the deeply personal to the socio-cultural, from material entity to abstract concept.

“What does home mean to you? Where, when and why do you feel at home? ... Some may speak of the physical structure of their house or dwelling; others may refer to relationships or connections over space and time ... Your sense of home might be closely shaped by your memories of childhood, alongside your present experiences and your dreams for the future”.<sup>254</sup>

“... home might take the material form of a house or other shelter, but also extends far beyond a material dwelling”.<sup>255</sup>

“Home is both a place/physical location and a set of feelings ...”.<sup>256</sup>

“Home as a place and an imaginary constitutes identities – people’s senses of themselves are related to and produced through lived and imaginative experiences of home”.<sup>257</sup>

As outlined by the above quotes, the notion of home may be considered a vital hinge in the relationship between body and place in that it is deeply implicated in embodied experience and constitutive in the building of identity. In this respect, it is important to remember that if

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<sup>253</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place & Gender* (Polity Press 1994), p167 where Massey discusses the identity of place in relation to socio-cultural identity – whose place, whose identity, whose home?

<sup>254</sup> Alison Blunt & Robyn Dowling, *Home* (Routledge 2006), p1

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, p13

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, p23

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, p24

identity is partially formed by past experience, whether 'home' was experienced as a safe or, alternatively, a threatening environment is pivotal to future feelings of belonging or attachment to any particular place. Location, dislocation, translocation?

### 4.3 Home, Fossils and Ana Mendieta

The following is an (edited) extract from my journal and offers an example of my lived understanding of home.

Boxes packed, removal company booked, contracts exchanged - I was moving house. Leaving 'home' and moving to another property is always a time of mixed emotions but for me this was magnified due to my practice. The majority of work undertaken for the past five years had been situated in an area covering no more than a square mile around this house. Already eighteen months in the making, a major work in progress involved documenting the same place at the same time every day and the move meant that this particular project be closed.<sup>258</sup> I wished to continue this document to time and place, I was not ready to move or to conclude the work. I was part of this land, far more 'of the land' than of any house I might temporarily call home, and I could not imagine being elsewhere. I began collecting objects on my walks. This was an instinct but soon became an obsession.

On the way to *my* field (note the personal pronoun) to take the daily photograph, I walked across the maize field. The field had recently been ploughed in preparation for the coming season and brought to the surface were numerous small fossils. I knew these as 'devil's toenails' and soon one found it's way into my pocket. The fossils began to fill my pockets. By the time we moved, I had a large box full of gryphaea, packed and taped securely in readiness.

Gryphaea: related to the oyster, Gryphaea is characterized by its distinctively convoluted shape; fine markings extend across the shell at right angles to the direction of growth. In some mature specimens, the coiling of the shell became so pronounced that it is unlikely that the shell could be opened at all, at which point the animal must have died.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> This 'document to time and place' was the first of the '*Daily*' sequences – see Chapter Three

<sup>259</sup> Edited extract from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/247503/Gryphaea> (accessed 27.09.10)

Redacted due to copyright

*To have and to hold* (2007) – from the gryphaea project

I refer to my collection of gryphaea (and other such collections) as *tangible memories*; objects of agency that bring me a little closer to other places and other times, that prompt recollections and the retelling of stories. But why my compulsion to collect, why the obsession with possession? Prompted by the gryphaea, a house move and thoughts around 'home', these questions demanded investigation. The artist Ana Mendieta wrote of the people of the Kimberley region of South Africa and a custom that reflects a similar deep-rooted attachment to place – to an understanding of the material substance of the land as a reflection of belonging.

“The men from the Kimberley go outside their village to seek their brides. When a man brings his new wife home, the woman brings with her a sack of earth from her homeland and every night she eats a little bit of that earth. The earth will help her make the transition between her homeland and her new home”.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Extract from a letter written by Mendieta in Irit Rogoff, *terra infirma* (Routledge 2000), p124

I instinctively recognise the basis of this tradition and see parallels in my obsessive collection of the gryphaea – an instinct related to transition and the ritual of carrying a small part of an existing ‘home’ to a place that might become a new ‘home’.

I am now in the new house. The topography is different, the aspect is different, I am different. I continue to walk daily and have commenced several new series of photographs. I still have a boxful of gryphaea. Gryphaea are the fossilised remains of bivalves that lived in shallow muddy seas and were originally formed during the Lower Jurassic period. The gryphaea were once the home of marine creatures that lived in the cavity between the shell and the lid. The shape of the remaining shell, separated from its lid (although these can also be found), is reminiscent of a foetus. A home and a foetus? The associations between home, the land, the body and the foetal intrigued and haunted me. What might this mean? What might ‘a place called home’ equate to? And how might this be differently understood if considering the twin roots of the verb ‘to dwell’?

Due to the associations between the gryphaea and the foetal *and* background knowledge of the gryphaea as once home to marine creatures, due to a feeling of being rent from the earth when moving house *and* as a reflection of a series of increasingly complex questions and theoretical concepts, I needed to further explore the import of these fossils in my work. How best to proceed? Ideally I wanted to construct a large gryphaea the size of myself when curled into a foetal ball. But this was problematic. As I pondered various options and materials, I recalled the ‘body earth’ imagery of Ana Mendieta and it became obvious that the best way to have a ‘gryphaea’ the size of myself was to myself be the gryphaea.

#### 4.4 In Practice: *Of Being and Becoming* (2006 on-going)

Drawing on subjective experience as well as my analysis of dwelling and notions of home, this series of images investigates bodily placement in the landscape through a series of attempts to blur divisions between body and place. The notion of home as fixed and singular is also challenged – the work being performed and documented in Gloucestershire and on Mull, both places I call home. The sites of the various performances reflect personally significant places in both locations; the choice of black clothing to outline the form, the choice of androgynous dress being to relate to humanity generally rather than specifically to gender at this point. My face was deliberately averted, or the photographs taken from behind, in order to further assist a referencing beyond the individual/subjective.

Redacted due to copyright



*Of Being and Becoming* (2006/7) – Gloucestershire and Mull; the first two images from the field in Gloucestershire where the gryphaea were found, the second two from Mull

The series grew and stands as a formative and indicative body of work. The images that collectively form this series have served as an important springboard for later works – for considerations of identity and gender as well as the spatio-temporal, and for the incorporation of performance to camera in my practice. This was a turning point; the experiential connection between body and land, together with the affective power of the gryphaea, reflected in the performative act of becoming bodily part of the landscape. By recognising the relevance of intuitive connections between research practice and theoretical enquiry, opportunity beckoned, the possibilities multiplied and my practice mutated.<sup>261</sup>

#### 4.5 The Influence of Ana Mendieta

Cuban artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) produced many radical, polemic and provocative works but the series that my preoccupation with the gryphaea brought to mind were the *Silhoueta* images – photographs of works performed by Mendieta in Mexico, Iowa, up-state

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<sup>261</sup> For further reference to the mutation of my practice over the period of doctoral study, please see Chapter Five, Section 5.10



New York and Cuba. The *Silhoueta* series (1973-1981) contains imagery of Mendieta's body itself and interventions she carried out in the landscape; hundreds of photographic slides being the only legacy that remains to attest to this extensive body of work.

Redacted due to copyright



Documentation of untitled earth body work (1976, Iowa)  
with Mendieta just visible on top of the fallen branch

Cuban born Mendieta wrote of a 'dialogue' between her female body and the landscape and she stated that it was her artist dialogue with the earth that helped her re-establish her bonds with the universe.<sup>262</sup> She believed that this overwhelming desire to re-unite her body with nature was directly due to being forced into exile as an adolescent<sup>263</sup> and asserted that her work was 'basically in the tradition of a Neolithic artist' and that she was not 'interested in the formal qualities of my materials, but their emotional and sensual ones'.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Olga M Viso, *Unseen Mendieta* (Prestel 2008), p124

<sup>263</sup> Because of political unrest in Cuba, Mendieta was sent by her parents to Iowa in 1961 aged 12

<sup>264</sup> Olga M Viso, *Unseen Mendieta* (Prestel 2008), p232

Redacted due to copyright



Documentation of an untitled *Silhoueta* (1977, Iowa)

The title of the series directly reflects the work: *Silhoueta*, the silhouette of a female form (whether Mendieta's body itself formed the outline or whether the shape was delineated by other material means, for example rocks, flowers, mud or ice). Much commentary has been written about Mendieta's life and work – with accusations of essentialism being levelled by some feminists and simplistic readings of immigrant longings for homeland given by other critics.<sup>265</sup> Although Mendieta herself acknowledged that her exile from Cuba influenced her, I would claim that the work is anything but simplistic (and goes beyond essentialism) and that the historical and cultural references that underpin the work serve to add context and content and take it out of the realms of easy definition.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> See Rogoff 2000, p130, for a counter-claim against the 'biologically essentially feminine' and Blocker 1999, p12, for her commentary on accusations of a 'therapeutic response to traumatic expatriation. Also Viso 2004, p25 and Viso's comments on 'limited, stereotypical readings'.

<sup>266</sup> See Viso (2008), in particular p77 and Rogoff (2000), in particular p130.

Redacted due to copyright



Documentation for untitled *Silhoueta* (1977, Iowa)

During her life and since her death, a series of misappropriations and dislocations of Mendieta as artist and woman have been made<sup>267</sup> but, contrary to such readings, I would suggest that it is not possible to definitively place her or her work in any singular or fixed position. Indeed, I would advocate that more can be gleaned by positively resisting such categorisation as Mendieta's work can serve to inform and question on many levels through its very instability as it continually oscillates between polarised positions.<sup>268</sup>

Rather than reiterate and expand on biographical interpretations (or accusations made), I will concentrate on the more positive and radically creative aspects of her work and the primary links between this practice-led research study and her *Silhoueta* series. That said, it is important to remember the critical framework against which Mendieta was judged – namely the politicisation of gender, a growing post-colonial awareness, and the foregrounding of modernist (primarily male) art practices in the American/Western European art world at this time (the 1970s/80s). Of course dominant cultural themes and issues have changed yet

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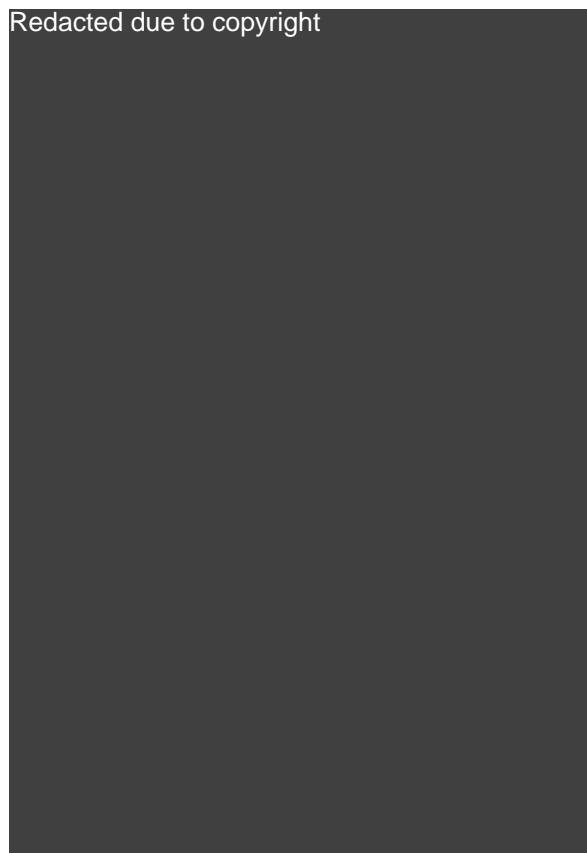
<sup>267</sup> See Rogoff (2000), p130-133

<sup>268</sup> For a broad and well-researched overview of commentary on the work of Ana Mendieta, see Jane Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta?* (Duke University Press 2004). For visual reference, see Olga Viso's excellent volumes (details in bibliography).

certain parallels between Mendieta's work and my own remain (in particular the *Of Being and Becoming* series and her *Silhoueta* series), parallels that suggest a common concern with:

- (i) a sense of belonging and identity (although from very different starting points and with very different emphases);
- (ii) feminist issues of identity (we are both women and by using our bodies in our practice and documenting this directly in our work, we are actively engaging with gendered issues);
- (iii) recognition of the significance of, as well as an affinity with, the land/earth and localised landscapes (although, again, coming from slightly different directions and from distinctly different starting points);
- (iv) the nature/culture divide and possible accusations of essentialism (although I would argue that both Mendieta and I adopt a position of strategic essentialism in order to draw attention to underlying issues that cross gendered as well as other divides);
- (v) ancestral inheritance (Mendieta in Cuba and me on Mull) and with female genealogies more generally.

#### 4.6 The *Silhoueta* series and my *Of Being and Becoming* research project



Ana Mendieta, *Imagen de Yagul* (1973, Mexico)

*Imagen de Yagul* (1973) was the name Mendieta gave to this, her first, *Silhoueta*. The performance was enacted at a pre-Hispanic gravesite at Yagul, in the Mexican state of Oaxaco (an archaeological site associated with pre-Columbian Mesoamerica), where Mendieta lay in an open grave with white flowers arranged over her naked body whilst the performance was documented. This was a pre-planned and quietly (and quickly) executed performative act – such cultural sites in Mexico being guarded; an ephemeral act leaving no trace except for photographic documentation of the event.<sup>269</sup>

This work threads together a series of reference points; connections between body and site as well as between other contested positions – between nature and culture; history and historical interpretation; the temporal; genealogy; identity and gender; and issues of documentation and re-presentation. The questions and possibilities that such intersections raise are not only the foundation of Mendieta's work but also of this practice-led research

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<sup>269</sup> Olga Viso, *Unseen Mendieta* (Prestel 2008), p79

project – as evidenced through a significant body of artwork and the contextual analysis that critically examines such positions in practice.



*Of Being and Becoming* (Gloucestershire, 2006)

As with *Imagen de Yagul*, the above work was carefully considered and quickly performed – the time of day (the right light) and time of year (obviously) being integral to the piece; the body position, the choice of clothing, the focal length and orientation of photographic image all important to the impact and content of the resulting piece. As with Mendieta's work, no trace of any intervention was apparent yet the photograph remains and testifies to the act – reflecting its exploratory intentions as an investigation of the relationship between self and place, the temporal, the embodied act and the photographic image.

In my work, the connection between act and image is, I believe, more calculated than appears to be the case with Mendieta where the photographs are primarily testimony to an ephemeral event. The photographs I present are not considered only as witness of performative action but as carriers in themselves, to be exhibited as part of a 'bodily mapping' of place.<sup>270</sup> The relevance of the photographic image in these two practices remains an important distinction and underlines the personalisation of our overlapping but clearly individuated practices – distinct influences and emphases resulting from different life histories and experiences, the

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<sup>270</sup> Though it is interesting to note that as Mendieta's work become recognised and opportunities to exhibit and sell increased, more conscious attention was given to the composition of photographic works. See Olga Viso, *Unseen Mendieta* (Prestel 2008), p155

different cultural climates in which we were/are practising, the specific issues and sensibilities of these times and places, and the complexities of these framings adjunct to two women each with hybrid, fluid identities fighting to resist placement or categorisation (either culturally or individually).

As previously mentioned, the intention behind the *Of Being and Becoming* research project was to examine bodily placement and notions of home, the idea of dwelling in the landscape. In the images below, the aim was to add to this growing series of references by exploring, through multiple imaging, intimations of movement and of being one among many; of becoming a small part of a composite landscape scene.<sup>271</sup> By shifting position and re-photographing the body from slightly different angles, the intention was to suggest a degree of multiplicity and instability, both with reference to locus and to identity. The idea behind the repetition, which serves to question any concept of the same by emphasising difference in similarity, was to problematise reading through the inherent ambiguity of a shifting bodily locus.<sup>272</sup>

The figure seen (my body) is deliberately shot from behind and the clothing deliberately asexual – the aim, as before, to increase the possibilities of inter-subjective reading through the loosely defined but unidentified human figure imaged.<sup>273</sup> In addition, being recorded from a distance, the intention was to suggest a paradoxical quality of immateriality, a ‘haunting’ of place, although there is evidently a body imaged in the photograph. As such, the ambiguity reflected the concerns of my research project, ie an unsettling of the concept of dwelling and notions of home – with home being understood as complex and multiplicitous and with dwelling as mobilised. Between location, dislocation, translocation.

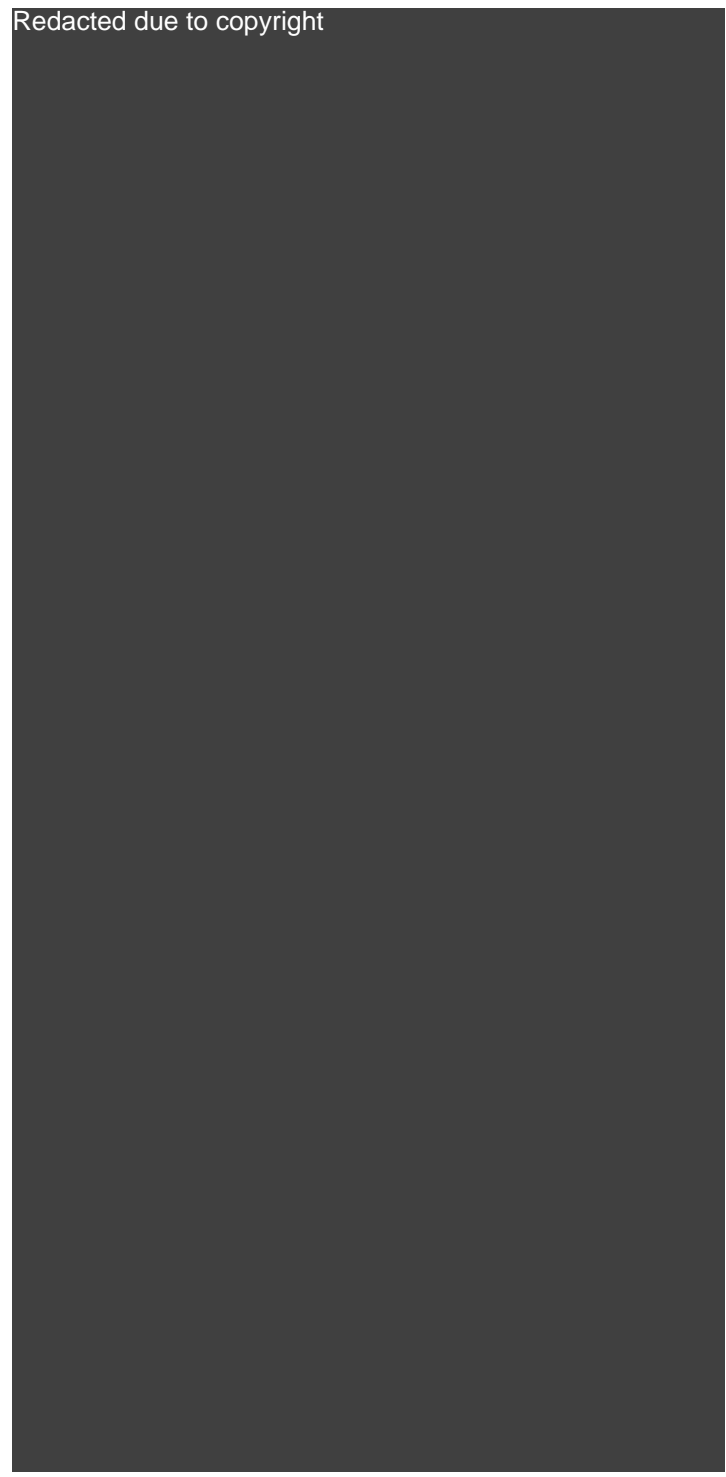
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<sup>271</sup> It might interest the reader to know that the sub-text of these particular images was *Safety in Numbers* – reflecting the context and concept of this sequence of photographs

<sup>272</sup> See Chapter Six for further reference to repetition, similarity/difference and identity

<sup>273</sup> It must be noted here that Mendieta’s *Silhoueta* series all reference the female form (even when they are oblique). Although Mendieta’s work, alongside the gryphaea, first prompted me to use my own body in performative work, as the *Of Being and Becoming* project progressed I started exploring other ways of imaging the body in place, other ways of expressing what I wanted to say. Therefore, in some of the photographs that comprise the series, as in the particular images evidenced here, the focus shifted slightly. For instance, here, my primary concerns were with allusions of movement and suggestions of multiplicity and instability through anonymity/androgyny. On reflection, I remain doubtful as to whether all of the images in the series, including these particular photographs (but see also p135/6), fulfil their ambitions. In this respect, I do not consider the photographs in this series ‘finished work’ and although they have helped clarify my aims and intentions through practice, no images from the *Of Being and Becoming* series have yet been exhibited except in the context of exploratory research/work in progress.

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*Of Being and Becoming* (Gloucestershire, 2006)



#### 4.7 Fossils, *Of Being and Becoming* and Ana Mendieta

Prompted by the boxful of gryphaea and considerations of dwelling and home, reflections on the work of Ana Mendieta, and the consequent metamorphosis of personal practice through the *Of Being and Becoming* series, the following recognitions helped establish a firm foundation for subsequent research:

- (i) a growing understanding of the relevance of body placement in the performativity of practice: greater awareness of the intention and impact of the performative act (as well as the subsequent image) in my practice;
- (ii) the interface of corporeal and conceptual understanding in the performance and in (later) re-presentation as artwork;
- (iii) the importance of photography in my research: a greater understanding of the role of photography within my practice and a growing awareness of the importance of the materiality and temporality of the photographic image. In particular, the paradoxical quality of, simultaneously, the presence of the image *and* material absence of the imaged – a fluctuating tension that might be heightened through strategic use of the medium;<sup>274</sup>
- (iv) the specificity of my own practice: underlining my core concerns (dwelling, identity and becoming) and key research threads (embodiment, place and time) yet at the same time linking my work with the work of Mendieta and other artists in the contemporary field in which I practice and across the visual arts more generally.

As I analysed the *Of Being and Becoming* works, I questioned the adoption of an androgynous pose and rethought the importance of gender in my practice. I am a woman and my experience of landscape is, in part, influenced by my sex – as is the way others might interpret my relationship with the environment, in actuality or in re-presentation. Building on this series and a growing awareness of the relevance of feminist critique in my research, later performative projects directly reference issues of sexuate difference and cultural assumptions of feminine roles in a strategic move to challenge gendered notions of dwelling and home more directly and further explore the concept of becoming as a means of unsettling singular or fixed understandings of identity (personal, inter-personal and/or cultural).<sup>275</sup> Firstly, the second part of this chapter expands and develops the concept of dwelling in performative practice as informed by cross-disciplinary research.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> For further explication see Chapter Six

<sup>275</sup> For example, the *Communion* project detailed in Chapter Five

<sup>276</sup> References span cultural geography, anthropology, philosophy, visual culture and feminist critique.

#### 4.8 Body and Place, Identity and Becoming

“When I inhabit a place – whether by moving through it or staying in it – I *have* it in my actional purview. I also *hold* it by virtue of being in its ambiance; first in my body as it holds onto the place by various sensory and kinaesthetic means, then in my memory as I “hold it in my mind.” ... holding onto a place so as to prolong what I experience beyond the present moment. In this way, place and self actively collude”.<sup>277</sup>

“Home as a place is a porous, open, intersection of social relations and emotions. As feminists have pointed out, home is neither public nor private but both. Home is not separated from public, political worlds but is constituted through them: the domestic is created through the extra-domestic and vice versa”.<sup>278</sup>

#### 4.9 A Place called Home

Doreen Massey equates home with identity and power and when notions of home are closely knit with a sense of place, questions of identity and power are contentious because of their vital importance to personal and social wellbeing, to belonging at every scale from the local to the global.<sup>279</sup> In an essay entitled *A Place called Home?*, Massey explores links between identity and place and asks whose identity we might be referring to when considering such notions – is it the identity of those that dwell in a place or is it the place itself?<sup>280</sup> In a world that is increasingly recognised as mobilised as well as globalised, this is a pertinent question and where I suggest it is crucial to understand that identity is moulded through the co-constituency of self and place and that the identity of *both* are continually in process.

Massey observes that ‘recent years have seen the emergence of many arguments, policies and movements’ which, in their attempt ‘to establish a relationship between a place and an identity, a place and a sense of belonging’, have looked to the past and constructed a (fictional) ‘seamless coherence of character’. These fabrications, she continues, are attempts to ‘fix the meaning of places’ and ‘construct singular, fixed and static identities for places’, identities which she interprets as ‘bounded enclosed spaces defined through counterposition

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<sup>277</sup> Edward S Casey 2001, *Between Geography and Philosophy* (Annals of the Association of American Geographers 2001, 91:4), p687

<sup>278</sup> Alison Blunt & Robyn Dowling, *Home* (Routledge 2006), p27

<sup>279</sup> In this respect, see also Rose 1993 (pp53-60) and Cresswell 2004 (pp24-33 and 82-85)

<sup>280</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Polity Press 1994, p167)

against the Other who is outside'.<sup>281</sup> Such fabrications have the power to divide communities into polarised factions of insiders and outsiders – those who belong and those who do not who are, in this fiction, a threat to the illusion of stability and identity created. The dangers are clear – any conceptualisation of place as 'bounded', 'singular' or 'static' is veering toward exclusion by actively discouraging democratic movement thus leaving places in danger of becoming closed (even gated) communities, places that are aggressively defended against 'the Other'.<sup>282</sup>

Following Massey, I would reiterate that a radical awareness of self *and* place as continually evolving, as becoming, is pivotal to more inclusive and ethical understandings of dwelling, identity and belonging – a relationship actively explored in this project. Massey too offers an alternative – via her exposure of place as unbounded, as 'open and provisional'. She writes of the specificity of place as being, in part, formed out of the individual and particular 'interactions which occur at that location (nowhere else does this precise mixture occur)' and in part due to 'the meeting of those social relations at that location (their partly happenstance juxtaposition)' which 'produce new social effects'.<sup>283</sup> The conceptualisation Massey offers is of place as *process* – of the complex co-constituency of place and identity (individual, social, cultural). Massey's comment on the 'happenstance' parallels my understanding of the value of chance encounters, of affective injunctions and temporal disjunctions, and how these highlight the processual nature of place and contribute to a continual reconfiguring of the relationship between a self and a place.<sup>284</sup>

Massey observes that the identity of place is also 'constructed out of positive interrelations with elsewhere'<sup>285</sup> – but I would add that it is not only, or always, 'positive' interrelations that contribute to the identity of place. And neither is it only present interrelations but the influence of past meetings and crossings that are embedded and embodied in the identity of place and, importantly, in the identities of the people that dwell, have dwelt or that come to dwell there. Prompted by the gryphaea, my research into dwelling and subsequent questions of what and where we might call home, the *Of Being and Becoming* series actively explores such interrelations. Inspired by the work of Ana Mendieta, this research project examines the inter-

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<sup>281</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Polity Press 1994), p168

<sup>282</sup> Julia Kristeva explores the antagonistic notion of 'the Other' in relation to belonging and identity in her book *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991). Kristeva has proved informative and in many ways her observations echo Massey's outline of attempts to fix the identity of place via recourse to an illusory past with similar connections to exclusivity and xenophobia.

<sup>283</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Polity Press 1994), p168

<sup>284</sup> See also Chapter Three regarding temporality

<sup>285</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Polity Press 1994), p169

relationship between place and self via attention to notions of home and issues of belonging and identity in two specific landscape locations – both places I call home.<sup>286</sup>

As cultural theorist bell hooks observes:

“... home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference ... that reveals more fully where we are, where we can become...”<sup>287</sup>

#### 4.10 Dwelling in the Body

Film theorist Vivian Sobchack asks what it means to be embodied and questions how the lived body might be implicated in ‘making “meaning” out of bodily “sense”’. This is an issue that is directly pertinent to my own research – that is a critical interpretation of the experiential as understood through performative research where the body itself acts as a conduit for a multitude of affective triggers and sensory registers. Here, the making “meaning” (visual articulation) out of bodily “sense” is of paramount importance if artworks made are to themselves embody echoes of the lived and if they are to reach receptive audiences. A detailed and critical reading of Sobchack’s work on embodied experience and visual representation has therefore served to substantially expand my understanding and has subsequently been influential in the development of practical research projects.

Sobchack writes of her phenomenological approach as not seeking ‘essences’ but instead ‘the meaning of experience as it is embodied and lived in context’ with ‘meaning and value emerging in the *synthesis* of the experience’s subjective and objective aspects’.<sup>288</sup> As we have seen, the methodology of this doctoral project is largely phenomenological and, as such, the ‘synthesis’ that Sobchack identifies is key to understanding the dynamic role of the body in this research practice. The body here recognised as a site of cross-fertilisation for a multiplicity of influences (experiential and theoretical). In this respect, the body becomes a conduit of ‘bodily sense’ within which a range of perceptual encounters and multi-sensory observations are experienced. These heterogeneous influences and references are later critically reconfigured into artworks through a process of analysis and reflexivity with continual recourse to the theoretical as well as experiential background of the project. This understanding of a ‘synthesis’ of the corporeal with the conceptual as a result of embodied

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<sup>286</sup> It is important to remember however that although Mendieta’s *Silhoueta* series motivated me to use my own body in my work and inspired the *Of Being and Becoming* series, during the course of my research I have pursued my own specific issues/concerns. There are therefore considerable differences between the *Silhoueta* and *Of Being and Becoming* series (formally/conceptually) as there are between the date/situation of performance and the personal history and individual intentions of the artists.

<sup>287</sup> bell hooks quoted in Massey 1994, p171

<sup>288</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California 2004), p2 (italics in original)

research informs my approach (as well as critical response) to the phenomenological landscape of practice.

For example, in the *Of Being & Becoming* research project the performativity of exploratory practice in the landscape was challenged by my conceptual understanding of dwelling. Theoretical analysis of the concept of dwelling had led me to understand dwelling (after Casey) as both movement and stasis; as an ontological state that, following Heidegger<sup>289</sup>, we must ever learn anew; and that, following Mels, occurs on 'scales from the domestic household to the globe'.<sup>290</sup> The implications of this synthesis of practical inquiry with theoretical examination prompted me to question how I might better translate and reflect such understandings in my artwork. How might I allude to dwelling as both movement and stasis, how might I suggest such complex understandings through my imagery?

It was such questions that led me to remember Ana Mendieta and her *Silhoueta* series and (as we have seen<sup>291</sup>), first led me consider using my own body in performance to camera as a way of intimating dwelling as an expanded concept – as opposed to earlier research that had instead interpreted dwelling and home in a more literal sense.<sup>292</sup> Early exploratory performances and documentation from the *Of Being & Becoming* project were re-presented as single images of my body in the landscape and yet these images did not reflect my understanding of dwelling as mobilised. Therefore both the performance and the documentation became extended and I began to physically mobilise myself within the immediate landscape environment. In the process, bodily engagement served to inform my thinking and rather than presenting a singular image of myself 'dwelling' in the landscape, I explored the possibility of using series of images and composites so as to evoke a more ambiguous and mobile understanding of dwelling. Such a strategy served to underline the importance of embodied practice to the development of conceptual understanding (abstract theory grounded in the materiality of place) as well to subsequent presentation of the imagery – the artwork here understood as the concrete particulars of research resulting from a bodily fertilisation of practice with theory.

To return to the 'making of meaning out of bodily sense', Sobchack proceeds to consider the relationship between 'subjective imagination' and 'objective imaging'. This is, of course, particularly relevant to practice-led research in a visual arts context and my own research project in particular where the performativity of practice plays a significant role in the analysis of abstract concepts.<sup>293</sup> It is in the act of performance when critically informed intentions give

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<sup>289</sup> For reference to Heidegger, please see Sections 4.0 and 4.1 of this chapter

<sup>290</sup> Tom Mels, *Reanimating Places* (Ashgate 2004), p6

<sup>291</sup> Please refer to Chapter Four, Sections 4.3 and 4.4 in particular

<sup>292</sup> See Chapter One, Section 1.3 where I discuss an earlier project (the *Home Without Walls* project)

<sup>293</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California 2004), p179

way to spontaneous improvisations and when earlier practical intentions (or previously adopted methods) are adapted in response to the experiential landscape. It is, as such, in the process of embodied research that the subjective and objective aspects of my practice clearly merge. Pragmatic, intuitive, aesthetic and strategic decisions are constantly processed and re-processed by the body in response to the immediacy of affective experience through a complex (conscious and unconscious) cross-fertilisation of influences and references. When the bodies of others enter the process through the act of collaboration, this merging becomes both more complex and more comprehensive.

In *Is Any Body Home*, Sobchack investigates 'the structures that constitute our *ontological* relation to our bodies as rich, ambiguous and multidimensional' and states that 'both empirically and philosophically our bodies are the essential premises of our being in the world'.<sup>294</sup> Here Sobchack considers our bodies themselves as dwelling places, effectively our bodies as our first home – indeed, it is as such that our bodies can help make 'meaning out of bodily sense' and deepen an understanding of the relationship that exists between self and world. Sobchack further explores our relationship with our bodies by outlining several ways in which we might experience our bodies as home – in varying degrees between the body as our '*quintessential mobile home*' (as familiar, comforting and enabling, as giving access to the world) to the body as '*prison house*' (as constrained, constructed, controlled or uncomfortable and alien).<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California 2004), p182

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, p183

Redacted due to copyright



*Of Being and Becoming* (Mull, 2007)

Drawing in part on a reading of Sobchack, the above images explore the notion of our bodies as our first home – the sea being commonly accepted as first ‘home’ to mammals. By using myself as a human example of an animal species understood to have originated from the sea, the intention behind the act was a symbolic return to element of origin. By walking into the sea, I was temporarily aligning my mortal body with a signifier (eternal) of origin. The incongruity of the gesture, as evidenced in the above photographs, was intended to highlight tensions between: (i) the impossibility of return, (ii) the possibility of a challenge to the concept of essential origins, and (iii) understandings of dwelling and home.

On reflection, I do not think these images are successful in achieving the aims outlined above. When critically assessing the relationship between intention and outcome, it was apparent that these particular photographs from the series did not clearly or adequately reflect the particular themes and tensions detailed above. The reason I have included them here is because they effectively highlight the actuality of practice-led research in the visual arts where exploratory projects do not always fulfil their ambitions (even if they serve as important to the process of the inquiry itself and help to determine the more successful imagery and possible future direction).

Indeed, further reflection and critical analysis of these (and other)<sup>296</sup> images from the *Of Being and Becoming* series has served to underline the efficacy (or otherwise) of the various poses/postures I have adopted. It is in this respect that I now consider the foetal or 'gryphaea' bodily position more indicative of the underlying intentions of my project – an exploration of the inter-relationship between self and place that focuses on expanded interpretations of dwelling and home (including, importantly, Sobchack's notion of the body as first home). In this respect, it has proved important (as well as useful) not to forget the impetus for this particular project and series of works and indeed to keep the original concept/issue in mind (in this instance the gryphaea and examination of the concept of dwelling) when critically assessing work in progress more generally.

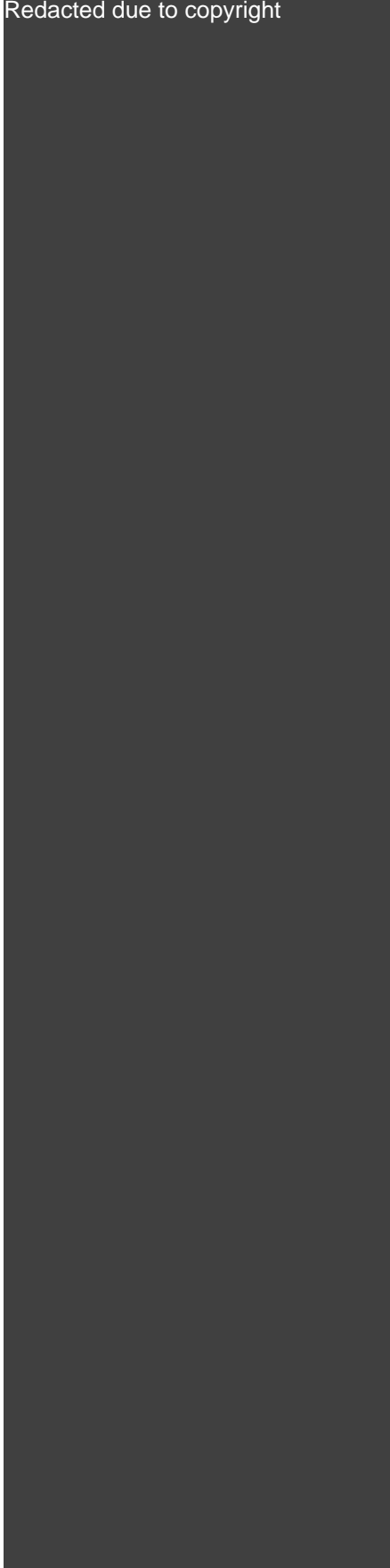
Consequently, I have recently returned to using the gryphaea and the foetal/gryphaea posture in this particular body of research and have taken an alternative group of exploratory images of myself at Traigh na Cille, Mull. These are shown over the following pages together with others of the gryphaea on the same beach and, I believe, as such these photographs more closely reflect the focus of my research and better embody the intentions behind the act. The experience of folding into a foetal position on the shore also made more bodily sense when performing the work and the feeling of vulnerability and physical exposure to the elements was intense – the smell of seaweed, the taste of salt on my tongue, the cold wet touch of the water, the sound of the waves, the grit between my toes, the view across the beach at ground level. As such, I got an alternative perspective on Traigh na Cille as well as this body of work/project, and when I look at the images of this quiet performance, I consider that something of such bodily proximity to the environment remains.

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<sup>296</sup> In this regard, see also footnote 273 on page 127

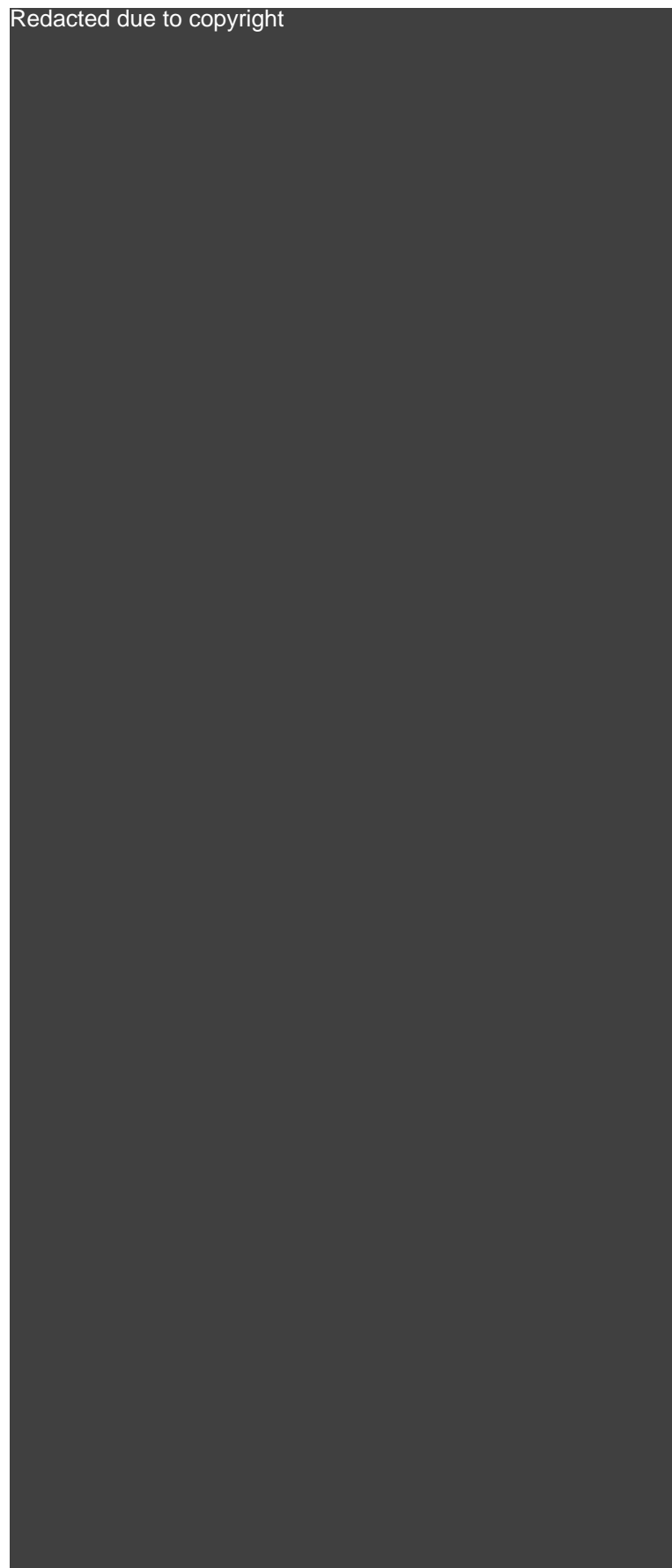


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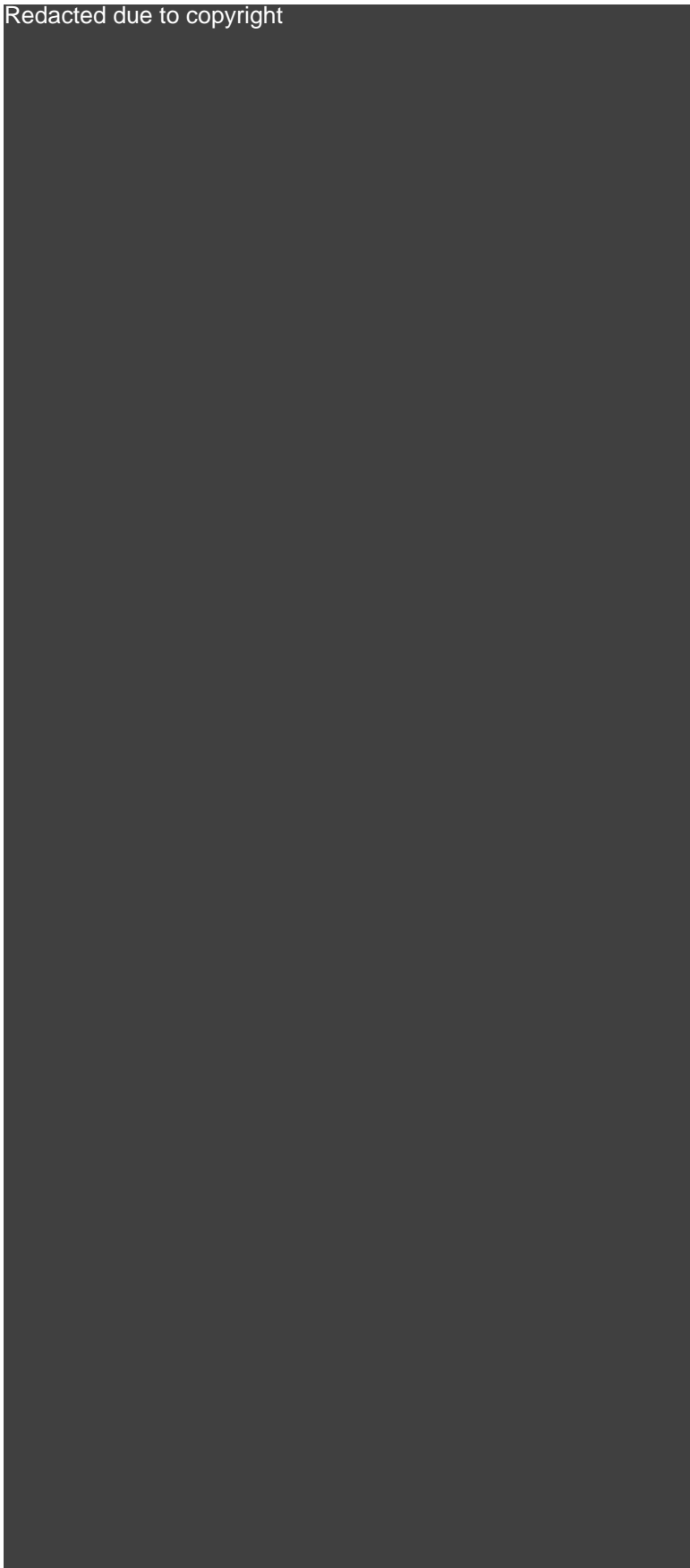
Untitled (from the Gryphaea project, 2007)

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Untitled (from the gryphaea project 2007)

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*Of Being and Becoming* (Mull 2011)

If our bodies are, as suggested by Sobchack, the primary place of our dwelling, the level of subjectivity in how we objectify our bodies is crucial to our experience of dwelling and our potential for becoming (and, in this project, for clarity of intention and re-presentation of research). Sobchack states that it is personally and politically crucial ‘that we inform critical thought and cultural studies with a phenomenological understanding of the body that includes and resonates with our own bodies’, adding that we should consider our bodies as ‘not merely objectively beheld but also subjectively lived’.<sup>297</sup> This statement concurs with my premise in this research project – that theoretical examination and analysis inform conceptual understanding (‘objectively beheld’) and that this is carried forward in performative practice following a phenomenological methodology (‘subjectively lived’), ie that both (theory and practice) are critical to research development and subsequent artworks. As Sobchack observes, ‘our corporeal materiality always ultimately grounds us even as it allows us to continually displace, disassemble, and reassemble ourselves’.<sup>298</sup>

A bodily grounding in place is vital to this project. The material specificity of place, in this instance the rural landscapes of Gloucestershire and Mull, as pivotal anchoring point for exploration and examination of abstract concepts in practice. Perhaps such bodily grounding might also serve as a reminder that our bodies are not only efficient machines and useful tools but are also ‘sense-making sites for constituting meaning and realising both ourselves and a world’ – thus serving to highlight the affective and multi-faceted nature of the inter-relationship between a body and a place.<sup>299</sup>

#### 4.11 In Practice: Performativity and Phenomenology

“At home and regrounded in our lived bodies, we have dimension, gravity, and the enabling power to regain our sense of balance and to comport ourselves differently – first, perhaps, *before* our images and then, one hopes, *within* them”.<sup>300</sup>

Echoing the understanding of Vivian Sobchack as illustrated in the quote above, my artworks build on experiential knowledge. This knowledge, together with theoretical analysis, assists the development of practical projects where the ‘synthesis of the experience’s subjective and objective aspects’ are realised (cross-fertilised) in embodied performance. As such, lived experience serves to ground the criticality of the research and to balance the concrete with the abstract in subsequent artworks – in this respect, not only *before* the images (the theoretical background to the project adding ‘dimension and gravity’ to the research process)

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<sup>297</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California Press 2004), p187. Sobchack’s emphasis on the importance of the ‘subjectively lived’ also serves to underline the relevance and necessity of the innovative method of dissemination employed throughout this thesis – ie the adoption of a performative writing strategy as evidenced in the Field Notes and journal extracts.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, p188

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, p190

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p204

but also (hopefully) *within* the imagery (as powerful reflections of embodied understanding of the lived landscape about critical analysis).

As previously stated (deleted 3 words here), my methodology is largely phenomenological in its orientation. My place-based visual arts practice follows a multi-sensory research trajectory and reflects lived experience as perceived through and performed by the body in specific landscape locations. Consequently it should be understood that the artworks I produce are assembled as a direct consequence of sustained multi-sensory attention and sensitivity to the specificity of place. The inter-play of body and place is therefore pivotal to my understanding and subsequent interpretation of the world in practice.

In this project the performative body is understood as a site of cross-fertilisation for a multiplicity of influences and references – integrating embodied practice with theoretical inquiry, the physical with psychological and the tangible with intangible.<sup>301</sup> Perception of the immediate landscape situation is affected by memories of past encounters and intimations of imminent futures where received knowledge is challenged by the concepts and concerns underpinning my inquiry.<sup>302</sup> The abrasive tension of a variety of competing issues blurs the boundaries between past and present, practice and theory, place and self as the body performs place and various affects seep and assimilate in and through the body.

As we have seen in the *Of Being & Becoming* series, embodied inquiry served to expand my understanding of integrated research and the cross-fertilisation of practice with theory (here with particular emphasis on the concept of dwelling). An explicit example of the role of the body as a site of cross-fertilisation is evidenced in my earlier review of artworks from this series of performances where the inter-relationship between self and place was compounded by multiple heterogeneous influences, all which stem from the original intention behind and motivation for the project (as underlined in the previous section). Once again, I stress the importance of remembering the impetus for inquiry and underline the fundamental impact of performative practice (the embodied act of performing in the phenomenological landscape) on the inquiry.<sup>303</sup> As this project developed, additional performances and documentation further challenged theoretical considerations and as new critical understandings and landscape references were bodily assimilated, the research progressed (as detailed earlier).

Evidence of how cross-fertilisation deepens understanding and informs research can also be seen in *Mesa*<sup>304</sup> where notions of home are contested with regard to my proposition that there might be more than one geographical location we call 'home' (an understanding also

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<sup>301</sup> For further reference to the body as a site of cross-fertilisation, see Chapter Five, Section 5.10 and the detailed review of *Communion*.

<sup>302</sup> The concepts of dwelling and becoming as explored in the phenomenological landscape of practice

<sup>303</sup> Please refer back to page 136

<sup>304</sup> Examples of imagery from *Mesa* can be seen in Chapter One

examined/discussed earlier in this chapter). Not only do the images comprising *Mesa* contain performances on Mull and in Gloucestershire (as do the *Of Being & Becoming* series) but there is an additional expansion – two people (me and my daughter) are imaged in this work, two women of different generations wearing the same clothes, performing the same act but in different locations. The differences between multiple similarities<sup>305</sup> serve to heighten the intensity and paradox of the work; a deliberate strategy adopted in order to underline mobility and the non-unitary identity of self and of place. Although the images are clearly linked (and are constituents of the same artwork), the differences are marked and serve to draw attention to small individual details within each of the performances, each of the bodies and both of the places.

As such, the imagery of *Mesa* reflects a synthesis of the conceptual and the corporeal where a critical understanding of the multiplicity of subjectivity and the mobilisation of dwelling about lived experience in the performativity of place as articulated through subsequent imagery. In the process of (re)presentation, questions are raised around the content of the individual images and the relationship between them.

*Mesa* is another example of an expanded cross-fertilisation: an amalgam of places, concepts, practices and bodies – a complex photographic installation that asks questions yet does not yield easily, that demands of its audience in its consideration of dwelling and becoming.

*Mesa* and the *Of Being & Becoming* series are reviewed as two examples from the significant body of artwork that is evidenced in this thesis where I propose that my understanding of the body as a site of cross-fertilisation relates to Sobchack's consideration of the body as first home – the body a place of primary reference, a place of direct contact with the world.<sup>306</sup> Here the influence of the senses and affect are crucial – bodily assimilated, lived experience of the landscape of practice continually expands theoretical understanding of the inter-relationship between self and place as well as critical consideration of the concept of dwelling as an ontological state. As Sobchack notes, 'both **empirically and philosophically** our bodies are the *essential* premises of our being in the world'.<sup>307</sup>

#### 4.12 Dwelling Between Body, Place and Time

In this chapter I have argued for a reconsideration of dwelling as a (potentially) formative ontological state. Drawing on cross-disciplinary texts ranging from phenomenological

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<sup>305</sup> For further reference to difference and similarity in visual imagery please see Chapter Six, in particular Sections 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 which detail the artworks of Roni Horn and draw on the conceptual understandings of Jean Luc Nancy and Section 6.5 where I explore such considerations in practice

<sup>306</sup> Please refer back to page 134

<sup>307</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California 2004), p182 – bold type added

philosophy and feminist critique, cultural geography and anthropology to visual culture, I have shown that although dwelling is considered an appropriate term to use in this project, it remains a complex and contested concept. When dwelling as a concept is unpicked and expanded with an understanding of its twin roots (in European language) and is critically understood as a place *and* an ontological state, as real *and* imagined, it becomes deeply implicated in notions of home, belonging and identity and, consequently, firmly situated *between* the personal and the social, *between* nature and culture. As such, the concept of dwelling is a rich and challenging resource for a creative arts practice that explores the inter-relationship between a self and a place; the term dwelling employed in my research practice as a concept through which to examine (sexuate) identity and to propose alternative visions of situated, embodied modes of dwelling.

In the next chapter I explore the concept of becoming (after Irigaray and Deleuze). Reflecting my understanding of place and identity in this project, becoming is understood as processual; like dwelling, something that has to be ever learned anew<sup>308</sup> – an evolving re-figuration of an on-going conversation between self and place over time, an emergence informed by corporeal as well as conceptual logic. Becoming is explored here through my research project *Communion*; a project which re-examines issues of identity and belonging in practice, a project critically informed by reference to a range of cross-disciplinary sources. The concept of affect is introduced to further consider the inter-relationship between a self and a place with an emphasis on issues of multi-sensory embodiment, the materiality of place, and agency with regard to potential becoming.

“We can surely learn from the Western Apache, who insist that the stories they tell, far from putting meaning upon the landscape, are intended to allow listeners to place themselves in relation to specific features of the landscape, in such a way that their meanings may be revealed or disclosed. Stories help to open up the world, not to cloak it”.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> After Heidegger who states that ‘mortals ... must ever learn to dwell’ (please refer to page 113)

<sup>309</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (Routledge 2000), p208

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*Communion (detail):*

*For those who have come before and for those yet to come*  
digital photograph, Mull 2008



## CHAPTER FIVE: BECOMING AND AFFECTIVITY

“... personal identity could entail a kind of continual transformation in a corporeal dance with others in which we acknowledged and celebrated the interdependent activity of self-making. That is, personal identity could be refigured as a continual shaping and reshaping of self in concert with others, or the continual becoming of a self with a past, present, and future, whose story was inextricably implicated with the stories of others”.<sup>310</sup>

“It is in the corporeal and conceptual exchanges of ourselves with others that we create - through contact with that which always exceeds ourselves and so exceeds any corporeal or conceptual patterns we may have already established – new ways of being in the world”.<sup>311</sup>

### 5.0 Transfiguring the Space between Self & Place: a Situated Study in Practice

Building on the critical understandings of subjectivity, place, time and dwelling as put forward in preceding chapters (ie with subjectivity as non-unitary, place as process, time as non-linear and dwelling as a mobilised concept), I now examine *becoming* with a view to substantiating an argument that calls for a re-examination of becoming in practice. This investigation considers the possibility of becoming together with the concept of *affect* (a concept further explored in Chapter Six) and proposes, via an exposure of artworks from my *Communion* series, alternative contemporary subjectivities that cross discursive and non-discursive domains. My interrogation of becoming in this affect-led research practice concurs with feminist philosopher Tamsin Lorraine in understanding that:

“Theories that reduce human consciousness to physiological processes, as well as those that depict consciousness as either a disembodied process or the effect of a mental thing, fail to capture the ambiguity of human existence. Human beings come to experience the world as conscious, sentient, embodied subjects through a process in which no clear distinctions can be made between mind and body, thought and matter, reason and emotion, interiority and exteriority, or self and other”.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Cornell University Press 1999), p237

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, p70

<sup>312</sup> Ibid, p3

## 5.1 Becoming: Irigaray and Deleuze & Guattari

In this analysis of becoming, I concentrate in particular on the conceptualisations of Irigaray and Deleuze & Guattari who are examined together with analysis from feminist critique. I have chosen to focus on these philosophers because of the rigorous, original and provocative contributions they have made to philosophy on the subject of embodiment. They are arguably problematic and challenging theorists to engage with but the value and relevance of their work to this project can be clearly demonstrated. Being a woman and engaged in a project that is founded on an embodied arts practice, Irigaray and Deleuze & Guattari invite further investigation, as do feminist interpretations of becoming from secondary sources.

I am aware that I am extracting an individual concept from extended tracts of text and that this concept sits alongside extensive theoretical analysis (from these theorists as well as other phenomenological and feminist thinkers). Yet for the purposes of this project and within the scope of this thesis, I will concentrate primarily on becoming<sup>313</sup> as this concept continues to inspire and challenge my evolving performative arts practice and is directly relevant to the context of this project.<sup>314</sup>

Both Irigaray and Deleuze & Guattari underline the plurality of individual human subjectivity, highlighting and endorsing difference. Following poststructuralist understandings, identity is considered provisional and processual, the corporeal and the conceptual are in dialogue, and becoming is an immanent possibility. In using the term becoming, I refer specifically to the dynamic potential of interaction between the corporeal and conceptual where lived experience of the world is deeply embedded in the body, in place *and* in time. For Irigaray and Deleuze & Guattari, it is writing and linguistics that closes the gap between thought and action. In this project, the gap between the concrete and abstract is breached not primarily by textual means but by a visual arts practice and specific embodied projects that bring my work, vitally and importantly, into contact with the materiality of place. Practical projects are grounded in lived experience, abstract concepts are firmly positioned in the context of the concrete particulars of place. It is such material intensity and affectivity that informs works made and makes bodily 'sense' out of the discursive. This is the location, dislocation, translocation of *becoming* – becoming in self, in place and in time through performative practice, becoming in and between the corporeal and the conceptual.

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<sup>313</sup> Becoming as examined here via the *sensible transcendental* of Irigaray and *becoming-imperceptible* of Deleuze & Guattari

<sup>314</sup> My understanding of becoming after Irigaray and Deleuze has been further informed by feminist theorists that advocate attention to embodiment and those that also draw from Irigaray and/or Deleuze – in particular Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Vivian Sobchack and Tamsin Lorraine but also Margaret Whitford, Sara Ahmed, Buchanan & Colebrook and Claire Hemmings.

## 5.2 Becoming in a Feminised Practice

Becoming is a challenging concept, not least because it is not (and cannot) be pinned down. Becoming is not meant to be categorised. It is non-unitary, it is *potential*: fluid, mobile, multiplicitous, heterogeneous, contradictory, processual, contingent, immanent – *forming* not formed. It is viral, deeply problematic and frustrates attempts at clear definition. This concept is further complicated by the fact that it is interpreted and realigned with other concepts, and adopted in other projects, in a wide (and not always straightforward) variety of ways – not only by Irigaray and Deleuze & Guattari themselves but by cross-disciplinary theorists. Bearing in mind the above, becoming remains a rich and provocative concept; one continually reinventing itself, one that can be usefully adopted and creatively applied – in this instance, in a performative visual arts practice.

It must be remembered that Deleuze & Guattari do not write from a feminist perspective and that their interpretation of becoming remains contested by many feminist writers.<sup>315</sup> I do not suggest that their conceptualisation goes unchallenged but that judgement be suspended and, instead, their interpretation of becoming be critically analysed in order to ascertain what productive threads might be drawn from the concept, threads that might be gainfully explored in practice. It must be remembered that ‘feminism itself has never been a body of knowledge, but rather a mode of critique, a process of thinking’.<sup>316</sup> A mode of critique open to productive argument and, I would add, not just a process of thinking but a creative logic and flexible mode of living in, and relating to, the world – a mode that incorporates corporeal *and* conceptual domains and has the potential to think and act expansively, to both acknowledge and respect difference. The feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz defines feminism not primarily as the struggle to liberate women but as:

“... the struggle to render more mobile, fluid and transformable the means by which the female subject is produced and represented. It is the struggle to produce a future in which forces align in ways fundamentally different from the past and present ... a struggle to mobilise and transform the position of women, the alignment of forces that constitute that ‘identity’ and ‘position’”.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> In particular see Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One*, p140/1 as well as Buchanan & Colebrook 2000, pp102-107, on Irigaray/Deleuze and Braidotti and Grosz on *becoming-woman* (Braidotti 1994, pp111-123 and Grosz 1994, pp162-164, 177-180). I do not pursue this line of enquiry here as within the scope of this thesis it is not deemed of primary relevance to my argument but I am aware of the debate.

<sup>316</sup> Amy Herzog (University of Rochester, USA), *Affectivity, Becoming, and the Cinematic Event*, <http://media.utu.fi/affective/Herzog.pdf>, p87 (accessed 23.09.09)

<sup>317</sup> Elizabeth Grosz quoted in *Affect, Becoming and the Cinematic Event* by Amy Herzog (University of Rochester USA); <http://media.utu.fi/affective/herzog.pdf>, p86-7 (accessed 23.09.09)

Such an understanding echoes my interpretation of the work of feminist theory and, in this thesis, underlines the potential of my understanding of the concept of becoming in practice as, reiterating Grosz, a means 'to render more mobile, fluid and transformable the means by which the female subject is produced and represented'. Becoming understood therefore as *radical immanence*.<sup>318</sup> In this project, becoming is translated as uncharted territory and considered a strategic risk – explored and analysed via projects sited on Mull and in Gloucestershire. Becoming, here, understood as pursuing 'connections that defy commonsense'<sup>319</sup> – as daring to imagine otherwise and envisioning, through practice, other ways of presenting and re-presenting self and place.<sup>320</sup>

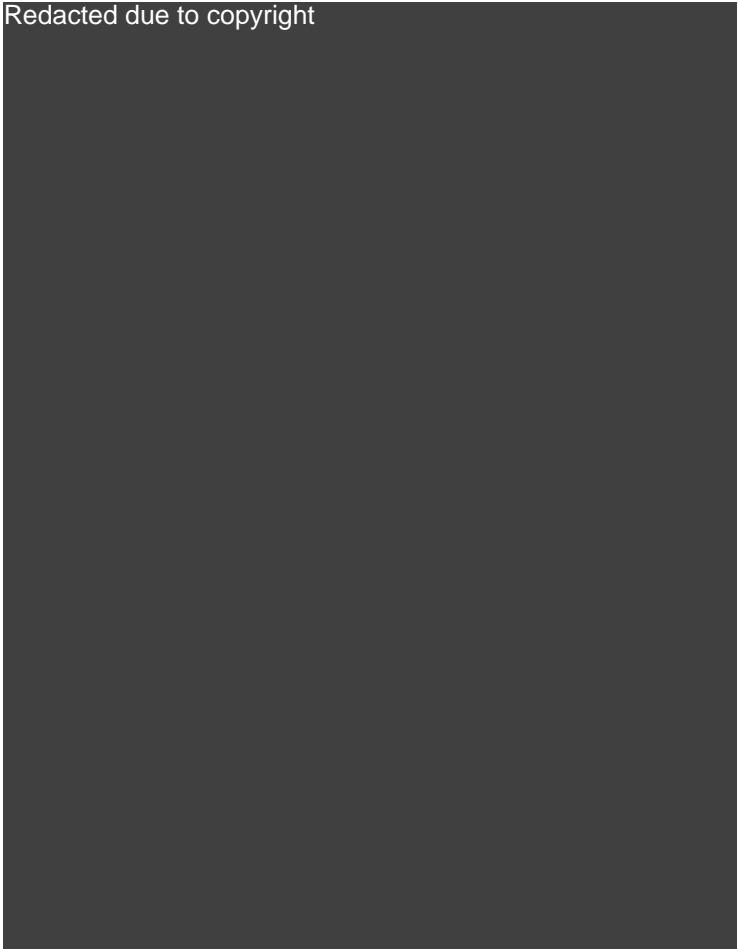
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<sup>318</sup> Radical immanence: see Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* (Polity Press 2002), in particular pages 5 and 63, where Braidotti defines *radical immanence* as thinking 'through the body', as 'encompassing the body at all levels'.

<sup>319</sup> Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Cornell University Press 1999), p145

<sup>320</sup> My understanding of becoming in practice has been further informed by an essay by Amy Herzog (University of Rochester, USA: *Affectivity, Becoming, and the Cinematic Event*) that discusses becoming with respect to affect and the temporality of film – <http://media.utu.fi/affective/Herzog.pdf> (accessed 23.09.09)

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*Communion* (detail)  
digital photograph, Mull 2008

### 5.3 Background to *Communion* (2008 on-going)

In this project, becoming is explored in practice via embodied engagement in the landscape and, in this chapter, evidenced through the *Communion* series. This project builds on the *Of Being and Becoming*<sup>321</sup> series of quiet performances and is a project that continues to expand.<sup>322</sup> In order to help the reader understand the intentions underpinning *Communion* and in what ways this performative work explores the concept of becoming in practice, I have included the following texts and an image of the work 'in the making' as well as in installation.

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<sup>321</sup> See Chapter Four

<sup>322</sup> *Communion* has developed into a collaborative project via a series of on-going engagements between myself and poet Anna Saunders, composer Robert Perry and film editor Josh Biggs. See also detailed review of *Communion* later in this chapter (Section 5.10)

Marking (a particular) time: a eulogy to people and place

She died in May,  
shortly before my birthday  
and her granddaughter's third birthday;  
she is my mother

She died in May  
and when she died she gave me something  
something special, part of herself  
and a responsibility  
to continue to bring it into being  
and, in so doing,  
to become myself.

To bring others with me;  
to gather, nurture, cherish ...  
a responsibility  
and a gift.

On the page she speaks;  
in the imagery, in my writing,  
in my making,  
my becoming;  
seen and unseen, named and silent.

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In preparation: *Communion*; Mull, April 2008

I returned to the Inner Hebrides alone,  
to the isle of Mull, home of maternal ancestors.

I took a chair with me,  
a chair given by my mother, deceased, to my daughter (now 17)  
on the occasion of her second birthday.

I went to visit my mother's favourite haunts,  
I took the chair with me.  
In taking it with me, I was also taking both my mother and my daughter.

I climbed S'Airde Beinn,  
I went with chair, mother and daughter.  
As I climbed, I gathered my grandmother, my great-grandmother  
and the others before them

Redacted due to copyright

*Communion* (detail)  
digital photograph, 2008

The following is an extract from a presentation given at an informal symposium hosted by An Tobar (arts centre), Mull, in April 2009. The event was held in association with an exhibition, *Fieldwork*, which included imagery from the *Communion* series.<sup>323</sup>

From the starting point of oral family histories, for the past eight years I have been exploring ancestral connections on the Isle of Mull. My first question as a practising artist is how might I find a way into this place, shortly followed by how might I possibly attempt to articulate a multi-sensory bodily understanding of place and how might I (re)present my understanding of this relationship in practice? Effectively, where and how do I start to suggest something of the experiential in my artwork, how

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<sup>323</sup> In an attempt to articulate my practice to a non-academic audience, my presentation took the form of a collection of collated/edited notes from my journal. *Fieldwork* the exhibition was the tangible result of a field trip to Mull the previous year and contained a range of works from eleven artist scholars.



might I invoke something of the physical and the psychological, the rational and the intuitive, the seen and the unseen of my relationship with Mull? How might I represent this place I call home?

In attempting an articulation of landscape, the questions return – just how can the lived be translated? The importance of the personal, the subjective voice, yes, but one that carries over into cultural consciousness and shared experience thereby allowing inter-subjective understanding and multiple trans-personal readings; the importance for me of creating layers of meaning that somehow echo layers of experience and memory in the viewer and thereby assist a level of intersubjectivity being attained. Such is my intention, my ambition.

I have adopted a phenomenological walking methodology as a route into place – a time and space for exploration, contemplation, investigation and observation. On Mull I have been following in the footsteps of my ancestors, both literally and metaphorically; gathering information from family members and from the archives at Mull Museum; visiting and staying in places where family have farmed, investigating the neighbourhoods where they lived, walking where they walked; and, importantly, exploring my mother's favourite haunts on the island, her 'special' places, her walks.

I have wandered and lingered ... hearing in my imagination the voices of relatives retelling familiar tales of picnics and gatherings, relating tales of friends and places, those whose names reverberated throughout my childhood; recalling stories of 'Pop and Grannie' and all the many aunts, uncles and cousins (including all those once, twice, thrice removed) that gathered together at any and every opportunity; and conjuring in my mind a relay of further narratives and interactions and wondering what these might add up to, what they might mean, and what they could mean in practice.

I have chosen my locale and I let my intuition guide me to places that reverberate in the present, that suggest possible futures (and possible future artworks) and that are hinged to the past in remembrance of people and oft-repeated tales. Exploring, investigating and examining; absorbing, sensing, recording and collecting – collecting objects, sounds, images and passing thoughts; new connections and associations are made and begin to mingle with old memories and echoes of other places and other times.

I do not intend to '*explain*' the images but to give background information to evidence how I have engaged with the landscape and how I have subsequently articulated an experience of place – the work coming out of the time and place of engagement as a result of juggling with intention and practicality, levels of control and necessary abandon.

In this body of composite images, I am following family traces and exploring notions of home and of being at home in the landscape through female genealogies. I brought a child's chair (a memorial object) from Gloucestershire to Mull and carried it out into the landscape as a way of alluding to other places, people and times; as a vehicle through which to explore the temporal and issues of constancy and change focusing on the past, the present and on possible futures.

Bearing in mind the female lineage of my link with Mull, another concern that lies behind the work is an attempt to prompt suggestions of the domestic and maternal that reference personal connections to place as well as simultaneously challenging notions of home and the feminine role more generally.

Already a complex mix of underlying intentions and concepts are coming together and beginning to rub against each other. In the process of making this quiet performance, the implications of the place, the memorial object, my presence and the haunting presence of others evoked through the chair begin to come together to form the piece. It is a question of paying attention and listening with all my body, of paying heed to measures of intention and improvisation as they come into play.


Through works produced I am not attempting to determine any answer as such or to suggest any definitive reading of place – what I am in the process of making and presenting in images shown is an extended response to the experience of, as well as an intimate acquaintance with, a specific and enchanting landscape – in this instance Mull. A quote from French philosopher Luce Irigaray, who approximates in words the very essence of what I am attempting to express in and through my practice:

“... if we precisely grasped all that makes the springtime, we would without doubt lose the wondrous contemplation in the face of the mystery of springtime growth, we would lose the life, the vitality, in which this universal renewal has us participate without us being able to know or control where the joy, the force, the desire that animate us come from”.<sup>324</sup>

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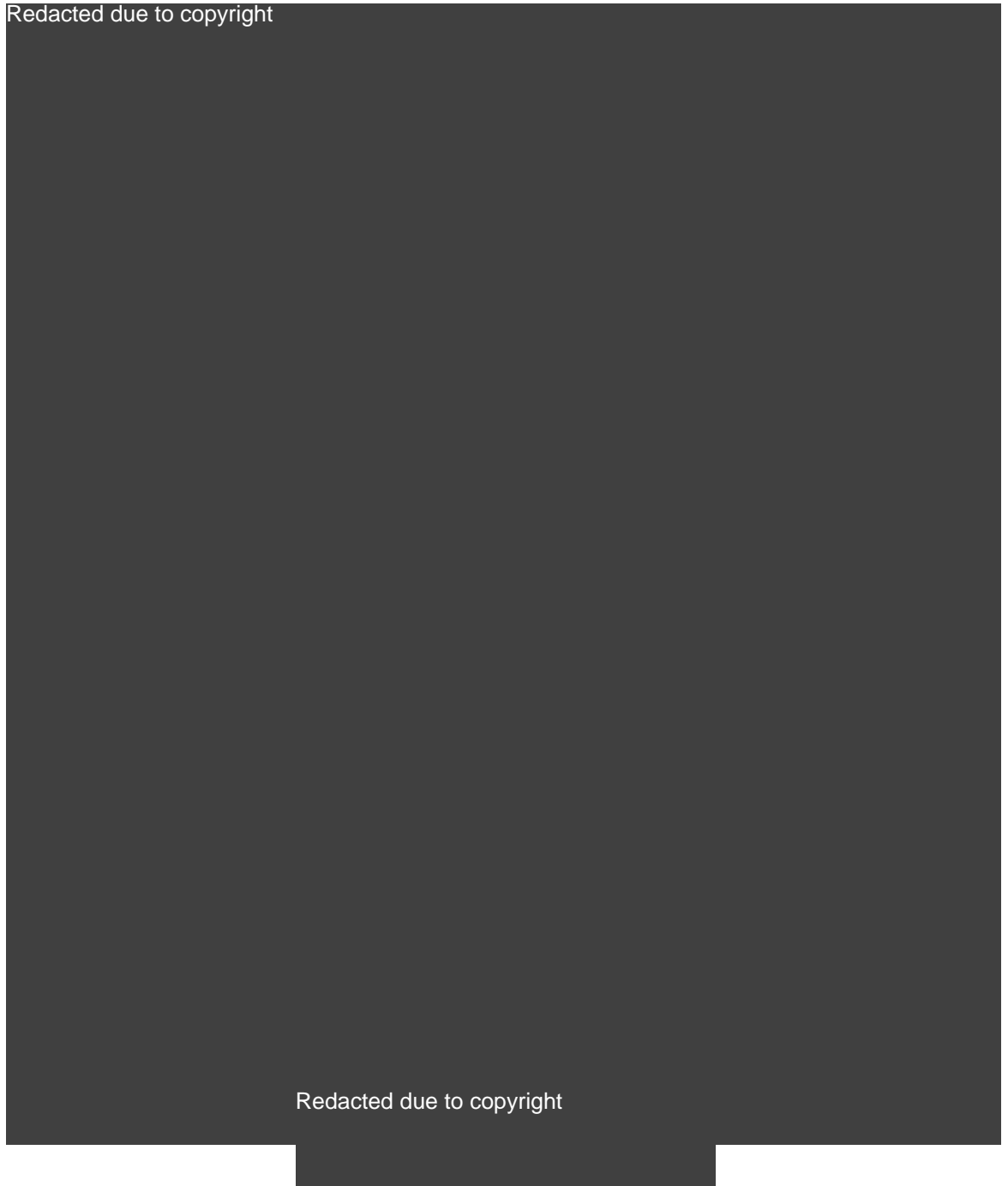
<sup>324</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings* (Continuum 2004), p23

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*Communion* (detail of installation at An Tobar, Tobermory, Mull April 2009)  
photographic composite, guttering, water and sound piece (just to right of image)

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Redacted due to copyright

*Communion* (detail of installation at SVA, Stroud June 2009)  
photographic composite with sound piece

Transcription of the short text included in the sound piece – a text written and spoken by myself over a recording of wind-driven waves lapping against the shore of the lochan at S’Airde Beinn, Isle of Mull.

After Her and Her and Her Before

The eye in the crater;  
dark, reflective,  
absorbing,  
surface water  
wind-driven  
to the near shore;  
a constant,  
lapping,  
rhythmic,  
flow.

Looking up  
from the womb  
of Airde Beinn ...  
limitless,  
unfathomable light;  
expanding,  
covering,  
sealing,  
sheltering.

The depth below,  
the height above,  
the inverted belly  
of Airde Beinn.

And yet  
the allure belies  
the shadows behind;  
unknown depths,  
other faces,  
hidden identities -  
to be remembered,  
and respected.

#### 5.4 Female Genealogies

“We bring many things into the world apart from children, we give birth to many other things ... love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things ... We must take back this maternal creative dimension ... our task is to give birth back to that mother, to the mother who lives within us and among us ... Historically we are guardians of the flesh. We should not give up that role, but identity it as our own”.<sup>325</sup>

As can be deduced from the commentary earlier and the quote above, *Communion* is a project that builds on female genealogies. By drawing on my maternal ancestral link to Mull and a feminine subjectivity, my situated practice questions and explores the concept of becoming, identity/belonging and emplacement with reference to feminist theories of difference.

Irigaray states that it is our female genealogy, our feminine ancestors that provide (women) a horizon for becoming, that give us a platform for becoming. She encourages women to assert their genealogy, urging us to remember that each of us has a female lineage – mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers who came before – and that there will be daughters who will continue the (female) line. She says that the ‘special quality’ of the female genealogy can be overlooked and neglected, even denied, and stresses that we (women) already have a history and that this should not be forgotten. She asks us to remember our feminine forebears and underlines how important this is in terms of our own identities now as well as in the future, pressing us to ‘situate ourselves’ within the female genealogy ‘so that we can win and hold on to our identity’.<sup>326</sup>

In *Communion* I am strategically positioning myself within the horizon of my maternal ancestors in their ‘home’ landscape – Mull. At the same time as examining the concepts of dwelling and becoming in practice, I am engaging with the female genealogy. Simultaneously, I am exploring my own becoming through familial links to place; specific landscapes on the island – particular areas where family lived and farmed, the routes across the hills, the cairns that remain, the moves they made around the north-western peninsular, all these I have traced. Research at Mull museum has furnished me with further information; dates, names, places – a list of connections to add to earlier tales as well as the remembrances of my aunt and my mother’s cousins that I so love to hear now. Memories and stories passed to my

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<sup>325</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (Columbia University Press 1987), p18/9

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*, p19

daughter – names she now recognises, places that are familiar – and new discoveries shared with older relatives as well as younger ones.

Irigaray states that in order to become, we need a horizon that ‘assures us the passage between past and future, the bridge of a present that remembers’<sup>327</sup> and this is key to the understanding that informs *Communion* – an artwork that draws on the past in the present and looks toward new understandings. Irigaray asserts that ‘the becoming of women is never over and done with, [it] is always in gestation’.<sup>328</sup> It is important here to stress that the female genealogy is not singular – yes it applies to each and every woman but it is situated in the socio-cultural domain and has a (shared) history, an identity and a feminine strength. It is this history, identity and strength that I celebrate in *Communion* through and with my own maternal ancestors on Mull.

“In order to become, it is essential to have a gender or an essence (consequently a sexuate essence) as horizon. Otherwise, becoming remains partial and subject to the subject ... To become means fulfilling the wholeness of what we are capable of being”.<sup>329</sup>

In the next part of this chapter I examine becoming with regard to Irigaray’s *sensible transcendental* and the Deleuzean notion of *becoming-imperceptible* and, evidenced through the *Communion* project, outline my adoption and understanding of *mimesis* (after Irigaray) as strategic route to further exploration of the female genealogy in practice.


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<sup>327</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (Columbia University Press 1987), p67

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, p63

<sup>329</sup> Ibid, p61

Redacted due to copyright



*Communion 2*  
photographic composite, 2008-09



## 5.5 Becoming: The Corporeal and the Conceptual

As we have seen, in my practice contextual analysis is wed with lived experience. Theoretical understandings are explored in performance (and later via photographic documentation of the performative act) in order to examine the inter-relationship between a place and a self and, as a result of seepage between theory and embodied practice, artworks are formed.

Phenomenological philosopher Tamsin Lorraine suggests that 'for something new to happen, something more than one's intellectual or commonsense understanding must be involved'. She adds that 'becomings are encounters that engage the subject at the limits of the corporeal and conceptual logics already formed' and that this brings on 'the destabilisation of conscious awareness'. She continues to state that this 'forces the subject to a genuinely creative response'.<sup>330</sup> Lorraine's conceptualisation of the creativity, the originary awareness of becoming, parallels my understanding of becoming in performative practice. Lorraine proposes that 'articulating these becomings not only demonstrates our ongoing participation with nonhuman as well as human processes but also indicates new possibilities in self- and world- transformation'.<sup>331</sup> As such, Lorraine's proposition concurs with the premise of this project – that via such articulations (here in the form of artworks), new understandings of the co-constituency of people and place might be offered. Acknowledging a debt to Lorraine, I now summarise the concept of becoming understood in the context of Irigaray's *sensible transcendental* and the Deleuzean notion of *becoming-imperceptible*.

## 5.6 Irigaray's *sensible transcendental*

Irigaray defines the *sensible transcendental* as 'a female transcendental against which each woman can measure herself rather than progressing only by taking the place of the mother, the other woman or the man'.<sup>332</sup> As such, the sensible transcendental is a rich concept for a feminine subject engaging with issues of identity, difference and becoming in practice. Rosi Braidotti understands the notion as relating to the feminine subject in such a way that she is neither considered an 'essentialised entity, nor an immediately accessible one'.<sup>333</sup> Instead she suggests a 'virtual feminine' where the feminine subject emerges by transcending encultured or more 'traditional' roles.<sup>334</sup> However, she underlines that this is a becoming that occurs 'through the flesh, in embodied locations and not in a flight away from them'.<sup>335</sup> In this respect, Braidotti's interpretation of the *sensible transcendental* (as being firmly grounded in

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<sup>330</sup> Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Cornell University Press 1999), p182

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, p181

<sup>332</sup> Margaret Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader* (Blackwell 1992), p112

<sup>333</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* (Polity Press 2002), p22

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, see pp22-28

<sup>335</sup> Ibid, p23

the physicality of the world) intersects with my research project *Communion* – an embodied, located project that explores alternative feminine becomings that transcend ‘traditional’ positions. She adds that an ‘opening out of the feminine toward religious or mystical experiences is central to Irigaray’s notion of the *sensible transcendental*.<sup>336</sup> This suggests an interesting tension – how can the transcendental occur through the flesh and at the same time open out toward the mystical? Or is this the crux of the argument for Irigaray: a bringing together of the material with the immaterial effecting a breaching of polarised singularities, effectively affirming the affectivity of matter with spirit?<sup>337</sup> I propose that this is precisely the point in question, a concern I engage with through *Communion*. As Braidotti observes:

“... (the sensible transcendental) situates the female embodied subject in a space between transcendence and immanence. This kind of materiality connects the subject to a number of differences within herself and also between herself and others. It does so, moreover, in a non-dialectical and non-oppositional manner ...”.<sup>338</sup>

And as Lorraine states:

“Irigaray’s feminine subject is receptive to the sensible transcendental. This transcendental is immanent in all sensuous experience and yet is transcendent in the sense of eluding any determinate form experience takes”.<sup>339</sup>

The above quotes are helpful when engaging with Irigaray’s concept of the sensible transcendental which, I suggest, indicates a liminal realm of potential. The position they together indicate approximates my understanding of becoming in practice – the bridging of any perceived distance between physical and psychological realities, the proximity of the corporeal with the conceptual, the tangible with the intangible, and of presence with absence as experienced in the phenomenological landscape.<sup>340</sup> This is becoming as explored through *Communion*; a becoming composed of hybrid, non-hierarchical influences and issues in the multiplicity and non-linearity of a lived experience of place affording a ‘non-dialectical and non-oppositional’ approach that might permit flesh to lie (comfortably) with spirit.

As Irigaray writes:

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<sup>336</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* (Polity Press 2002), p23

<sup>337</sup> See also Braidotti 2002, p58; Robinson 2006, p 156; and Colebrook in Buchanan & Colebrook 2005, pp121-4 on this convergence – or, alternatively, examine the *sensible transcendental* as set out by Irigaray herself in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Cornell University Press 1985)

<sup>338</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* (Polity Press 2002), p59 – brackets added for clarity

<sup>339</sup> Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Cornell University Press 1999), p11

<sup>340</sup> See Chapter Six for further examination of presence and absence.

“Neither simple nature nor common spirit beyond nature, this transcendence exists in the difference of body and culture that continues to nourish our energy, its movement, its generation and its creation”.<sup>341</sup>

### 5.7 Deleuze & Guattari's *becoming-imperceptible*

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze & Guattari state that becoming is not to be considered imitation or symbolic reference but instead as processual movement toward an absorption and incorporation of individual and specific qualities of other manifestations where each would be affected by the other. Becoming suggested as inter-active process itself, where ‘becoming produces nothing other than itself’.<sup>342</sup> They outline their concept through a range of becomings – including that of *becoming-imperceptible*.<sup>343</sup> Lorraine interprets *becoming-imperceptible* as ‘bringing faculties to the limit of communication with one another’ which she suggests causes a ‘fragmenting’ of the ‘coherent subject’ and a ‘disabling’ of the ‘convergence of the faculties upon an object of commonsense experience’.<sup>344</sup> She further states that this ‘requires leaving behind not only the perceptible boundaries of the body but also one’s conventional understandings of oneself, of others, and of one’s world’.<sup>345</sup> This suggests that, under such conditions, subjectivity is open and vulnerable to being affected by as yet unperceived, unknown and unforeseen forces. I would caution that such openness and vulnerability needs careful grounding – for instance, as in this project, being firmly located in the materiality of the experiential landscape.

When Deleuze & Guattari pose the question ‘what does becoming-imperceptible signify?’ they follow it by stating that it ‘means many things’.<sup>346</sup> If it means many things, then where might it be found and how might it be identified? I do not find any direct answers but I find clues. They say that *becoming-imperceptible* is ‘to be present at the dawn of the world’ where:

“... one is then like grass: one has made the world, everybody/everything, into a becoming, because one has made a necessarily communicating world, because one has suppressed in oneself everything that prevents us from slipping between things and growing in the midst of things”.<sup>347</sup>

From hints implicit within this statement, I visualise a becoming that cannot be definitively found or identified as such but that is unpredictable, unplottable, unsettling and, importantly,

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<sup>341</sup> Irigaray quoted in Robinson 2006, p156

<sup>342</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum 2004), p262

<sup>343</sup> Becoming(s) is discussed in Deleuze & Guattari 2004, pp256-341

<sup>344</sup> Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Cornell University Press 1999), p188

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, p189

<sup>346</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum 2004), p308

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, p309

must be *experienced* in the process of engaging with the world. A becoming that opens to the world – opens to a world of multiplicity that eschews duality and false representation and instead embraces heterogeneity and offers infinite possibility. In practice-led research, such communication is sought via the vehicle of a walk where attention rests on the experiential (the immediate locality and the rhythms of breath, of embodied activity) in order to heighten receptivity and prompt (potential) alternative understandings of the inter-relationship between a self and a place. In the words of Deleuze & Guattari, it ‘concerns alliance ... Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative’.<sup>348</sup>

### 5.8 Becoming: Alliance and Contingency

Are there any common concerns that might be attributed to becoming, that might be pulled from this rich array of interpretations to guide us? Where might we legitimately and tentatively place becoming, where can we begin to situate a concept that defies rational definition? And, importantly for this project, how might such a concept be explored and applied in my research practice? Lorraine states that becoming for Irigaray and Deleuze & Guattari is ‘a practice of thinking that entails integrating corporeal and conceptual logics’ in a ‘receptivity to an immanent “beyond” in which binary oppositions no longer hold’.<sup>349</sup>

In a similar vein, I propose that my conceptualisation of becoming in practice contains aspects of both Irigaray’s *sensible transcendental* and Deleuze’s *becoming-imperceptible* and, as such, offers a potential alternative by attempting to close any divide between polarisations (such as the physical and psychological, the tangible and intangible, presence and absence). The basis on which I am making such a proposition is that of *immanence*, of the inherent potential implied in the concept of becoming; the key thread running through the two conceptualisations of becoming above, namely the *sensible transcendental* and *becoming-imperceptible*, being one of potential. Becoming is therefore understood in this project as *potential*:

- an active, erratic process of movement, openness and creativity;
- a thread that encourages receptivity to the unfamiliar, the different, the ‘other’;
- an alliance that does not attempt to erase but instead embraces alterity and respects difference;
- an alliance that serves to affirm the heterogeneous affectivity of human and non-human forces;
- a potential that works between polarisations.

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<sup>348</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum 2004), p263

<sup>349</sup> Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Cornell University Press 1999), p11

The contingency of becoming embraces the possibility of unpredictable encounters and imperceptible forces. Such contingency values the psychological alongside the physical, entertains the as yet unconceived (and the inconceivable, though not the ill conceived), and recognises the multiplicity of identity and the instability/insubstantiality of any notion of a coherent enduring 'self'.

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*Communion* (detail); digital photograph, 2008

I hear voices, high pitched laughing;  
children?

I turn to see who is there but no-one, nothing  
but rough grass and sky, the water at my feet.

The laughter turns to plaintive wails  
the air chills, I can no longer rest;  
the atmosphere is charged, I do not feel welcome  
I am (quite possibly) not alone

Voices call, converse on the whispering wind;  
time ruptures, lines of thought are broken  
I am distracted and somewhat disturbed.

Listening, attentive,  
I want to hear but do not understand;  
perhaps it is not me they are addressing  
(a thought merely entertained because I know it is)  
Whispers on the wind, a haunting uncertainty;  
disorientated, disassembled, vulnerable

Voices; from without  
or echoes caught from within?

Where do these sounds, the words come from?  
Are they suggested by the elements recalled from the psyche,  
the watery depths; are they out there or in here?  
Voiced fears, remembered states, echoes of earlier separation;  
traces of loss, of Others and of past identities invoked in the present,  
traces of disunity, of hybrid complexity and multiplicity;  
out there, in here?

The divisive cut of binaries brought into focus  
subjectivity and lived experience contradicting any easy division;  
contra-indications between embodied understanding and assumed knowledge;  
misunderstandings, misinterpretations and deep mistrust  
due to centuries of polarised conditioning and socio-cultural repression?

Voices, echoes of humanity,  
in here, out there; the frailty of the human condition

## 5.9 In Practice: Strategic Employment of *Mimesis*

In an effort 'to work at 'destroying' the discursive mechanism' Irigaray advocates a path of 'mimicry'. Her call is for women to 'assume the feminine role deliberately'; a stance that works 'to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation and thus to begin to thwart it.' She expands on this statement by suggesting that, through a reclamation of subjectivity, the female subject can proceed to present, 'to make 'visible', by an effect of playful repetition' that which 'was supposed to remain invisible'.<sup>350</sup>

This is, I propose, a form of strategic essentialism – a device through which to positively reclaim and reaffirm personal identity as a woman (as well as for women) in the socio-cultural domain. Following Irigaray and adopting a mimetic strategy<sup>351</sup> as a route to becoming, in my role as a practising artist I am deliberately attempting to problematise gendered roles and draw on the female genealogy through my own maternal ancestry. Simultaneously I am working to trouble other binary divisions (such as nature and culture, interior and exterior) in such a way as to expose difference and propose an alternative conception of feminine subjectivity in the context of an exploration and examination of the inter-relationship between a self and a place.

Here, an understanding of feminist critique underpins my exploration of the concept of becoming and converges with concerns regarding the inter-relationship between a self and a place as brought together in practice-led research via Irigaray's call for an adoption of mimesis.<sup>352</sup> In this instance, mimesis explored via the *Communion* project as represented by the image on the following page: woman with domestic chair up mountain standing in water?

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<sup>350</sup> Irigaray (in interview) quoted in Margaret Whitford (Ed), *The Irigaray Reader* (1992), p 124

<sup>351</sup> It should be noted that mimesis after Irigaray is an initial phase and not a long term solution – mimesis employed to question/unsettle established roles, as a *route* to becoming and not an end goal

<sup>352</sup> For further reference on mimesis see Irigaray 1993 on philosophical texts and phallogocentric knowledge as well as Grosz 1995 (p41/42) and Lorraine 1999 (p6). Irigaray refers to strategic use of mimesis throughout her texts - Whitford gives a helpful overview of various meanings implied by Irigaray when she uses the term (1991, 1992).

Redacted due to copyright



*Communion* (documentation of performance); digital photograph, 2008

Through my research practice and in works made, I am aiming for an unveiling, a quiet revealing and questioning of sexuate difference and socio-cultural roles rather than advocating a position of reversed privilege – rather, an acceptance of and respect for difference. I am putting forward a proposition for consideration rather than suggesting any alternative ‘truth’ – the intention being to prompt questions and a plurality of readings. As Lorraine suggests, intimations of:

“... how the body comes into play in the production of the knowledges that inform our self-understanding and our conceptions of what is desirable as well as what is possible for human relationships and ethical community ...”.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Cornell University Press 1999), p4



In the *Communion* project, I have adopted strategic mimesis as a means to both evoke and provoke, and have brought several factors together to effect my intent. I am wearing a skirt, a conscious move to be recognisably female. By deliberately choosing to employ a piece of furniture in the piece I am alluding to the domestic. By locating the performance in the landscape, I am attempting to trouble conceptions of spatial reality and 'fixed' boundaries between internal and external domains. What is going on here? This chair is not a picnic chair; this chair would not be expected to be used, or even taken, outside – what is this chair doing in the landscape; what purpose, what idea, lies behind such a move?

Through the inclusion of this particular chair, a small child's rocking chair, it might be seen that the maker is suggesting another place, another time and/or another person. The inclusion of a child's chair might also suggest the maternal as well as the domestic. Mimesis is employed but it is not direct or simple; the allusions are not singular, this is a troubled and troubling provocation – this is an example of an (my) interpretation of strategic mimesis after Irigaray. Location, dislocation, translocation.

Through this piece, I am attempting to suggest that we reconsider what we do, how we do, when we do, and how we view – in other words that things might not be as they initially appear and that they might be done and viewed differently. In so doing, I am attempting to ask questions of my audience and prompt a response that might offer alternative figurations of place – as evidenced here in images from the *Communion* project where I draw on my own maternal ancestry to celebrate the female genealogy and explore strategic mimesis in practice as a route to becoming.

It is important to remember the context of the *Communion* project (that it is an examination of the concepts of dwelling and becoming *in and through* practice) and, in this respect, the following section should be read with reference to the theoretical considerations detailed earlier in this thesis.<sup>354</sup> If we return to the main body of the thesis and read the following section in context, the review of *Communion* can be examined in relation to the analysis of dwelling/home and be seen to build on and expand the critical potential of dwelling as well as becoming (after Irigaray and Deleuze). Irigaray herself states that philosophy and philosophical insights are not about direct translation as such, rather that they are important due to 'the way they constrain you to think'. She adds that as opposed to being 'a text that asks us to believe in it' (in a literal sense), philosophy is a route to 'surpassing ourselves', a form of transcendence or becoming.<sup>355</sup> Here the grounded and grounding constraints of the body on thought (theory) is made explicit in a way directly relevant to the argument presented in this thesis.

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<sup>354</sup> Please see Chapter Four for detailed critical reading of dwelling after Heidegger and Edward S Casey and earlier this chapter for critical analysis of becoming after Irigaray and Deleuze

<sup>355</sup> An audience with Irigaray at the Arnolfini, Bristol, 23 February 2011

It is with this understanding firmly in mind that I approach the philosophical concepts in question here, exploring and developing the insights they offer through my research practice. In this way, theoretical references become bodily meaningful – understood and assimilated through a process of embodied cross-fertilisation, a ‘synthesis’ of the concrete with the abstract in the performativity of practice. Adopting the words of Vivian Sobchack, a making of ‘meaning out of bodily sense’ – first in practice and later through artworks presented.<sup>356</sup>

Redacted due to copyright



*Communion 1*; photographic composite (digital), 2008-09

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<sup>356</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California 2004), p1

### 5.10 In Practice: A Review of The *Communion* Project

In order to explicate the methods incorporated in this practice-led doctoral research project as well as to underline the dynamic influence of embodied investigation in the phenomenological landscape, I outline the see-saw<sup>357</sup> of practice and theory with regard to *Communion*.

*Communion*: an investigation of place and becoming in practice.

*Communion*: an example of a research project in which the body acts as a site of cross-fertilisation – where multi-sensory affects meet conceptual understandings, practice engages with theory, and ideas converse with media.

*Communion*: a work performed in the experiential landscape and re-presented through artworks made as a result of a series of exchanges, collaborative explorations and conjunctions of media.

#### Mutation of practice

*Communion* is an explicit example of research in practice; a project that over the past three years has resulted in various manifestations and involved a series of collaborative ventures and improvisations – a work that, as it develops, continues to expand and mutate. With a background in print-making/photography with practical knowledge of a range of techniques, my practice has shifted over the period of doctoral study from large-format photography and wall-hung sequences (the *Daily* works), through extended photographic series (*Visible & Void*), installation and performance (live and to camera, for example *Of Being & Becoming*), to composite bodies of work, such as *Communion*, that comprise a mix of performance, sound, text, still photography and moving imagery made in collaboration with other artists/disciplines.

This mutation has resulted from a growing awareness and understanding of the landscape of experience (as informed/performed in multi-sensory observation of specific rural landscapes and as challenged by the theoretical sources cited in this thesis) with the body acting as a site of cross-fertilisation for a variety of lived and learned influences/references.

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<sup>357</sup> The ‘see-saw’ of practice and theory as proposed by Katy MacLeod in her commentary on practice-led research in the visual arts (Chapter One, Section 1.6 but also see Section 1.5 re practice-led doctoral research, especially Holdridge and MacLeod). MacLeod’s consideration of practice-led research echoes my experience of the inter-play between the concrete and abstract understandings and in my research inquiry there is no hierarchy between practice and theory. This is a distinction that carries forward to the relationship between doing and thinking, making and writing in practice. As such, I adhere to the understanding of Holdridge and MacLeod as indicated in Chapter One of this thesis.

*Communion* is an explicit example of research carried out in practice; an on-going project that over the past four years has resulted in various manifestations and involved a series of collaborative ventures and improvisations. This is a work that, as it develops, continues to expand and mutate. With a background in print-making/photography and with practical knowledge of a range of techniques, my practice has shifted over the period of doctoral study from large-format photography and wall-hung sequences (the *Daily* works), through extended photographic series (*Visible & Void*), installation and performance (live and to camera, for example *Of Being & Becoming*), to composite bodies of work, such as *Communion*, that comprise a mix of performance, sound, text, still photography and moving imagery made in collaboration with other artists/disciplines.

This mutation has resulted from a growing awareness and understanding of the landscape of experience (as informed/performed in multi-sensory observation of specific rural landscapes and as challenged by the theoretical sources cited in this thesis) with the body acting as a site of cross-fertilisation for a variety of lived and learned influences/references.<sup>358</sup> As such, this awareness refers to the ‘**location, dislocation, translocation**’ of the title of my thesis<sup>359</sup> – the dialogue between the corporal and the conceptual resulting in a contextual re-positioning (a dislocation and translocation) of the subject (myself), the relationship between the subject and the place of empirical research (location), and the concepts under examination.

[para break added here]

In this respect, the profound influence of Vivian Sobchack’s understanding of the body as a ‘first home’ proved pivotal to the project. Here, the body serving as a fulcrum for the cross-fertilisation of multiple (often conflicting) influences and references, a vital and dynamic grounding of the conceptual in the corporeal.<sup>360</sup> In addition, Heidegger’s proposal that we ‘must ever learn to dwell’<sup>361</sup> and Irigaray’s concept of the ‘sensible transcendental’<sup>362</sup> have

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<sup>358</sup> See also Sections 4.10 and 4.11 in Chapter Four

<sup>359</sup> Please refer back to the deconstruction of the terms at the beginning of this thesis (particularly the section on translocation)

<sup>360</sup> For reference to Sobchack see Chapter Four where I discuss and expand on the concept of dwelling and notions of home – of particular relevance are Sections 4.10 and 4.11 where I detail the role of practice in my inquiry (ie embodied experience of the lived landscape) and the cross-fertilisation between theory and practice in situated performance where the influence of the conceptual and the corporeal together assist the development of practical projects and artworks. Sobchack underlines the importance of our bodies as ‘not merely objectively beheld but subjectively lived’ (an understanding to which I/my work responds) where the ‘lived body provides the material premises for meaning’ in ways that ‘inform and include but also far exceed the particular sense and image-making capacities of vision’ (Sobchack 2004; p187). It is this *lived meaning* that I am striving for in my work; a research practice that uses a conjunction of media through which to articulate lived understandings of the experiential landscape as mediated through the body, understandings that will hopefully resonate in other ‘subjectively lived’ bodies. In this respect, please also refer to Chapter Six for detailed explication of the role of photography and strategic use of haptic visuality in dissemination of practice as artworks.

<sup>361</sup> Please refer to Chapter Four, p113 (footnote 246)

<sup>362</sup> Please refer to Section 5.6

similarly (and radically) altered my perception and appreciation of the interconnection/cross-fertilisation between body and place in the performativity of practice. Dwelling as a concept is expanded and effectively mobilised (as inferred through the imagery in *Communion*) with notions of home revised and similarly up-rooted (as well as re-visioned) as a direct result of continued critical analysis of the concept of dwelling alongside located practical exploration. The 'sensible transcendental' (itself understood as a form of located becoming) is also explored through *Communion*. The concept is examined in performance and (re)presented in *Communion* through the imagery of an altered relationship with the landscape, effectively a situated becoming. Here the artwork reflects and demonstrates a developed understanding of dwelling and becoming in place – a dwelling (as ontological state) that liberates the subject from the interiors of domesticity (as intimated through the addition of the chair imaged at S'Airde Beinn) allowing a freedom in which to explore (and potentially adopt) alternative relationships with the landscape (for example, as potential home-place).

In this respect, the imagery strives to intimate references beyond the visible echoing the understanding of Vivian Sobchack who observes a prevalence in contemporary culture to 'forget that both our bodies and our vision have lived dimensions that are not reducible to the merely visible'.<sup>363</sup> The work is not derivative (or indeed a direct 'translation' of theory, more a means to 'constrain you to think'<sup>364</sup>); it is in its selective form and critical content intended to raise further questions around the inter-relationship between a self and a place.

The inherent multiplicity of these over-lapping themes within this research project challenged my practice and raised the following questions: 'How could I adequately acknowledge and highlight such undercurrents in my work?' 'How could I extend my practice in order to express the multi-sensory, visceral landscape of experience and these complex conceptual understandings in order that the relationship between them became not only intertwined in the performativity of research but embedded in the work?' 'How might I add to the layers already beginning to form in this work'?

In response to the above questions, the potentialities of a range of media were tested in order to ascertain which particular combinations might best enable incorporation of such bodily understandings. This process has necessitated exploration of diverse conjunctions in order that the tacit be expressed together with formal knowledge – the subjective with objective understandings that together underpin this sustained research inquiry. Hence the expansion of practice and new conjunctions of media evidenced in *Communion* – as an extension of (the performativity of) empirical research.

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<sup>363</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California 2004), p182

<sup>364</sup> A reference to Irigaray – please see Section 5.9

A return to the foundation of my research (the question of the inter-relationship between a self and a place), together with critical reflection on the concept of dwelling and Irigaray's understanding of becoming, prompted the first quiet performance. Here I was putting my own body in the frame, a representative body in the landscape ('a' body in 'a' place), as a way of underlining the material/tangible relationship between body and place. Subsequent realisation of the value of such a move led to (and continues to fuel) further performative acts and through photographic documentation of body/landscape details as well as general landscape/body shots, embodied performances are recorded. Informal performative research becomes refined, structured performance – consciously performed to camera (often with additions such as the child's chair in *Communion*). Performance, live and to camera, is now an integral part of my research process – an act that brings conceptual investigation and corporeal experience together in specific landscape locations, the act contributing (directly and indirectly) to subsequent dissemination.

The mutation of my practice (as detailed in this section with reference to *Communion*) should therefore be viewed as the result of what is taken to be a necessity in a critically informed practice (particularly one that strives to articulate the performativity of embodied practice). The dialogue between performance and media expresses a range of multi-sensory bodily understandings as informed by examination of the concepts of dwelling and becoming in practice – embodied understandings of the lived landscape abutting, challenging and, importantly, grounding the concepts that are vital to the overall remit and reach of the project.

#### Use of media as extension of body in practice

As a result of careful deliberation and analysis, certain media have been adopted in order to expand particular arts projects. Each medium selected and used is a specific tool for a particular task; a choice determined by the time and place of making as well as the concepts examined, explored and actively performed. The media employed are those appropriate to the experience of place as understood in practice, chosen because they best allow me to articulate what I want to convey. This is important.

For example: in relation to *Communion*, the camera is a tool used to assist articulation of concepts explored in the field rather than to evidence photographic technique (although of course I ensure images are sharp where needed, blurred where wanted and framed as required so that that the content of the final works is of quality). In my practice, it is of primary importance that the images reflect the concepts examined as part of an embodied exploration of place and remain sensitive to the context of re-presentation as well as original locus of experience. These are the images I consider 'successful' and that might later become part of composite artworks.

As distinct from being a photographer who applies skill in order to document a place, I consider myself someone who *uses* photography (as well as other methods/media) in a self-aware and reflexive manner. In my research practice, photography is put into service in an attempt to articulate the inter-relationship between a self and a place. The camera, in effect, becomes an extension of my body, a tool through which to evoke embodied, multi-sensory understandings of place. Photography here as a method of asking questions and of commenting on the experiential – of finding a way to invoke a sense of the everyday and the marvellous, the ordinary with the extra-ordinary, through images that sit between belief and doubt, that both expose and compose 'reality'.

“... photography as ... a way of seeing the world, and that way must be honest, *using technology as a medium* for capturing reality ...”<sup>365</sup>

As can be surmised from the above, such a practice requires a flexible, fluid approach; one that can embrace a multiplicity of embodied understandings. An approach, therefore, that extends to media employed, an approach that is able to bring together the intuitively realised with the calculated by balancing spontaneity with intention in performance and through adopted media. As projects/works develop, critical awareness and reflexivity are vital in order that works presented adhere to the specificity of location as well as the concepts examined and that they remain both coherent and evocative at the time of re-presentation.

#### Performance and collaboration in *Communion*

Echoing the thinking behind the choice and use of media in this project and returning to the conceptualisation of *synthesis* after Sobchack (as raised and discussed in the previous chapter where the cross-fertilisation of the heterogeneous corporeal and conceptual elements that underpin this research practice is detailed<sup>366</sup>), it must be remembered that such an understanding is pivotal to the reading of the relationship between practice and theory in this doctoral project. Here, the cross-fertilisation of influences and references that inform *Communion* extends to include the conjunction of media employed and the dialogue of collaborative exchange. An example of the *synthesis* of 'subjective and objective aspects'<sup>367</sup> is demonstrated in the *Communion* project where the original performance to camera that was the departure point for this body of research was the result of complex and often conflicting experiential and theoretical references (as explored and developed in conjunction and collaboration). The heterogeneous themes in question are detailed below:

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<sup>365</sup> Isabel Allende quoted in *Thomas Struth: Photographs 1978-2010* (Whitechapel Gallery 2010) – my italics.

<sup>366</sup> See Section 4.10 in particular but also 4.11

<sup>367</sup> Sobchack 2004

Context and concept:<sup>368</sup>

- an exploration of personal genealogy as well as (the) female genealogy more generally and, in this regard, a consideration of gendered identity in relation to notions of home;
- an examination, simultaneously, of belonging, becoming (after Irigaray and Deleuze) and *dwelling as becoming*;
- an attentive, affected response to the lived landscape (the sound of the water was calming; the wind was gentle but the water cold; the climb up the mountain was arduous, the path water-logged); an experience that resulted in an intense body awareness of my situation, an intuitive understanding of the immediate environment sitting alongside the critical thinking underpinning the performance and memories of my ancestors, reminders of current family, my place among them and my place here on edge of the lochan.

In collaboration:

- awareness of working in collaboration with a photographer I did not know and of articulating my ideas to another, of trying to put into words the range of complex influences brought together in this performative exploration of place;
- sensitivity to site alongside aesthetic understanding of composition/ frame of the lens (calculated positioning and focal length, haptic detail and distant topographical representation); between us, determining the most evocative as well as the most practical positioning for the performance (how would the photographer record the performer, the water and the distant shore; what details did I want recorded and how close could the photographer get to my body whilst I was in the water; where on this shoreline was most suitable in terms of the thinking behind the work and an evocation of the lochan itself; where was practical in order to best combine intention and actuality?);
- active consideration of future viewers who would know nothing of the place or the background to the work (what was I trying to say and how might we together realise and effectively record this performance; how to suggest the concepts underpinning the project as well as the affectivity of the location, the lapping waters, the gentle breeze at the top of the mountain?)

*Communion*: a multi-layered response to place (S'Airde Beinn) brought together in performance and in collaboration with the photographer.

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<sup>368</sup> See also Section 5.3 for background to *Communion*



*Communion*: a collaboration expressed and exchanged in a shared experience of the mountain and a growing understanding of the potential of the work; a performance interpreted through intention and discovery, through the camera and the body – a work made in collaboration with each other, the place and the elements.

#### Performance and conjunction of media

Here the process of making the work (intimacy due to embodied understanding of S'Airde Beinn in performance and, simultaneously, critical distance as a result of analysis of photographic documentation and the concepts informing the act – the 'see-saw' of practice with theory<sup>369</sup>) served to shift my perspective on the project and helped to determine the first manifestation of *Communion*. This configuration (an installation piece) was exhibited in 2009, initially at An Tobar arts centre, Tobermory, Mull (just fifteen minutes or so from the base of S'Airde Beinn) and three months later at SVA Stroud.<sup>370</sup> The installation comprises a large-format composite image with a sound piece and a length of guttering with water. The aural component combines text with ambient sound from the lochan. The text, recited by myself, was written in direct response to the place/performance and reflects awareness of my maternal ancestors as well as the specificity of location.

Although performance to camera is considered a preliminary act, ie an act that contributes to a later re-presentation of place, located performance always deepens my understanding of the inter-relationship between self and place.<sup>371</sup> In *Communion*, the impact of the material landscape affected and deepened my performative engagement with Sobchack's concept of the body as 'first home'<sup>372</sup> (as well as my understanding of becoming after Irigaray as reflected in Heidegger's proposition of learning to dwell anew) – here embodied performance serving to ground the abstract in the concrete particulars of place. Following Sobchack, in my work I want to point to an understanding that 'both empirically and philosophically our bodies are the essential *premises* of our being in the world'.<sup>373</sup>

As such, I consider the performative act vital due to its influence on the final piece/installation – the body itself acting as a site of cross-fertilisation in extended research practice. In *Communion*, not only grounding the conceptual in the corporeal (in performance) but, when considering the first installation, helping me select/compose appropriate imagery (influence of body memory) and prompting an aural component (to reflect the multi-sensory experience of place, here the continual sound of water lapping) as well as guttering (to allude to the

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<sup>369</sup> See reference to Holdridge and MacLeod p171 (footnote 357)

<sup>370</sup> Images of Communion in installation at An Tobar and SVA can be seen on pages 155/156

<sup>371</sup> For further reference to performance to camera in my visual arts practice, see Chapter Four and the *Of Being and Becoming* series

<sup>372</sup> For reference to Sobchack and home, see Chapter Four, p132

<sup>373</sup> Sobchack 2004, p182

properties of water as material substance and as psychological presence). These decisions and additions as a way of heightening the multi-sensory impact of the work and highlighting the gap Sobchack identifies as a prevalence in contemporary culture to 'forget that both our bodies and our vision have lived dimensions that are not reducible to the merely visible'.<sup>374</sup>

### Collaboration and conjunction

*Communion* has progressed through a series of collaborations, each resulting organically from performance/re-presentation of the work at various stages of its development and subsequent conversations around the concepts and places performed. The departure point for this growing body of artwork was my personal connection with the island of Mull and, as already detailed, the initial collaboration at S'Airde Beinn which produced the first installation piece at An Tobar. It was the installation of this work at SVA Stroud in June 2009 that generated an inspiring conversation with the poet Anna Saunders (who asked if she could write a response to the work and later introduced me to composer Robert Perry) and resulted in *Communion* the performance.

The conjunction of media in *Communion* - a short film projection (my own images, moving and still, together with some of the performance at S'Airde Beinn), a poem written by Anna (recited by myself in front of the projected imagery) and music composed by Robert (an improvised work for acoustic guitar and clarinet) – necessitated prolonged consideration and dialogue, a series of conversations that challenged and progressed the existing work. The possibilities offered by collaborative exchange also made demands on my practice and questions were raised: How might we bring these cross-disciplinary elements together; how best to sculpt the music, imagery and words into a whole; how to perform the work live, how much improvisation and how much structure; what instruments did I want for the work, what stress and rhythm to the musical score; which images to include; the timing of the projection, the mood of the conjunction, the pace of my delivery?

As the originator of the project and performer of the work at S'Airde Beinn, I orchestrated the project and, in this respect, it was vital to continually refer back to the initial experience of performing at the lochan. Instruments were chosen that reflected the elements, the exposure of the location; the music was gentle but at times more intense echoing the wind-driven water, the intermittent gusts of wind; the pace slowed and deepened to reflect the memory of others, the depth of the experience; the poem was broken up to reflect the flow of images in accordance with my memory of the experience, the feel of the place – the mood of embodied experience continually echoed in the work.

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<sup>374</sup> Sobchack 2004, p179

A major decision was to speak the poem, to (re)perform the work myself; these are my relatives that are imaged and named in *Communion*, the island of Mull is my ancestral home and S'Airde Beinn remains a familiar haunt. Originally an actor was to recite the poems but Anna was unsure and as we discussed work in progress, it became clear to me that I should perform the piece – that it should be my voice heard, that I should be live on stage as well as in the projected imagery. In fact, this 'here and there, now and then' of my figure/voice live and recorded added a new dimension to the work – echoing elements of the impulse for the work and heightening the temporality of the imagery. As such, the 'here and now, there and then' of the conjunction of images from S'Airde Beinn and the performance to camera (as seen in the projected imagery) and the live body in staged performance (myself reciting the poem in front of the projection) both underlines the understanding of multiple subjectivity that informs the project and highlights the non-linear temporality of the work.

Additionally, the concept of dwelling as mobilised (moving with the body as 'primary' dwelling place, the body understood, after Sobchack, as 'the essential *premises* of our being in the world'<sup>375</sup>) is stressed through the altered temporality, a non-linearity echoed through the conjunction of media in this collaborative piece. These additional layers have been incorporated into the film of *Communion* and are valuable research insights that I carry forward and continue to explore in other artworks. *Communion* is just one example of the value of exchange in collaborative practice, as such demonstrating the possibilities for expansion through conjunction and collaboration.

What is interesting with regard to the *Communion* project is that none of the others involved in the collaboration have visited Mull. I have spoken of the physical as well as the psychological landscape of the island but I am the only one to have visited, to experientially know the location of the performance and origin of the imagery. I alone know the feel of the rough grassland, the bogs on the steep ascent to S'Airde Beinn, the sound of the water, the call of the raven, the feel of the weathered rocks, the whispering wind around the shore of the lochan. The challenge of how to translate the elemental pull of Mull as well as the harsh reality, the emotional attachment and resonance, the physical challenge of this distinctive location, the specific site that, in large part, prompted the work. It was my job to direct the others in this project – to articulate first to my collaborators and then in the artwork, the concept behind the work as well as the experience of S'Airde Beinn – the atmosphere and evocation that I wanted the performance as a whole to embody, the work itself to hold and carry to a receptive audience. A steep and demanding task but one that has resulted in

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<sup>375</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California 2004), p182 – see also Chapter Four, Sections 4.10 and 4.11 for reference to Sobchack and the influence of her critical understanding of our bodies as our 'first home' to my research on dwelling and home

further collaboration and more recently an artist film<sup>376</sup> as well as a live performance that, being improvised, further mutates and continues to evolve each time it is performed.

The most recent collaboration and manifestation of *Communion*, a photography and poetry publication, has already resulted in plans for a shared journey to Mull. What will transpire remains unknown but it will be a collaborative work and it will be inspired by inspired by our embodied experience of the island of Mull. It will be the result of time spent together exploring and experiencing specific sites on the island which will later be expressed in new conjunctions of word, sound and image.

*Communion: a work with a life of its own*

*Communion*: an example of the inter-connected performativity of my expanded research practice.

*Communion*: a cross-fertilisation of diverse, multi-sensory influences – a range of personal and socio-cultural, human and non-human, conceptual and corporeal, physical and psychological references brought together and re-presented in the form of an artwork that mutates through practice and theory as it is interrogated and developed using a variety of media.

*Communion*: an extended project where each 'voice' contributes to the whole – making the whole greater than the sum of its parts with a life of its own that continues to demand further inquiry and exploration through shared endeavour and personal reflection. Importantly, I see this work as both a comment and a prompt to critical engagement and dialogue.

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<sup>376</sup> See DVD of *Communion* (inside back cover of thesis)

Field Note.

*Communion* is about life and death, memory and time,  
about 'big' questions,  
the sort of questions that might never be answered  
but it is also about small details, artefacts of the here and now;  
about specific people and special places.

*Communion* is about my mother and my daughter,  
about our ancestors and the arresting, enchanting landscape that we call home,  
about places that are forever marked, that are scarred by shared memories.  
The female genealogy, the maternal line, the people and the place;  
our family, other families, now  
and then.

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Once upon a time I travelled to Mull with my mother;  
we borrowed my aunt's car – I drove, my mother worried about the narrow roads,  
the sheep, the blind bends and the steep drops.  
She was reluctant to take the wheel herself  
but I was happy to drive,  
relishing the sweeping curves and distant views.

I return to Mull with friends or family,  
with my aunt, my sister or my children,  
but often I arrive alone, the others in memory,  
in mental images and letters written to the absent.  
The curves and views remain,  
friends on the island are revisited, tales retold;  
the roads continue to weather and wear, the elements are not kind  
but I am once again drawn to a place I call home.

Redacted due to copyright



*Communion*  
(film still, 2011)

## 5.11 The matter of description

In order to expand on the understanding of practice and the vital role of embodied performance in this research inquiry, I will now outline human geographer Nigel Thrift's conceptualisation of non-representational theory and examine its relation to the (contested) issue of place. Thrift writes of the necessity of challenging/changing the way in which we look at the world in order to understand the dynamism of place, adding that one of the 'purposes' of non-representational theory is to afford just such a shift of perspective. He advocates that we 'undo what we think of as theory' in order that we might address practice and focus on the role of the lived together with the learned and states that non-representational theory grows out of 'the simple ... observation that we cannot extract a representation of the world because we are slap bang in the middle of it'.<sup>377</sup>

When Thrift writes of 'representation' here it must be viewed in context and understood that he is not referring to literal representations of the world as in visual artworks or descriptive prose but reacting against theoretical representations of place-based practice that 'must be affixed prior to any attempt at engagement'. He adds that it is this propensity of 'actively constructing webs of significance which are laid out over a physical substrate' to which he objects. Instead, he writes of the performativity of practice and of engagement in/with the world. As such, this clearly demonstrates Thrift's position with regard to the vital influence of embodied understanding to the practice of place – ie that 'we are slap bang in the middle of it', we are already 'co-constructing' the world as active contributors in the construction of place.<sup>378</sup>

To support his view, Thrift draws on Wittgenstein's observation that the problem lies in anticipating an answer or reasoned account, ie a rational, theoretically substantiated commentary. Instead, Wittgenstein proposes that 'the solution to the difficulty is description, *if we give it the right place in our considerations*'<sup>379</sup> and it is this assessment that underpins Thrift's request that we challenge our assumptions and, as a result, change the way we view the world and 'undo what we think of as theory'.<sup>380</sup> Grounded in the experiential landscape, a similar understanding sustains a cross-fertilisation of the corporeal and the conceptual in this research inquiry – as bodily assimilated in practice and as disseminated through a critically informed combination of analysis and description. As stated earlier in this thesis, such an approach is deemed not only appropriate but necessary in order to adequately reflect the

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<sup>377</sup> Nigel Thrift, *Steps to an ecology of place* in Massey, Allen & Sarre, *Human Geography Today* (Polity Press 1999), p296/7

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, p297

<sup>379</sup> Wittgenstein in Thrift, *Steps to an ecology of place* in Massey, Allen & Sarre, *Human Geography Today* (Polity Press 1999), p196 (my italics)

<sup>380</sup> Nigel Thrift, *Steps to an ecology of place* in Massey, Allen & Sarre, *Human Geography Today* (Polity Press 1999), p297

active dialogue, the bodily synthesis, of practice with theory in this performative research inquiry.<sup>381</sup>

Thrift proceeds to critique how 'human practices' can be reduced to 'raw material' in the categorisations of what he calls 'grand theory'<sup>382</sup> and, with recourse to Heidegger, proposes that we adopt a 'dwelling' perspective rather than a 'building' perspective.<sup>383</sup> He notes how a building perspective can reduce space and time to 'containers, over which and in which meaning is 'placed'.<sup>384</sup> In counterpoint, Thrift enlarges on a dwelling perspective as an approach that is both practical and performative<sup>385</sup> - an approach that incorporates attention to the relationship between time and place, nature and culture, the abstract and the concrete, in an acknowledgement of the world as 'complexly connected, constantly changing, and contingent'.<sup>386</sup> As we have seen, this research project similarly adopts a dwelling perspective and proposes and presents alternative visions of situated, embodied modes of dwelling and becoming founded on an understanding of the performativity of self and the affectivity of place together grounding critical analysis of 'grand' theoretical concepts.

"It comes as no surprise, then, that place is so pivotal and so hard to grasp. It comes with the weight of numerous past associations. Yet it always depends upon further works of association to activate these associations, let alone make new ones."<sup>387</sup>

The above conceptualisation aligns with my experiential understanding of situated performative practice and materialist becoming (Thrift's 'beginnings') and is a stance that supports (and substantiates) my approach, analysis and critical interpretation of the inter-relationship between a self and a place as put forward in this thesis and as demonstrated in the artworks imaged and explicated herein. I propose that we follow Thrift and accept that 'we cannot extract a representation of the world because we are slap bang in the middle of it' and instead, after Wittgenstein, consider that 'the solution to the problem is description [a question of finding the right language or medium through which to challenge existing representations of place]' and that we should, after Massey, follow Latour's injunction and 'let ourselves be affected'.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Please refer to Chapter One, in particular the second and third sections, *Subjectivity and Performative Practice* and *Echoes of Humanity – Making Meaning out of Feeling* (pp32-59), where I draw on Phelan, Wolff and Ricoeur to substantiate the adoption of a performative writing strategy in this thesis

<sup>382</sup> Nigel Thrift, *Steps to an ecology of place* in Massey, Allen & Sarre, *Human Geography Today* (Polity Press 1999), p297

<sup>383</sup> Ibid, p300 (see Chapter Four where I refer to Heidegger and critically examine dwelling in detail)

<sup>384</sup> Ibid, p301

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, p305

<sup>386</sup> Ibid, p306

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, p317

<sup>388</sup> Doreen Massey, *Landscape as a Provocation*, *Journal of Material Culture* 2006; 11; p44; see Chapter Three, Section 3.5, for reference to Massey and Latour and the affectivity of place and for a detailed examination of affect see Chapter Six and Sections 5.11 and 5.12 in Chapter Five.



In my practice I follow and adhere to such a stance and theory is not imposed on practice or on place; there are no 'webs of significance laid out' but a cross-fertilisation, a bodily synthesis of associations that underpin (and are implicitly embedded within) my work, both visual and textual. No meaning is fixed; it is in the experience of the place and/or the work that the practitioner and/or audience might find an intertwining of references that might allow expanded understandings of place to emerge, alternative figurations of place to evolve and new beginnings, or becomings, to be effected.

#### 5.12 Evidence of theory in/forming practice

The choice of terminology is not arbitrary, neither is the written form of the word 'in/form' above.

In/form: the theory embedded **in** practice; the critical **informing** of practice through theory (and vice versa); and the influence of theory in **forming** the practice/artwork.

The etymology of the verb dates back to the Latin *informare*: to fashion – the 'fashioning' of practice through theory.

Contemporary definitions include:

To impart information to; to make aware of something

To acquaint (oneself) with knowledge of a subject

To give form or character to; imbue with a quality or an essence

To be pervasive presence in; animate<sup>389</sup>

Therefore we could take the role of theory as imparting information to the practice (ie the critical analysis that underpins practical investigation); as making the practice aware of something and acquainting with knowledge of a subject (ie the theoretical background to the practice); as giving form or character to, imbuing with a quality (ie the rigour of the practice); and as being a pervasive presence in or animating (ie the underlying presence of theory in practice – implicit or pervasive critical presence).

So where (one might ask) is the 'evidence' for such interplay of theory with practice? This is the conundrum for practice-led research where in actuality the boundary between practice and theory becomes increasingly blurred in the process of carrying out embodied research; one is implicitly (even if not always explicitly) in the other, each serving to both inform and form each other in the process. **The theory, I propose, is evident in the criticality of the practice.**

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<sup>389</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/inform> (accessed 03.12.11)

Following Thrift, I recommend that we ‘undo what we think of as theory’ in order that we might address the issue of embodied practice and focus on the role of the lived together with the learned. We have already seen a blurring of the boundaries between practice and theory and the dynamic role of the body in this performative research inquiry through analysis of the extended *Communion* project and the *Of Being & Becoming*<sup>390</sup> series. Further evidence of a synthesis of the corporeal with the conceptual can be seen with regard to the installation *Neither Here nor There*.<sup>391</sup>

*Neither Here nor There* is underpinned by theoretical analysis of Miwon Kwon’s *One Place after Another* and a critical reading of Claire Doherty’s discussion of ‘the wrong place’. Kwon’s critique of contemporary site-specific practice and Doherty’s notion of a ‘wrong place’ prompted me to question my assumptions and earlier understandings of the concept of place and to reconsider my position with regard to the relationship between location and dislocation. Here, Kwon and Doherty challenged (and informed) my theoretical understanding of the relationship between location and dislocation and helped me gain a degree of objectivity, a critical distance, when analysing my own experience of (temporary) displacement on a brief visit to Budapest. This in turn assisted the progression of my research and I was able to critically re-assess my immediate reaction to the situation and, using photographic images taken whilst in Budapest, to develop this into a more considered and multi-layered response to the city. The experience of a (temporary) feeling of dislocation proved deeply affecting and this, coupled with a reading of Kwon and Doherty, was pivotal to the form and content of the final piece.

In this respect, the theoretical references indirectly pointed me toward the vital influence of not only place but time – it was less a matter of the wrong place as such that prompted a feeling of dislocation but the short time span of acquaintance, a brief visit that did not allow any more than a passing experience (and understanding) of all that I encountered whilst in Budapest. The resulting tension between theoretical understandings and lived experience, as explored and examined through the research process that both informed and formed the *Neither Here nor There* installation, challenged both my thinking and making. As a result, this research project not only deepened my critical reading of place but my embodied understanding of time – the resulting artwork, a synthesis of practice with theory.

In this respect, I propose that the practice becomes the vehicle for the abstraction of theory, the artwork the concrete embodiment/manifestation of a research practice. The *Neither Here nor There* installation piece (as well as the other artworks evidenced in this doctoral thesis) are the concrete evidence that research output, in this case the artwork, in itself demonstrates

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<sup>390</sup> See Chapter Four, Sections 4.10 and 4.11

<sup>391</sup> See Chapter Two with regard to this installation and the critical analysis that in/formed the work

evidence of MacLeod's metaphorical and performative 'see-saw'<sup>392</sup> between theory and practice. In short, the affective power of the theory and the practice together as evidenced in the hermeneutic circle (individual and public translation) of the artwork.

The located projects and the concepts explored in practice are detailed alongside each other in order that the performativity of the research process is echoed in the documentation of the thesis. As such, the progression of theoretical examination and practical analysis can be clearly evidenced and the development and adaptation of methods and methodologies reviewed (by the writer and the reader). The main conceptual threads are itemised throughout and, in this way, the key research issues can be viewed together with the practical outcome of embodied research (the artworks) and the core themes seen to reverberate across/between individual images, projects and bodies of artwork. The aim is not only to indicate the centrality and criticality of practice in this research project but to assist the reader to focus on the dynamic role of the practice as well as the artworks in this doctoral study.

“One of the delights of dialectical theory, alongside its cultivation of extremism, is that it includes within itself clear strictures about what one should do with theory ... But to be consistent, dialectical theory must imply that just theory alone, like everything else humanity produces, will always tend to become destructive and follow its own interests, oppressing rather than serving humanity ...

“Theory, philosophy, modern art, economics and other movements that utilise obscure abstractions can easily degenerate into pretentious obfuscation and become oppressive playgrounds of academic divas and elites used to intimidate as much as to impress ... It is only through the subsequent process of maturing and re-grounding theory in its application to everyday lives and languages (*ie to practice/practical application*) that such cleverness becomes transformed into understanding and re-directed to a compassionate embrace, rather than an aloof distance.”<sup>393</sup>

### 5.13 The role of the research practice in this doctoral project

It is important here to again underline the dynamic role of the expanded practice in this research project where the performativity of empirical inquiry not only informs/forms the research outcome but is, in effect, the embodiment of grounded theory. All of the photographs, the texts, associated imagery and documentation are included for a purpose – that of accurately reflecting the hybrid, reflexive, creative, critical and exploratory process of

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<sup>392</sup> Here I refer to the 'see-saw' of practice and theory as proposed by Katy MacLeod in her commentary on practice-led research in the visual arts (see Chapter One, Section 1.6) – a conceptualisation echoed in my experience of the synthesis of the corporeal with the conceptual in embodied research.

<sup>393</sup> Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Polity Press 2010), pp79/80; bracketed italics added

practice-led research. The artworks should not therefore be considered illustrations of (a) research practice but as critical explorations of conceptual understanding – as questioning, multi-layered and multi-sensory evocations resulting from an inter-twining, a synthesis, of practice with theory – ie **as (evidence of) theory critically examined in practice**.

Continual recourse to the concepts at the core of this project (ie questions around embodied experience, dwelling and becoming coupled with issues of place and time) has been imperative in order to retain the critical focus of the research practice. For example, in the *Communion* project where theoretical reading of becoming<sup>394</sup> abuts feminist critique and examination of the concept of 'home' in a quiet performance up a mountain in Scotland. As we have seen, reflexive analysis and a developed critical understanding served to expand *Communion* into an artist film where a range of media are conjoined in a collaborative project between myself (artist), a poet and a composer. As such, continued reference to the concepts informing the work served to retain the criticality of practical exploration and a sensitive approach to the conjunction of media – the theory in this instance underpinning analysis and reflection of an evolving artwork. The evidence for this can be seen in the complexity of the film which not only combines diverse media but a layered range of questions and evocations. A tool that assists in this task is haptic visuality which is used to invoke affect in the viewer.<sup>395</sup>

#### 5.14 Becoming and Affect

In the final part of this chapter, I examine becoming in relation to affect. Building on the understanding of becoming as explored and evidenced in the *Communion* project, what of affectivity/agency and how might affect link to the concept of becoming? Affectivity refers to the active and re-active power of affect; in this project, as experienced in the lived landscape (as mediated by the body and the materiality of place) and as interpreted through a creative arts practice (further mediated by interventions and the agency of objects, eg the child's chair in *Communion*). According to Deleuze & Guattari, affects can be defined as 'new ways of feeling'.<sup>396</sup> In other words, affects can be considered emotive (although not as emotions – in my understanding, affect precedes emotion although it might prompt emotion and emotive acts). Affect prompts, stirs, awakens, intensifies, throws off balance, shifts, disturbs, shocks, startles, surprises, moves – affect dislocates/translocates. Deleuze & Guattari relate affects to percepts and concepts and in counterpoint to their definition of affects as new ways of feeling, they define concepts as new ways of thinking and percepts as new ways of seeing or hearing.

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<sup>394</sup> Please refer to Chapter Five, in particular Sections 5.9 and 5.10

<sup>395</sup> For explication and detailed analysis of haptic visuality and affect see Chapter Six

<sup>396</sup> Amy Herzog (University of Rochester, USA), *Affectivity, Becoming, and the Cinematic Event*, <http://media.utu.fi/affective/Herzog.pdf> (accessed 23.09.09) – Herzog quoting Deleuze

In my understanding of Deleuze & Guattari, affect approximates to a mobilisation – of sensory energies, of interactive flows and intensities – an embodied orchestration of vibrations that offers the possibility of new figurations and relationships with the lived. Affect therefore serves as a prompt toward further interaction in human and non-human domains as well as personal and social milieux. To return to my question above, what of affectivity and how might affect link to the concept of becoming? In my experience of the phenomenological landscape, affect is translated as potential – as becoming in and through situated practice and as a vital, formative constituent of our relationship with place, to becoming *im-placed*.<sup>397</sup>

It is important to be aware that as well as the capacity of affect to disturb automatic responses, to unbalance and to surprise, to alert the individual to the unexpected or overlooked and to spontaneous possibilities (openness; becoming), affect can also serve to reinforce previously established receptive states and modes of being, to prompt stereotypical responses (reflex behaviour; closure). For instance the irrationality of affect might cause a bodily prompt that results in the adoption of a preconditioned, indoctrinated response – for example one of fear due to previous trauma or one of nausea due to disgust based on social or cultural conditioning, one of religious or racial intolerance or one of gendered discrimination. Just as the power of affect may invoke wonder and offer an opening to the possibility of becoming, it may alternatively reaffirm existing behavioural patterns.

The potential of affect to fracture normative practice and to re-alert the individual to alternative, potentially transformative, ways of being and becoming is undeniable but it is not a given. Feminist theorist Clare Hemmings cautions against such assumptions and underlines the relational, cyclic causality of affectivity in subjective, social and political domains. Such caution is echoed by cultural geographer Nigel Thrift who comments that affect can be hastily adopted and become a catch-all term which ‘omits, ignores or diminishes many of the negative and obvious links to the exercise of power’.<sup>398</sup> In other words, it should be remembered that the emotive power of affect can be harnessed and manipulated for (often dubious) political ends. It must, therefore, be understood that affect is *not* a neutral term – it has itself a broad range of registers and these ‘can be utilised to enable ability, authority, control and creativity’.<sup>399</sup> The context in which affect is interpreted, and the emphasis given, must therefore be carefully and critically read and its application clearly understood. Hemmings underlines such concerns and stresses the cyclic character of her understanding of affect as:

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<sup>397</sup> See Chapter Six for more detailed reference to affect as well as Wylie 2005 for an experiential translation of affect in the context of a coastal walk.

<sup>398</sup> See Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory* (Routledge 2008), p221-2

<sup>399</sup> Adrian Parr, Ed. *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Columbia University Press 2005), p12

“... [a] series of repeated moments ... an ongoing, incrementally altering chain – body-affect-emotion-affect body – doubling back on the body and influencing the individual’s capacity to act in the world”.<sup>400</sup>

It is in this sense, ie as ‘an ongoing, incrementally altering chain’, that the affectivity of embodied engagement in the landscape might prove to be a decisive move toward potential becoming and a route toward new understandings of the inter-relationship between a self and a place.

### 5.15 Affect and Emotion

In a project that considers affect and sensation and contains critical analysis that focuses on becoming, on the co-constituency of place and self, it would be an omission to merely mention the power of emotion in passing, to overlook the emotive impact of the landscape encounter. Might becoming and a sense of belonging be underpinned, as the quote below suggests, by that precursor to emotion, affect?

“... emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that. The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive, or gives us a dwelling place”.<sup>401</sup>

In her provocative study, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, feminist theorist Sara Ahmed links emotion and affect through the power of agency and states that ‘emotions can move through the movement or circulation of objects’ and that these ‘objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tensions’.<sup>402</sup> The power of agency, the meaning attached to inherited family ‘treasures’ or to natural objects discovered (collected and/or photographed) in the landscape, is explored and exploited in this research practice (for example the chair in *Communion*, the cutlery in *Mesa*<sup>403</sup> or the gryphaea in the *Of Being and Becoming* series<sup>404</sup>). The fact that these objects have social as well as aesthetic power, psychological implications as well as physical; that they can serve to remind, to stir the memory, and transport the collector to other places and connect with other people, other times. These same objects will hold alternative meanings for other people and evoke quite different individual memories – but that does not mean that they will not in some way translate to and for others. I conceive of such objects as ‘tangible memories’ and they are strategically employed in performative projects to invoke affect.

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<sup>400</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Invoking Affect* (Cultural Studies, Volume 19, Issue 5 Sept 2005), pp548-567

<sup>401</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press 2004), p11

<sup>402</sup> Ibid, p11

<sup>403</sup> Images from the *Mesa* series can be seen in Chapter One

<sup>404</sup> See Chapter Four for examples from this series of images

Ahmed explores how the emotions 'work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies',<sup>405</sup> examining the interface between affect and the emotions. She writes with an awareness of the way in which emotions can 'operate as blockages' but she acknowledges that their influence cannot be denied and can also 'open up lines of communication'.<sup>406</sup> It is such lines of communication that are of interest to my project but the blockages should not be ignored.<sup>407</sup> Pleasure or pain, expression or repression, affect and the emotions remain deeply implicated in our lived experience of the world.

I return to *affect* and affectivity in the next chapter when I consider the power of affect as enticement to contemplation and invocation with regard to the medium of photography. Connections between *affect* and haptic visuality in relation to affectivity *in practice* and the affectivity of *artworks* are examined and cultural geographer John Wylie's observations on affect and the experiential landscape are discussed. But firstly, I address questions raised by the use of photography in this research project and consider the co-presence of materiality and immateriality as perceived in the photographic image alongside a reading of French philosophers Jean Luc Nancy and Roland Barthes. In this context, I examine how the relationship between presence and absence in the image might relate to a lived experience of place as understood via a visual arts practice that employs photography as a primary medium.

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<sup>405</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press 2004), p1

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, p182

<sup>407</sup> See caution from Hemmings and Thrift in the previous section of this chapter (5.11)

## CHAPTER SIX: IMAGE, PLACE, BODY

### 6.0 The Function of Photography in this Practice-Led Research Project

“I am not, it says, the image *of* this or that, as if I were its substitute or copy, but I *image* this or that, I present its absence, that is, its sense. I image what is unimaginable in sense”.<sup>408</sup>

This chapter is divided into three sections and considers the critical and practical function of photography in my research project. It raises issues of the photographic image (in particular the tension between presence and absence) and examines the relationship between the event/advent of place and the event/advent of image.<sup>409</sup> Based on a phenomenological methodology, the first section – *Significant Surfaces* – builds on an awareness of presence *with* absence in the experiential landscape, as understood through my embodied practice and the photographic image. This understanding is informed by a reading of *The Ground of the Image* by Jean Luc Nancy. The second section *Evocation: Temporal Rupture and the Photographic Image* continues to explore the co-incidence of presence *with* absence and considers the centrality of the temporal as reflected in the medium of photography through the observations of Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. I follow his investigation into the ‘genius’<sup>410</sup> of the photographic image and examine his conception of the *studium* and the *punctum*. This examination is again grounded in my experience of the experiential landscape and in my visual arts practice. The third section *Affect and the Haptic: The Event of Place, the Advent of Image* further develops my argument by returning to the concept of affect and, drawing on this, critically examines *haptic visuality* which, I propose, can be strategically employed to invoke affect in the viewer whilst simultaneously heightening critical reflexivity in the maker.

Through these three sections, I investigate the relationship between the theoretical enquiries outlined above, the phenomenological landscape and the photographic image. This is in turn related to my practice and includes a discussion of how each aspect of my praxis as a whole serves to inform, influence and develop the investigation – deepening my perception of the experiential whilst simultaneously prompting critical reflexivity via an articulation of place in practice. The artworks of Roni Horn and Tacita Dean are discussed and, in personal practice,

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<sup>408</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press 2005), p70

<sup>409</sup> Here I am drawing on Luce Irigaray (Irigaray 2004, p30) who writes of a proximity in event and advent; ‘something arrives which did not exist ...’ (advent) ‘that the bringing together of two worlds produces’ (event) – in this instance the event/advent of place and image.

<sup>410</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Vintage 2000), p3



strategic use of an understanding of haptic visuality is evidenced via examples of photographs from the *In Recognition*, the *Atmosphere* and the *Visible and Void* series. To reiterate, this chapter is a detailed examination of the photographic image through the staging of a dialogue between practice and theory as reflected in the particular strategies employed by this practice-led research project.

## 6.1 Significant Surfaces

In this section, the communication between place and image is explored via examination of the work of Roni Horn and, in my practice, the *In Recognition* series. The resulting understanding is interpreted and evidenced in works presented here and in the accompanying critical texts. My argument rests on recognition of the confluence of corporeal and conceptual understandings and of the material/immaterial range of perception as understood through lived experience and as reflected in the surface of a photograph.

In order to underline such an exchange between perceptual registers, the format of a reciprocal dialogue between imagery is adopted in re-presentation as a means of eschewing linear reading in favour of more fluid engagement that mediates between evocation, reception and interpretation. In adopting this structure when exhibiting works in installation (where groups of loosely associated photographs are presented alongside one another so that a multiplicity of possible readings – on formal, intuited, imagined and conceptual levels – are suggested), the aim is to ensure that neither place nor image become contained within, and therefore limited to, any singular understanding. This format is an attempt to approximate a *re-membering* of the experience of place by echoing the processes of a practice that draws from cultural theories as well as embodied engagement in the landscape.

## 6.2 Strategic Use of Resemblance in the Photographs of Roni Horn

In her extended and extensive series of photographic images, the American artist Roni Horn uses paired images of almost identical photographs to powerful effect. In her photographic installations, for example *You Are the Weather*<sup>411</sup>, she draws on the power of resemblance to invite viewers into her work. Horn cites a painting of two nearly identical women with two equally similar babies, *The Cholmondeley Ladies*<sup>412</sup> as a founding influence on her work:

“It is like standing at the edge of infinity, where everything begins but has no end. Just the psychology of it is stunning. This is not about resemblance, it is about identity, because the differences are so minimal. But the more perceptible

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<sup>411</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.4, for detailed reference to this work

<sup>412</sup> *The Cholmondeley Ladies*, 17<sup>th</sup> century British school, c.1600-1610, Tate Britain – from Roni Horn quoted in Tate Etc, Issue 10, Summer 2007, p67.

differences are in the inanimate, in the clothing and the setting. It's the duplication of the setting, the framing of this portrait, that makes it so captivating.

"There's so much pathology in that duplication, I cannot accept them as the same ... I look constantly for the differences, and I see them too. To me that is just talking about the impossibility of pure identity ..."<sup>413</sup>

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*The Cholmondeley Ladies* (c1600-1610)

Although Horn refutes that the painting is about resemblance, is it not the resemblance that underlines the individuality of each of the *Cholmondeley Ladies* and the infants? Is it not the almost imperceptible differences that draw attention to and confirm the identity of each? Perhaps, therefore, it is the resemblance that effects the affirmation of individual identity within each image or component of image? Horn states that it is the duplication within the image that makes the image so 'captivating', that it is this resemblance that invites further inspection. I would suggest that it is the oscillation between similarity and difference, between duplication and specificity that so attracts and, importantly, also serves to affirm the identity of each of the sisters.

Perhaps it is this same quality of resemblance, one that entices yet withholds that is also communicated between image and receiver as being about identity? Might it be this

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<sup>413</sup> *The Cholmondeley Ladies*, 17<sup>th</sup> century British school, c.1600-1610, Tate Britain – from Roni Horn quoted in Tate Etc, Issue 10, Summer 2007, p66

recognition of both individuality and sameness between the viewer and the viewed – a commonality within individuality, an inter-subjectivity within subjectivity – that affirms both personal and communal identities through resemblance? Is this the *distinct* of identity recognised when echoed through the *distinct* of the image?<sup>414</sup> And, importantly, could such an understanding be applied in practice and (re)presentation as a way of underlining the specificity, the *distinct*, of place?

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Roni Horn: *Bird* (2008)

Viewing and experiencing a virtually identical pair of images is disturbing and raises many such questions – in this project, questions that focus on place and time (and by implication memory) as well as identity. Such imagery is unsettling as it underlines the relationship but also the distance between here and now, then and there, me and you. Placing together two images that initially appear the same serves to unsettle any illusion of stability or unity and these duplicitous images raise, above all, questions related to many such deeply-rooted uncertainties. But this is not direct duplication, it is resemblance and I would propose that the highlighting of small differences in repetition of the same is ultimately much more troubling to any sense of stability or unity of identity than direct duplicity and/or reproduction of the same.

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<sup>414</sup> The *distinct* according to Jean Luc Nancy belongs to the ‘domain of forces, their affections and transmissions’; for more on the *distinct*, the *image* and *distinct oscillation*, see Section 6.3 of this chapter

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Roni Horn: from *Becoming a Landscape* (1999-2001)

One of several of Horn's works that focuses on the deliberate pairing of such imagery is *Becoming a Landscape* (1999-2001), presented in both book form (*To Place: Book VIII*) and in installation.<sup>415</sup> The work resulted from one of Horn's many visits to Iceland and contains a series of photographic images of details of the hot water holes particular to this country. These images are juxtaposed with portraits of a teenager muffled against the cold. The hot water bubbles sensuously out of the earth's crust, the teenager looks directly into the camera. The face is not exactly expressionless but there is little emotion revealed – the bubbling water approaches, the eyes recede. The power and allure of this work resides in the pairs *and* the juxtaposition of pairs. Looking closely at the photographs, the individual differences in the pairings become quite noticeable and yet simultaneously connections between the different images begin to emerge; the outline of the water holes echo the dark mystery of the eyes, the

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<sup>415</sup> Examples of other photographic pairings include *Dead Owl* (1998) and *This is Me, This is You* (1999-2000). The strategy of pairing is echoed in Horn's sculptural work, eg *Things that Happen Again for Two Rooms* (1986) and *Opposite of White* (2006-07) as well as in her works on paper, eg *Double 3.9* (1990) and *Distant Double 2.21* (1988)

overt sensuality of the bubbling fissures suggest other bodily orifices, other landscape/body openings. The sensuality of these photographs also serves to invite bodily engagement through haptic registers – evoking the experiential and speaking of a more visceral engagement with place, a relationship that encourages *becoming* landscape.<sup>416</sup>

The paired images become more distinctly themselves whilst, simultaneously, the connections between individual images multiply. Rationally such a dichotomy serves to contradict itself and yet, experientially, the oscillation between similarity and difference in the pairings and between the juxtapositions of paired images is clearly apparent and is perceptually, sensually re-cognised. It is the interaction between image and imaged and between viewer and viewed that ‘makes’ the work. Horn states that it is the ‘brief bit of time’ between the taking of the photographs when ‘difference sets in’; the seconds between frames making the difference that is ‘sometimes perceptible, sometimes not’. Horn says that it is ‘that twitch of time’ that allows the viewer to enter the work.<sup>417</sup>

“The viewer is teased into the view. This is the point where something becomes too complex or too elusive to be itself only. Landscape resides somewhere in this space”.<sup>418</sup>

In this research project, the temporal is underlined and temporal perception considered vital to an integrated understanding of landscape *and* identity as process; our awareness of time heightened via temporal ‘twitches’ prompting reflection on the possibility of the becoming of self *and* of place, the becoming of self in place. Such considerations are reflected in Horn’s work as underlined in the title of this particular work – *Becoming a Landscape* – the process of landscape *and* the process of becoming both resonant in the temporal rupture, however short, as echoed in the presentation of the pairings and the other juxtapositions in this series of diptychs. The becoming of the work, as Horn herself suggests, made between viewer and viewed.

### 6.3 The Image, the Distinct and Distinct Oscillation

As a visual artist engaged with issues of place, I am always striving for suitable methods through which to appropriately and adequately re-present the experiential and, using photography as a primary tool, I explore such possibilities through expanded series of images and installation works. Whilst being aware of the inevitable distance from the lived that an imaged response necessarily assumes, I am nevertheless attempting to create an evocation of the multi-sensory experience of place through composite photographic works that allow the

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<sup>416</sup> The haptic and haptic visuality are explored in more detail later in this chapter.

<sup>417</sup> *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn* (Tate Publishing 2009); Subject Index, p18

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid*, p18

viewer multiple entry and exit points. Informed by Jean Luc Nancy and acknowledging the *distinct oscillation*<sup>419</sup> of the experiential and the image, I aim to permit a variety of hermeneutic routes around artworks/projects presented.

In his book *The Ground of the Image*, Nancy explores the concept of *distinct oscillation* and, in order to do so, identifies the *image*, the *distinct* and *distinct oscillation* as follows:

#### 1 the *image*:

- The image is *not* 'an identification photo' nor a 'descriptive record'.<sup>420</sup>
- 'It is therefore not a representation: it is an imprint of the intimacy of its passion (of its motion, its agitation, its tension, its passivity) ... the stroke that marks the surface'.<sup>421</sup>
- 'The image, clear and distinct, is something obvious and evident. It is the obviousness of the distinct, its very distinction ... The image must touch on the invisible presence of the distinct, on the distinction of its presence'.<sup>422</sup>
- 'the image ... is given in an opening that indissociably forms its presence and its separation'.<sup>423</sup>

In the context of this thesis, I would summarise Nancy's observations as follows: The *image* should not be understood as a representation of the imaged but translated instead as an 'opening' – an 'imprint' of the intimacy and intensity of the imaged. It might therefore be deduced that the potency (and meaning) of the image lies in the potential of its 'opening' – as described by Nancy, evoking the 'invisible presence of the distinct' through the 'stroke that marks the surface'.

#### 2 the *distinct*:

- 'The distinct is visible (*via the image*) ... because it does not belong to the domain of objects, their perception and their use, but to that of forces, their affections and transmissions'.<sup>424</sup>
- 'The distinct *distinguishes itself*: it sets itself apart and at a distance, it therefore marks this separation and thus causes it to be remarked – *it becomes remarkable*, noticeable and marked as such. It also, therefore, attracts attention: in its withdrawal and from out of this withdrawal, it is an *attraction* and a *drawing* toward itself'.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press 2005), pp63-79

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, p4

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, p7

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, p12

<sup>423</sup> Ibid, p3

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, p12; bracketed italics added

<sup>425</sup> Ibid, p6

In the present context, I would summarize the above as follows: The *distinct* of the image understood as the intangible remains of a distinct presence, 'visible' via the image but held apart. The *distinct* image therefore, following Nancy, at once both entices and holds at a distance as it bears witness to the presence of absence – a dichotomy as might be evidenced in Roni Horns's *Becoming a Landscape*; the images holding the viewer at a distance in their distinct individuality even as the connections between them become apparent and invite attention. The *distinct* of the image as the force of *affect* – between presence and absence, attraction and withdrawal.

### 3 *distinct oscillation*:

- Nancy defines oscillate as 'the diminutive form of the Latin *os*, which signifies the mouth and, by metonymy, the face. *Oscillum* thus designated a small mouth ... as well as a small mask of Bacchus hung in the vines as a scarecrow: the movement of this face swinging in the wind produced the sense of 'oscillation'.<sup>426</sup>
- 'The Oscillator, then, swings between mouth and face, between speech and vision, between the emission of sense and the reception of form'.<sup>427</sup>

It is this sense of the chiasmic in *distinct oscillation* (understood as the reciprocal interchangeability of positions as personified in the vision of a mask swinging in the wind) that personal research explores in practice. It is the *oscillation* between the experience of landscape and the reception of image – between experience, understanding and articulation (one that carries over to *distinct oscillation* as evidenced in the image) – that is pertinent to my enquiry. And, building on this understanding, the relationship between binary polarisations, for example presence and absence as reflected in the concept of *distinct oscillation*, evidenced and stressed in my project through the medium of photography.

*Oscillation*, as a term and concept, is used in this context to describe (i) the relationship of attraction and withdrawal in the image, (ii) the interface of exterior and interior landscapes, (iii) a perception of absence with presence, (iv) the interaction between artworks presented and an embodied experience of place, and (v) the relationship between image and viewer. The concept of *oscillation* builds on the paradox of binaries and the tension between polarised positions – a tension that, I believe, can be instructive and used as a provocative probe in practice.

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<sup>426</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press 2005), p73; the important point here taken to be the notion of 'swinging in the wind' and the turning of the face, showing alternately the front and back of the head at the mercy of the fluctuating power of the wind; the face oscillating between looking out/looking at and looking in/looking away. It is such a notion of alternation that I am exploring when using the term 'oscillate'.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, p73

“Notice, however, that by drawing sense out of absence, by making *absence* a *presence*, the image does not do away with the impalpable nature of absence. On the contrary, it is occupied solely with the immaterial, and that is what it *images ...*”.<sup>428</sup>

This project is concerned with the immaterial materiality of the image that, following Nancy, presents absence with presence by ‘drawing sense out of absence, by making *absence* a *presence*’ – an *oscillation* between surface and content (the surface both holding and withholding content) experienced as a contemporaneous attraction and withdrawal. To summarise Nancy’s observations on *distinct oscillation* as understood through practice-led research:

- the *oscillation* between absence and presence in the phenomenological landscape (reflecting the inherent temporality, the process, of place);
- the *oscillation* between the experiential and the artwork (between presence and absence in the lived and the imaged);
- a *distinct oscillation* in the image which presents absence as presence in the imaged; *and*
- a paradoxical attraction and withdrawal (of the surface) of the image itself.

#### 6.4 Absence and Presence, Similarity and Difference

As Nancy develops his understanding of the *distinct* of the image, he connects it to resemblance and states:

“Its distinction is the dissimilarity that inhabits resemblance, that agitates it and troubles it ... The absence of the imaged subject is nothing other than an intense presence, receding into itself, gathering itself together in its intensity.

Resemblance gathers together in force and gathers itself as a force of the same – the same differing in itself from itself ... We touch on the same and on this power that affirms this ... we touch on the intensity of this withdrawal or this excess”.<sup>429</sup>

Nancy notes that it is the resemblance of the image to the thing, it’s ‘sameness’ that unsettles the viewer and serves to intensify the power of the image and depicts a recognition prompted by resemblance that opens the image even as it withdraws.<sup>430</sup> Is this a recognition that might be strategically evoked in my practice to produce a similar perceptual shift and, consequently, a re-consideration and questioning of the imaged?

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<sup>428</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press 2005), p67

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, p9

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, p8



Building on the observations and artworks of Roni Horn as outlined earlier, I propose that this 'sameness' of resemblance, and the tension it creates, might indeed be utilised in practice as an enticement to contemplation of the image/imaged. 'Sameness' used as a means of unsettling the imagery, of encouraging further consideration of content and meaning as filtered by the viewer's own experience of the world. Such an understanding of the power of affect to invoke animates this research project. This is a call to be enchanted as I have been enchanted – but intensified through *distinct oscillation* (and heightened in juxtaposition and installation) thus serving to advance affectivity in the viewer and increase potential inter-subjectivity of readership (ie from artist intention to audience reception).

#### 6.5 In Practice: the *In Recognition* series

In my research, the *Daily* series reflects Horn's concerns with resemblance.<sup>431</sup> Building on analysis of this project and informed by the theoretical concepts of Nancy and the installations of Horn, I employ a parallel strategy when consciously juxtaposing images or considering installation works.

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*In Recognition* series (2008)

Although following a similar tactic to Horn, there are immediate and important differences in the juxtaposition of imagery. As can be seen, in this series I do not use near-identical images in my work but pair photographs that share other qualities (optical and haptic). Images brought together to prompt alternative connections and suggest other meanings; photographs that together contain echoes of the happenstance multiplicity of place. The pairs of images in

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<sup>431</sup> See Chapter Three for examples from the *Daily* series

the *In Recognition* series are abutted (unlike Horn, there is no white space dividing the images) so that at first glance the image may appear as comprising only one individual photograph as formal visual references bleed into one another. This is intentional, an invitation to closer inspection.

When pairing images, attention is given to tensions emerging due to small differences and/or similarities in form or content which can be underlined and utilised to create an *oscillation* between different manifestations of place. Strategic pairing and juxtaposition of imagery can serve to underline echoes between now and then/here and there, and to emphasise the relationship between materiality and immateriality, between presence and absence – what is seen, what is intimated, what is sensed. By highlighting spatio-temporal disjunctions, my aim is to entice the viewer, to prompt enquiry and to open up the possibility of alternative readings of the image/s. It is this *oscillation* between the seen and the sensed that, as Horn's work suggests (albeit with a different inflection), reaffirms the identity, the *distinct*, of the image just as Nancy proposes in his recognition of a resemblance that gathers 'itself together in its intensity'.<sup>432</sup> He states:

"This presence is a sacred intimacy that a fragment of matter gives to be taken in and absorbed. It is a real presence because it is a contagious presence, participating and participated, communicating and communicated in the distinction of its intimacy".<sup>433</sup>

Understandings gleaned from Nancy have proved instructive to practice and presentation. In this context, it is not just the unsettling attraction and withdrawal of individual images to which attention *is* paid but the fact that this oscillation can be creatively extended out of the frame of each photograph so that further connections can be made between images and added layers of meaning suggested. Through sensitive juxtaposition of imagery in diptych, triptych and/or installation form, perceptual gaps can emerge between photographs to create partial narratives, thus allowing space for reflection and contemplation between individual images as well as within the work as a whole. Further recognition by the viewer may then result as alternative connections are prompted and the subjectivity of the imagery becomes effectively extended beyond what is immediately visible toward an inter-subjectivity of receivership.

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<sup>432</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press 2005), p9

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid*, p11

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*In Recognition series (2008)*

## 6.6 Into the Experiential Landscape of Practice; a Walking Meditation with Nancy

Returning to the context of landscape and an experience of place, Nancy states:

“The landscape begins with a notion, however vague or confused, of distancing and a loss of sight, for both the physical eye and the eye of the mind”.<sup>434</sup>

What is Nancy implying, what does he mean when he says that landscape *begins* with a notion of distancing and loss of sight? Is he referring to landscape as embodied experience or as cultural construct, as imaged? Or might he be alluding to both, the experiential *and* the constructed? And, most importantly in the present context, how is this statement related to the photographic image?

Landscape as mediated via the body is an intensely physical and multi-sensory experience constituting sight but also sound *and* smell as well as taste *and* touch. And yet, as the body is pulled together in attention to the immediate materiality of the present, the in-passing moment of the experiential, there are perceptual echoes – traces of other times, of other people and places. As geographer Delores Hayden observes, place assaults ‘all ways of knowing (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste)’ and, as such, (place) becomes ‘powerful as a source of memory, as a weave where one strand ties into another’.<sup>435</sup> There is a perceptual awakening where memory is stirred, where an awareness of absence might combine with elemental presence – where, I propose, a distancing and loss of sight oscillate with(in) an intense experience of the present.

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<sup>434</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press 2005), p53 – see also journal extract in Section 6.7

<sup>435</sup> Delores Hayden quoted in Tim Cresswell, *Place* (Blackwell 2004), p85/6

Landscape as cultural construct and/or artefact is of course already at a distance, the physical materiality of the surrounding environment is already effectively removed or lost from sight. The ambiguity of this extract is key to underlining and understanding Nancy's concept of *distinct oscillation* – the hovering tension between presence and absence in the imaged as well as in the phenomenological landscape. This is a concept explored in practice – *distinct oscillation* as a concept resonating with underlying research concerns and with performative engagement in the landscape and located practical projects (as reflected in artworks presented here). *Distinct oscillation* is a concept confirmed in experiential understanding and a concept that serves to underline as well as inform subsequent articulations of place – *distinct oscillation* as (already) between presence and absence, as always 'just out of reach'. Location, dislocation, translocation.

Field Note

Three walks in the south-west of England:  
thoughts revolving around repetition and familiarity,  
belonging or not belonging, the heimlich and the unheimlich.  
Asking myself again and again why these three places affect me in such different ways,  
I am prompted to consider the temporal;  
what is the impact of the temporal to a feeling of familiarity,  
to a sense of location or dislocation?

Is it the relationship between the temporality of place  
and temporal span of visit or visits  
(regularity of acquaintance against an existing sense of familiarity and belonging)  
that is key to this diverse,  
and at times disturbing,  
range of affects in localised, previously visited or adjacent landscapes?

Consider ...  
Ceri's walk and the palimpsest of the Cumberland Basin;  
the evidence of past occupation and crossings, obvious layers behind the seen  
even if what remains is haunted by those yet to come  
(those who as yet unseen will one day inhabit the empty apartments,  
will come to walk through the deserted plazas, along the concrete pathways),  
there is a rationality I can understand, a series of arrivals and departures I can accept.  
Such an understanding is so very different  
to the veiled palimpsest of my walk upon Lisa's walk,  
two walks only a ridge and a valley apart.

Here there is a disturbing resemblance,  
causing slippage between the seen and the known, the observed and the imagined; between  
the tangibility and immediacy of place  
and shadows of another place, of other times.  
The divide between fact and fiction becomes decidedly blurred  
(irrational, illogical and troubling);  
a walk haunted by echoes of past experience, by the ghost of another landscape.  
A walk too close to be different but too different to be the same;  
familiar but decidedly unfamiliar.  
Familiarity breeds contempt (so it is said) and complacency or blindness to the fact.  
Three walks and two distinct experiences of absence in the present,  
yet having completely different affects;  
one tinged with nostalgia for a lost past even as the future beckons,  
the other decidedly unsettling in the present.  
I think of Freud  
but this experience is not really uncanny as in fear or dread,  
it is more a shifting, an unbalancing of the tangible,  
the elusive distinction between what I think I know and what I experience;  
a shift in perception, a temporal rupture,  
a slight edge that perhaps might tip to fear or temporary madness.  
Perhaps this is after all what Freud alludes to in his essay on the uncanny,  
perhaps this is what inhabits the examples he gives;  
is this the *uncanny landscape* as described by Nancy?

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*Atmosphere series* (2009)

## 6.7 The Uncanny Landscape

Journal extract, a draft text generated by a collaboration exercised through three walks. The following is my part in a cross-disciplinary conversation:

As discussed earlier, Nancy states that ‘the landscape begins with a notion ... of distancing and loss of sight, for both the physical eye and the eye of mind’<sup>436</sup> - but what of my experience of the two overlaid walks? The habitual and comforting acceptance of familiar landscapes, the sense of belonging that ensues from landscapes that are experienced as intimate, as intensely proximate – but what happens when habitual awareness is altered, when the familiar is no longer familiar? What happens when the relationship between the near and the far, between distance and proximity, is troubled – when the landscape no longer holds together? What happens when we are placed ‘not before it but within it’?<sup>437</sup>

Questions and more questions; uncertainties are fertile ground for an artist. Might this consideration be instructive for my practice, might such disturbance of the habitual be incorporated into the aesthetics of my work? How might this experience be translated and employed as a creative tool – a jolt to the familiar through the work, an unsettling of assumptions, a further prompt to inter-subjectivity of receivership; quite possibly, but how?

A clue from Freud, explained in a scene he frames of an author who ‘pretends to move in the world of common reality’ but instead goes beyond by including ‘events that never or very rarely happen in fact’, deceiving by promising to give the ‘sober truth’ but ‘after all overstepping it’.<sup>438</sup> And through such with-holding of definitive information, Freud illustrates how the author (artist) might heighten disturbance in the reader (viewer). Freud’s textual observation suggests how disjunction in the imaged might be intensified by strategic means (via selective juxtaposition) - effectively via a questioning of identity between the seen and the known; a wound to the identity of the familiar and to (assumed) knowledge of place and/or self.

Such might be the role of the participant observer who both experiences *and* witnesses; re-cognising the unfamiliar in the familiar, the absent in the present. Such might be the role of the attentive practitioner employing the medium of photography with awareness, with a degree of ‘artifice and spontaneity’.<sup>439</sup> When the maker is interested in placing the

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<sup>436</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham Uni Press 2005), p53

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid*, p59

<sup>438</sup> <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/uncanny.html> (accessed 19.12.09)

<sup>439</sup> Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton University Press 2001), p10

viewer 'not before but within' the imaged, when what is of concern is the 'presentation of a given absence of presence',<sup>440</sup> what might be gleaned from my experience of Lisa's walk; from the shift in perceptual understanding resulting from this walk in disturbingly familiar territory? From the sediment of the lived and the learned - from knowledge gained from a reading of Freud and Nancy *and* from lived experience?

As Freud concludes from his etymological probing:

"... *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*. Let us bear this discovery in mind, though we cannot yet rightly understand it ...".<sup>441</sup>

## 6.8 Place and Time: The Role of Photography in my Research

Nancy reflects such concerns when he writes:

"For this suspension is always a question of a passage or a passing on. A landscape is always a landscape of time ... the present of representation can do nothing other than render infinitely sensible the passing of time, the fleeting instability of what is shown".<sup>442</sup>

The above underlines the connection between landscape and time as echoed in this research project and explored through the twin themes of presence and absence (as evidenced on the two overlaid walks outlined here). This quote reflects a vital component of my practice as well as my experience of place (as mediated by the body) and underlines the choice of photography as a primary vehicle through which to explore the phenomenological landscape in practice. The rationale behind the decision being due to the characteristic ability of the medium to *capture* time and to question the divide between fact and fiction, between presence and absence, between the physical, psychological and the imaged. The photographic image 'does not simply depict truth or reality' but 'it isolates it, causing the viewer to question what is truth or fiction'.<sup>443</sup>

As such, a photographic image evidences a suspension of passage and yet simultaneously, and reflecting Nancy's consideration of *distinct oscillation*, evokes other times linking it with

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<sup>440</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press 2005), p59

<sup>441</sup> <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/uncanny.html> (accessed 19.12.09)

<sup>442</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press 2005), p61

<sup>443</sup> *Earth; Art of a Changing World*, p52 – commentary on the work of photographer Thomas Ruff.

other people and other places through memory as well as imagination – a suggestion that might be heightened by careful alliance with other images in presentation. The in-passing moment that is frozen in the photographic image containing echoes of the past, the present and possible futures. As previously stated, time cannot be halted but it is not necessarily experienced as linear and it does not need to be suggested, presented or read as linear. Photography, as employed in this research practice, considered as appropriate to the task of suggesting the event and advent of place and image.

“On the surface an intelligible lie; underneath the unintelligible truth”<sup>444</sup>

#### 6.9 In Practice: Time and Place in the *In Recognition* series

This body of work crosses time and place; photographic images from Mull and Gloucestershire bringing together different seasons, different times of day, different walks, different encounters and different locations. As seen earlier in this chapter, these images are strategically paired to evoke further intimations of other times and other places; times and places that the viewer might be reminded of, times and places that might hold significance for others.

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*In Recognition* series (2008) – Gloucestershire

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<sup>444</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (Harper & Row 1995), p60



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*In Recognition series (2008) – Mull*

The images are presented in pairs, each pair containing two photographs that depict either encounters on Mull or in Gloucestershire, and the pairs grouped so that the places are positioned beside and among one another. These images are intentionally paired and positioned so that together they intimate connections (actual or imagined) between Mull and Gloucestershire in such a way that evocations of other journeys and associations between other places might be brought to mind in the audience. In installation, the imagery tells a story but it is incomplete, temporally fragmented and visually fractured, so that no one complete narrative can be found. Snapshots, memories, passing moments caught on camera, tangibly close but altogether some where and some when else. Informed by the conceptualisations of Nancy and the artworks of Roni Horn, such is the rationale and the creative ambition of this body of work.

Redacted due to copyright



*In Recognition series (2008) – Mull and Gloucestershire*

Nancy has given us a complex deconstruction of the image, one I have subsequently related to a phenomenological understanding of landscape, to the strategic employment of the medium of photography *and* to the photographic image itself – as evidenced in the series of images included here. In the next section of this chapter, Roland Barthes provides a rich and thought-provoking evocation of the power of the photograph to touch or ‘wound’ the receiver.<sup>445</sup> Barthes gives examples of images he finds meaningful and empathic; images that serve to unsettle linear time, crossing and re-crossing the divide between presence and absence, subject and object, here and there, now and then. Building on Barthes’ evocative analysis of photographic imagery, I examine how this analysis translates through an embodied exploration of place and demonstrate how these concepts are applied in my practice with, importantly, visual examples of how such theoretical understandings are evidenced in my photographic works.

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<sup>445</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Vintage 2000), p27

## 6.10 Evocation, Temporal Rupture and the Photographic Image

“Such is the photograph: it cannot say what it lets us see.”<sup>446</sup>

“I collected in a last thought the images which had “pricked” me ... In each of them, inescapably, I passed beyond the unreality of the thing represented, I entered crazily into the spectacle, into the image ...”<sup>447</sup>

In a chapter that critically analyses the photographic image in practice and in theory, the contribution of Roland Barthes on the co-incidence of presence and absence is particularly relevant. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes examines a variety of diverse photographic imagery and questions what it might be that makes some individual photographs especially meaningful. Barthes describes the ‘attraction’ of certain photographic images as akin to ‘an internal agitation, an excitement, a certain labour too, the pressure of the unspeakable which wants to be spoken’.<sup>448</sup> Thus he begins to explain the ‘magic’ of specific photographs as he understands them. Barthes does not give a strict ‘reading’ of the images but an unassimilated recognition of a complex mixture of affects, an amalgam of emotions and perceptions. Such a reading might be similar to Peirce’s notion of abduction, an informed, reasoned and logical but finally unsubstantiated ‘guess’, a hunch or a wager. What Barthes describes is a combination of intuitive recognition (the recognised but previously unthought) and an uneasy lack of any adequate logical means through which to explain this new understanding.

He states that there is one thing of which he is clear and writes that ‘whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible; it is not it that we see’.<sup>449</sup> By this I understand Barthes to mean that it is the affect of the image that stirs him and not directly the image itself – that the power of the content lies elsewhere, resides in the receiver and not the photograph or its content (although it is undoubtedly these that have generated the affectivity in the first instance). He characterises such a feeling as one of ‘animation’ and he writes: “The photograph itself is in no way animated ... but it animates me”.<sup>450</sup> Such is my aim and if in my research studies I produce photographic images that ‘animate’ the viewer, that capture the attention as successfully as those that Barthes describes, that touch and create new meaning in myself and/or others, then I consider the work of value – whether as an image to present for exhibition purposes or as a research tool to be further developed in subsequent works.

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<sup>446</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Vintage 2000), p100

<sup>447</sup> Ibid, p116/7

<sup>448</sup> Ibid, p19

<sup>449</sup> Ibid, p6

<sup>450</sup> Ibid, p20

## 6.11 The Winter Garden photograph

Shortly after the death of his mother, Barthes searches through a series of photographs looking for her 'essence'. He tells of his search for an image that contains something of his mother, stating that at first he 'never recognised her except in fragments', that he missed her 'being'.<sup>451</sup> Eventually he does find a photograph in which he locates something he recognises as his mother – but not where or how he might have expected. He finds her in an image of a young girl standing in the park with her brother. Such re-cognition startles him and as he studies the Winter Garden photograph, he begins to examine the connections between what he is seeing and what he is feeling in an attempt to understand what it might be about this singular image that so powerfully and involuntarily arrests him.

"I studied the little girl and at last rediscovered my mother. The distinctness of her face, the naïve attitude of her hands, the place she had docilely taken without either showing or hiding herself, and finally her expression, which distinguished her ... the assertion of a gentleness. In this little girl's image I saw the kindness which had formed her being immediately and forever".<sup>452</sup>

'The *distinctness* of her face' Barthes writes.<sup>453</sup> He continues to describe other photographs that affect him – for example photographs of objects on his mother's dressing table that produce powerful multi-sensory associations; he can hear the sound of the lid closing on her ivory powder box, can smell the perfume of her powder.<sup>454</sup> Memories evoked by images of objects symptomatic of his mother; where the photograph arouses the senses and prompts thoughts of other times, where what is invoked (in the example above a sound or smell) is not itself (visibly) present in the image. Quite the reverse, the sense evoked is palpably absent. The object in the photograph becomes the subject of the image – the memory of another place and another time, and the distinct absence of his mother in the present. In his description of the Winter Garden photograph, Barthes illustrates the intensity, the power and subjectivity of affect by underlining the paradoxical co-existence of presence with absence in the image. Barthes chooses not to reproduce this photograph in *Camera Lucida*, although there are many other images in the book, explaining that although it might arouse our cultural or historical interest, our *studium*, this particular image would for us have no *punctum*, 'no wound'.<sup>455</sup> A deliberate, and telling, choice.

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<sup>451</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Vintage 2000), p65/6

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, p69

<sup>453</sup> Emphasis added in order to underline the terminology – as echoed in Nancy's concept of the *distinct* of the image.

<sup>454</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Vintage 2000), p64/5

<sup>455</sup> Ibid, p73

## 6.12 *Studium and Punctum*

Barthes identifies two convergent qualities within photographic images that together 'animate' him. These he terms the *studium* and the *punctum*. The first, the *studium*, he identifies as one that arouses interest in him through the content of the image (whether to his taste or not) and his subsequent engagement with the 'photographer's intentions'. But, he writes, it is 'always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture (from which *studium* arrives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers'.<sup>456</sup> The second quality Barthes terms the *punctum*, which he observes interrupts the *studium*. *Punctum* is Latin in origin and means to wound, prick or mark with a sharp instrument. It also refers to punctuation as well as to a sting, speck, cut or little hole, or to a cast of the dice. In Barthes words: "A photographer's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)".<sup>457</sup> He observes that the *punctum* also accommodates a 'certain latency' that carries forward even when the photograph is no longer visible to the eye.<sup>458</sup> The stirring of memories or emotions brought to the surface perhaps?

Field Note

Today I found my *punctum*;  
scrambling on the boulder-strewn foreshore at Treshnish,  
stumbling at low tide over pebble beaches,  
picking my way around the shore beneath the sheer basalt cliffs,  
plunged intermittently into cold shadow  
as the rock face above cut between me and the sun.  
Here I found my punctum.

Enjoying being close to the water,  
the sound of the waves, the smell of the kelp,  
but acutely aware of a rising tide  
and the need for a route to higher ground.  
Around the next headland - no.  
Or the next - no, not here either.  
How long do I have?

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<sup>456</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Vintage 2000), p28

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, p27

<sup>458</sup> Ibid, p53

Espying a narrow cut through the cliffs,  
one appearing to reach almost to the top,  
the final rocky outcrop seemingly possible (at least from the shore);  
a possibility indeed,  
if treated with due caution and if climbed close to the left-hand rock face.

Following a sheep track at the base of the cliffs  
past the remains of a carcass,  
I am reminded of my own mortality.  
A little further and another skeletal mass;  
this time a bird,  
evidenced by the few remaining feathers  
and two distinctive claws.  
(Is this an omen I wonder,  
a thought quickly and curtly dismissed)

Here I found my *punctum* ...  
my interest, *studium*, pierced by  
the position of the body, lying immobile where fallen;  
the fractured bone of the skull, so fine, so fragile,  
the sodden, tattered feathers  
and the legs of the bird reaching out, still and stiff.

My *punctum*,  
a long, sharp, clean, shining silver talon;  
unbelievably long and sharp  
incredulously clean and shiny,  
alive in contradiction to the decay of flesh;  
the sharp weapon and the wound,  
the talon and the *punctum*,  
the wonder and the pathos of this stinging image.

Redacted due to copyright



*Untitled (Haunn)*, Mull 2010; (from the *Asides* collection)

The two qualities Barthes identifies are significant – the immediate attraction of the *studium* (intellectual and aesthetic interest/understanding) engaging and inviting further inspection, and the prick of the *punctum* (affect) prompting a response and adding personal meaning; touching the viewer, evoking and provoking beneath and beyond the surface of the image. Barthes states that ‘the *studium* is ultimately always coded’ but that the *punctum* is not. The arrest of the *punctum* lies elsewhere – as Barthes underlines by saying ‘what I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance’.<sup>459</sup>

Such ‘disturbance’ might be translated as unsettling, a dislocation – as reflected in the oscillation between presence and absence in individual images (as, for example, in the image above) and as heightened by juxtaposition in installation. As such, the *studium* and the *punctum* are all important to the photographer. The *studium* important if the image is to engage the observer, to invite close examination of the imaged. The *punctum* vital if the image is to reach beyond the merely engaging to penetrate the viewer, to punctuate the *studium* by metaphorically piercing the surface of image as it proceeds to pierce the rational comprehension of the viewer. The *studium*, as such, reflecting the presence of the image and

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<sup>459</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Vintage 2000), p51

the *punctum* the absence; the attraction and simultaneously the poignancy, the withdrawal, of the image: the birth and the death together of the image and the imaged.

Barthes states that it is not possible to construct any 'rule of connection between the *studium* and the *punctum*' but that it is a 'matter of co-presence'<sup>460</sup> and adds that in order to 'perceive the *punctum*, no analysis would be of any use' – although he admits that perhaps memory might be influential here. I propose that memory is not only influential but all important to understanding the *studium* and the *punctum* in that the *punctum* pierces not only the *studium* of the image but also linear time by underlining the co-incidence of absence with presence. Barthes similarly identifies the impact of the temporal in the reception of a photograph. Alongside the *punctum* as detail, he identifies another aspect of the *punctum* – not one of form but one of intensity related to time – the co-incidence of the here and now and the there and then brought together in the image. He says that what 'pricks' him is precisely this temporal 'equivalence'.<sup>461</sup>

As in Nancy's writing, we see the importance of the temporal to reception of the image and to a confluence of materiality and immateriality in perception, as understood through lived experience and as reflected in the surface of a photograph. Building on the preceding examination of Nancy and Barthes and the analysis of presence and absence as reflected in the phenomenological landscape *and* through the photographic image, the third and final section in this chapter investigates the concepts of affect and haptic visuality. As previously mentioned, a strategy employed in this project in order to alert the viewer to the *oscillation* between presence and absence in photographic imagery is awareness of *affect* together with an understanding of *haptic visuality*. I propose that an application of such understandings in practice can help prompt something of the multi-sensory – through haptic visuality, encouraging an evocation of touch or smell, of sound or taste, and invoking something of an embodied experience of place, associations and/or memories that might 'wound'. An evocation of the rich complexity of place being invoked via the imaged before the surface of the photographic image closes over again and the image withdraws back into itself.

In the next section of this chapter, affect and haptic visuality are outlined and discussed alongside an appraisal of work by Tacita Dean together with further examples of photographic imagery by Roni Horn. Cultural geographer John Wylie provides a further contextual link via a discussion of affectivity in the experiential landscape. With reference to practical application in my project, images from the *Visible and Void* series are examined and presented as evidence of active exploration of conceptual understandings – as translated through an informed and engaged practice that employs photography as a primary medium.

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<sup>460</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Vintage 2000), p42

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid*, p96



### 6.13 Affect and the Haptic: The Event of Place, the Advent of Image

“... haptic visuality invites a kind of identification in which there is a mutual dissolving of viewer and viewed, subject and object; where looking is not about power but about yielding ...”<sup>462</sup>

“By dancing from one form of sense-perception to another, the image points to its own caressing relation to the real and to the same relation between perception and the image.”<sup>463</sup>

Drawing on the Deleuzean concept of affect as introduced toward the end of the previous chapter, this section of the thesis examines the notion of *haptic visuality* alongside a photographic series I have titled *Visible and Void*. Roni Horn’s installation *Pi* (1998) and the poetic film sequences of Tacita Dean are also examined. Here the focus is on Dean’s filmic temporality and the haptic qualities of her work and, in this respect, her film *Michael Hamburger* (2007) is detailed.

With the emphasis on invoking affect through strategic use of an understanding of the haptic, the concept of haptic visuality is outlined and examined.<sup>464</sup> Using this information, I consider how haptic visuality might become a valuable tool when employed in the service of a practice-led research project that seeks to express something of an embodied experience of place. When place is understood as the physical site of multiple crossings and as location of meaning and experience (as situated focus of hybrid connections and personal attachment), how might such a complex corporeal and conceptual understanding of the lived be represented? With this question in mind, I outline cultural geographer John Wylie’s interpretation of affect in relation to the performativity of place<sup>465</sup> and examine how the haptic might be explored through (and evidenced in) practice giving examples of diptychs from the *Visible and Void* series of photographs and the above mentioned work of Horn and Dean.

### 6.14 The *Visible and Void* series

This body of work has grown out of one image. Sitting in front of my computer editing, one image amongst many stood out. Double click, image enlarged. As I inspected the photograph I shivered – an involuntary shudder; an immediate and unexpected bodily

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<sup>462</sup> Laura U Marks, *Haptic Visuality: Touching with the Eyes* in *framework* 2/2004; [http://www.framework.fi/2\\_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html](http://www.framework.fi/2_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html) (accessed 12.11.08)

<sup>463</sup> Laura U Marks, *Touch* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p20

<sup>464</sup> Haptic visuality is discussed here with reference to critical theorist/curator Laura U Marks

<sup>465</sup> John Wylie (2005), *A Single Day’s Walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path*; *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30 (2), 234-247

reaction to the slightly disturbing qualities of this image. A picture that prompted the questions: “Why such a response”? “What are the defining qualities of this image”? “What was it that prompted such total bodily engagement”? I will now respond to these questions, referencing both practical and theoretical examples and contexts.



Detail from the *Visible and Void* series (original image 2007)

The image is part of a research project which focuses on examination of visible ‘surfaces’ and transparent ‘barriers’ encountered when walking in the landscape. These surfaces/barriers are broadly translated and include reflections, windows, the effects of light (natural and artificial) and of a variety of elemental conditions. The photographs are taken at oblique angles and from awkward viewpoints – any obstacle to normative viewing that alters perspective and produces an ambiguity of depth/surface shifting the relationship between figure and ground. This project reflects theoretical concerns centred on a phenomenological methodology (issues of perception, of sensory permeability and the chiasmic), in particular the inter-relationship between interior and exterior domains (bodily and environmental, material and imaginal).

The *Visible and Void* series was generated by a reading of the philosophical writing of Vilem Flusser<sup>466</sup> who states that photographs are 'significant surfaces' and notes that it is the interaction between viewer and viewed (the photographic image) that provides space for interpretation.<sup>467</sup> He states that this represents 'a synthesis of two intentions: one manifested in the image and the other belonging to the observer'.<sup>468</sup> According to Flusser, this is 'the space of mutual significance'.<sup>469</sup> What is so enticing and fascinating about Flusser's 'significant surface' is the way it protects *and* portrays its subject. Haptic threads touch the viewer and yet, of course, the subject of the image remains held under the surface of the image – the implied materiality so densely tactile in its photographic presence that it is able to psychologically reach the viewer in its near-tangible actuality – close enough to be believed, to be physically felt despite its absence in 'the space of mutual significance'.

Further practical examination focused on both actual and virtual surfaces ie tangible surfaces, as encountered in the landscape, and surfaces in and of the medium of photography, the fragile skin of the photographic medium, the virtual albumen of the print. The main concern here being to acknowledge the materiality of place through the breaching, exploiting and exaggerating of such physical qualities through the medium of photography. Building on my study of Nancy, Barthes and Flusser, further research into affectivity and haptic visuality assisted my theoretical understanding and therefore the efficacy of such a strategy in practice. Affect and the haptic being part of an embodied experience of landscape (reflected in a phenomenological methodology) and also, importantly, both being vital ingredients of a (my) visual arts practice that actively seeks and explores alternative approaches through which to evoke the experiential and engage the senses.

Field note

Amongst the many, one catches my attention;  
in the semi-darkness I approach, intrigued.  
Examined from different angles and recorded digitally,  
a small wonder is lifted from field to camera.  
In this way, just occasionally,  
I am arrested.

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<sup>466</sup> Vilem Flusser, *Toward a Philosophy of Photography* (Reaktion Books 2007)

<sup>467</sup> This echoes the conceptualisation of Ricoeur (narrative identity, see Chapter One) and Barthes (*The Death of the Author*) regarding the relationship between reader and text. It also underpins my understanding of the relationship between artwork, maker and audience, and endorses my rationale for the adoption of a performative writing style and dialogic presentation strategy in my research.

<sup>468</sup> Vilem Flusser, *Toward a Philosophy of Photography* (Reaktion Books 2007), p8

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid*, p9

Once in a while, a tell-tale shiver runs through my body  
and I know that what I have glanced holds more than that seen.

I look again, aware that a remnant remains.

Veils of light and meaning, layers  
obscured, hidden, erased, ambiguous;  
modesty, reticence, humility,  
cloth, shroud, texture, imprint;  
low light, blinding light,  
intense attention, proximity  
and distance.

#### 6.15 In Practice: *Visible and Void* – Haptic Connections and Tensions

The *Visible and Void* series of photographs comes out of repeated visits to Mull and regular peripatetic rounds of the fields and woods of Gloucestershire. Images are selectively juxtaposed in order to imply tacit connections between memory and experience, between form and content, between here and there, now and then. In exhibition, they are presented as a series of pairs in an attempt to intensify haptic visuality, as a means of invoking affect.

There is a logic but also a tension, an ambiguity, in the alliances presented – unexpected spatial and temporal intervals, odd allegiances that seek to create a push and pull between attraction and withdrawal. This is a deliberate strategy employed to highlight the haptic; the intention being to draw attention to the surface of the image – to heighten the ‘textures’ within the imagery and to encourage multi-sensory engagement with the work. A creative device, haptic visuality is used in practice in such a way as to prompt engagement beyond the visual; an intentionally adopted route through which to suggest echoes of the phenomenological landscape. Each image stands alone, as part of a pair and as part of an extended installation. The gaps between the images create a visual pause – a space in which the viewer might consider their own connections with the imagery, reflect on their own thoughts and experiences.<sup>470</sup> Various thresholds of vision (composition, focal length etc) are employed as formal framing devices, in an attempt to encourage the viewer into the scene and to heighten the oscillation between presence and absence in the imaged – withholding the fact, up-holding the fiction of the image.

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<sup>470</sup> Initially pairs of images were directly abutted. The gap was added after critical analysis of an earlier series – the *In Recognition* series (please refer back to Section 6.9 of this chapter for visual examples)

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From the *Visible and Void* series (Mull and Gloucestershire; 2010 on-going)

#### 6.16 The haptic

“Haptic criticism is a kind of criticism that assumes a tactile relation to one’s object - touching, more than looking. The notion of the haptic is sometimes used in art to refer to a lack of visual depth, so that the eye travels on the surface of an object rather than move into illusionistic depth. I prefer to describe haptic visuality as a kind of seeing that uses the eye like an organ of touch”.<sup>471</sup>

The haptic is experienced as a tangible closeness to the materiality of the image, the perceived presence of the imaged – a visceral proximity that promotes multi-sensory engagement; that evokes smells and tastes (hitting the back of the throat), sound and touch (awareness of environment and of flesh). There is an almost obsessive attention to detail; an

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<sup>471</sup> Laura U Marks, *Haptic Visuality: Touching with the Eyes* in *framework* 2/2004; [http://www.framework.fi/2\\_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html](http://www.framework.fi/2_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html) (accessed 12.11.08)

attention that serves to disturb the surface of the image (the balance between figure and ground, subject and object), that reaches out to affect the receiver and unconsciously remind of enfleshed status. Irigaray stresses the importance of touch when considering the dominance given to sight in regard to representation and advocates that we consider instead the inter-dependence between senses. She writes:

“We regress and we progress, way beyond all sense of sight, from the most primitive to the subtlest realm of the tactile. Everything is given to us by means of touch, a mediation that is continually forgotten. Anything that emerges into the visible realm, the images of man and the world, remains for a while in history, but this visual birth (*une naissance*) does not fulfil all our native potentialities”.<sup>472</sup>

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From the *Visible and Void* series (Gloucestershire and Mull; 2010 on-going)

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<sup>472</sup> Irigaray quoted in Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray* (I B Tauris 2006), p63

A dictionary definition of haptic states: 'relating to the sense of touch', the word originally deriving from the Greek *haptikos* meaning 'able to touch or grasp'.<sup>473</sup> To grasp, as well as meaning to seize or take hold, means to fully comprehend and/or having the capacity to understand something.<sup>474</sup>

The verb to touch: defined as 'to come into or be in contact with', to bring a part of the body into contact with, as well as to 'produce feelings'.

The noun touch: translated as the act of touching, 'the faculty of perception through physical contact'.<sup>475</sup>

From these definitions we have a coming into bodily contact which may 'produce feelings', a 'perception through physical contact' as well as the possibility of being able to 'comprehend fully', having the capacity to 'fully' understand. This echoes my interpretation of haptic visuality in practice: an awareness of the haptic prompting close bodily contact (thereby encouraging and increasing the possibility of sensual and emotional connection with the object of contact) and encouraging full bodily comprehension (ie contemporaneous reception via somatic *and* semantic registers). This reflects my intention in (re)presentation: the application of a comprehensive tacit, as well as learned, understanding of haptic visuality as a means of closing the gap between the image/imagined and the receiver of the work through invocation of affect via the haptic.

Laura U Marks distinguishes between haptic and optical space and notes that 'haptic space relates to the image as object rather than illusionistic space for identification'.<sup>476</sup> This of course links to Flusser's 'significant surfaces'.<sup>477</sup> Marks argues that haptic space 'appeals to a perception that is embodied and material' – that the haptic celebrates 'its material significance as an object' and explores 'its abstract representational power as an image' – as such, drawing attention to the surface as well as the abstract strength of the content of the image. Marks bases her consideration on a 'phenomenological understanding of embodied spectatorship' and states that engagement with the haptic 'occurs not simply in psychic registers but in the sensorium' and 'involves thinking with your skin'. She says that this is not 'willful repression' but is 'recognising the intelligence of the perceiving body'.<sup>478</sup> It is just such a call that I am making through strategic employment of haptic visuality in practice in an attempt to reach my audience on multi-sensory, multi-cognitive registers. As such, haptic visuality as a research tool used to translate the phenomenological landscape and re-present

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<sup>473</sup> [http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m\\_en\\_gb0364330#m\\_en\\_gb0364330](http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0364330#m_en_gb0364330) (accessed 08.11.09)

<sup>474</sup> Ibid

<sup>475</sup> Ibid

<sup>476</sup> [http://www.framework.fi/2\\_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks2.html](http://www.framework.fi/2_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks2.html) (accessed 12.11.08)

<sup>477</sup> See Section 6.14 of this chapter

<sup>478</sup> Laura U Marks, *Touch* (University of Minnesota Press 2002), p18

an embodied experience where the subject/object division may become blurred (as echoed in Marks' notion of 'embodied spectatorship').

6.17 An example of Haptic Visuality: *Michael Hamburger* (2007), a film by Tacita Dean

Dean's *Michael Hamburger* was made in response to the landscapes of East Anglia and the writing of W G Sebald and is an intimate portrait of poet Michael Hamburger, a Suffolk resident and friend of Sebald. The film, which focuses on Hamburger in his house and amongst the apple trees in his orchard garden, is richly evocative and 'explores a realm somewhere between fact and fiction ...';

"Sunlight dissolves the frames of the windows, the most insubstantial of thresholds between this home, only one-room-deep, and what lies outdoors; a rainbow marks its watery geometry in the sky; and the apples age upon the ground, shrunken, and yet somehow becoming more intensely themselves".<sup>479</sup>

Redacted due to copyright



Stills from *Michael Hamburger* (2007)

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<sup>479</sup> Extract from <http://www.fvu.co.uk/projects/details/michael-hamburger/> (accessed 05.11.09)



*Michael Hamburger* was presented in the group exhibition *Waterlog* (2007/8)<sup>480</sup> in which seven artists presented work inspired by Sebald's *Rings of Saturn* and his extended walks around East Anglia. Reflecting the multiplicity of place as subjectively experienced, the works collectively shown in *Waterlog* evidenced a broad range of media and a diverse mix of representations, as might be anticipated in a group exhibition, reflecting Edward S Casey's observation when considering the density of co-incidence of people and place; 'your locus deeply influences what you perceive' and people themselves are 'dauntingly complex'.<sup>481</sup>

Dean's film *Michael Hamburger* is as much an intimate portrait of a place as it is of Hamburger; a slow observance – close and attentive, the light varying from intense sunlight to low shadow, adding to the blurring of spatio-temporal boundaries and effecting a perceptual dissolving of natural and cultural domains. This film was no exception in its individual approach to the *Waterlog* project – Dean's interpretation of place taking into account and reflecting the localised particularities of place, the influence of Sebald's writing, her sensibilities *and* those of Hamburger.

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Stills from *Michael Hamburger* (2007)

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<sup>480</sup> *Waterlog* also involved Marcus Coates, Alec Finlay, Guy Moreton, Alexander & Susan Maris and Simon Pope. *Waterlog* was conceived, developed and supported by Film & Video Umbrella, London.

<sup>481</sup> Edward S Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Indiana University Press 1993), p.xii and p304

Author Sarah Emily Miano provides a context for the work by describing Sebald's wanderings in East Anglia (his cross country walks, the fleeting visits to towns, his conversations) and observes that he simultaneously 'crosses another kind of landscape – a skein of history, memory, biography, anecdote and reverie'. She writes of a 'recurrent theme' in his musings, a form of remembering that is 'a completely random process generated by echoes, affinities and connections'.<sup>482</sup> Using Sebald's writing as a contextual base, I understand *Michael Hamburger* as woven from similar threads. Dean sensitively produces a moving portrait; a day in the life of the British poet revolving around the apple orchard Hamburger tends so lovingly, speaking of his apples as individual characters, as friends. Her merging of detail with wide-angle shots, altered perspectives and visual pauses combine to create a haptic screen that both evokes and protects her subject. As the film moves back and forth from house to orchard, the atmosphere alters and the light continually changes as interior and exterior domains merge to form the background to a life lived.

Journal extract: notes written on the train home from London, 02 October 2009

*Michael Hamburger*, Tate Britain

Remembered ...

The camera focuses and lingers on Hamburger's worn hands as he gently appraises and presents his apples;

a distant shot of the poet walking slowly through his orchard as seen from behind; sunlit apple leaves, the wind flicking the light across the leaves, across the frame; the same light fades the papers on Hamburger's desk, reveals the dust casing the windows, the rough wood of the apple trestles;

the rough wood and the worn skin speak to the textured russet of the apples;

he reads, smoke caught in the opaque light of the room, sounds of wind or rustling leaves break the silence

Hamburger speaks little in the course of the film, mainly of the apples and their genera, and only once looks at the camera.

We follow him as he does his daily rounds – in the house, outside in the orchard.

Always looking over his shoulder – through a window, the open door, the arch of a branch or an arm, through trembling leaves ...

details, distant shots, light, shadows, textures, tones, flesh, fruit, wood, movement, stillness, sounds from the garden, his voice, silence, breath.

Dean's film talks of the man, of the place, of the body, of humanity, of mortality

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<sup>482</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/feb/10/art.art> (accessed 06.11.09)

Through attention to detail, use of light, the pausing and lingering, the long shots coupled with close-ups, the unusual viewpoints and angles, Dean's intense observations richly evoke a sense of place. And yet this sensitive and evocative film holds traces of other places and suggests other times beyond the immediately visible. Through a series of glimpses and concentrated details, Dean creates a fractured blend of observations that invite engagement yet also retain a respectful distance and allow just enough space for inter-personal narratives to enter this intimate scene. Dean's film, through strategic and/or tacit use of haptic visuality, parallels 'echoes, affinities and connections' woven through Sebald's writing and respects his friend, the man she portrays. Jean Luc Nancy writes of the 'inconceivable depth of the image' and says of Dean's filmic work that 'meaning – if we must use the term – is given before and in the image, in the penetration that it is and to which it calls', adding that 'it is a matter of confining oneself, locating oneself in that space, of reaching its depth, of allowing oneself to be touched by it'.<sup>483</sup> To be touched by it, to be affected.

Field Note

Affect changes everything.  
The light changes and the mood alters – the wind gathers pace, sound intensifies,  
crows take flight, the air is charged, senses heighten, a smell of rain ...  
my attention is drawn to an overhanging rock, a covering of moss;  
an animal instinct for refuge.  
In the space of seconds, the atmosphere, the temperature is radically different.

A minute or two later, the tone shifts again as the clouds pass,  
the winds ease and I find myself in an altogether other place.  
Birds sing, shafts of sun illuminate the woodland floor,  
patches of spring green startle the eyes in the early morning light,  
I forget my hands are cold;  
the experiential landscape – location, dislocation, translocation.  
Senses and sensing; bodily figurations, landscape features,  
distant echoes and small details  
drawing me in.

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<sup>483</sup> Jean Luc Nancy in *Tacita Dean: Essays* (Paris-Musees and Steidl Publishers, Germany 2003)

## 6.18 The Experiential Landscape: Affect and the Haptic

In 2002, cultural geographer John Wylie spent three weeks walking a 200 mile section of the South West Coast Path with a 'particular intellectual agenda in mind' – that of critically and creatively exploring issues of the self/landscape encounter, 'orderings of subjectivity and spatiality'.<sup>484</sup> Relating just one day of the walk, Wylie discusses affect and 'haptic enfoldings'<sup>485</sup> in a rich text that incorporates a range of narrative registers – as such sharing not only my concern with exploring the inter-relationship between a self and a place but also alternative methods of dissemination. Wylie's essay has provided a useful model and although we clearly come from different disciplinary backgrounds (ie cultural geography and the visual arts), we share concerns that engage with current theoretical debates regarding embodied geographies and expressions of corporeal with conceptual understanding through a blend of description with critical analysis.

In his narration of the 'differential configurations of self and landscape emergent within the performative milieu of coastal walking', Wylie writes of 'corporealities and sensibilities' – translating affect as 'an intensity ... which exceeds, enters into, and ranges over the sensations and emotions of a subject who feels', focusing on the 'multiple patternings of affect ... into performative orderings of self and landscape'.<sup>486</sup> Here Wylie highlights the affect of the experiential as a broad range of 'sensations and emotions'. He also underlines the co-constituency of self and place in his reference to 'performative orderings of self and landscape' – in this respect, echoing the tenets of my research. Wylie writes of affect marking the 'shifting mood, tenor, colour or intensity of places and situations' and 'acting as a catalyst for corporeal practice and performance', adding that in his understanding it is via affective states that the emergent subject engages with place, where 'inside and outside, self and landscape, precipitate and fold'.<sup>487</sup> Here Wylie further stresses the self/place relationship and, as such, I share his understanding, an understanding that underpins this project and propels my practice. It is such excess of affect and blurring of boundaries (as might be evidenced in a lived encounter of landscape) with which my practice engages, a series of places and encounters re-presented via multiple hybrid images.

Wylie writes of being 'in the thick of it', in 'a close visual, tactile and sonorous relation with the earth, the ground, the mud, stinging vegetation'; his descriptive and evocative prose invokes affect and conjures images of similar encounters in my past, similar 'thick' landscape scenes felt in the present. Wylie states that affect produces and circulates 'within a non-subjective,

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<sup>484</sup> John Wylie (2005), *A Single Day's Walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path*; Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 30 (2), p234-247

<sup>485</sup> Ibid

<sup>486</sup> Ibid

<sup>487</sup> Ibid

sometimes inter-subjective, relational spacing composed of moods, tones, postures and topographies' and it is in such intersubjective movement that he reaches me through his description of being 'in the thick of it'.<sup>488</sup> It is to such intersubjective densities that my practice aspires through strategic application of haptic visuality in order that something of the multi-sensory registers of the self/landscape encounter are invoked in others, in viewers; so that the eyes may touch, may feel the imaged and make their own journeys, create their own meanings. As Wylie reminds us, 'to be 'in' the landscape is also to be up against it'<sup>489</sup> and it is this physicality of being 'up against' the landscape that concerns me; literally to bring the viewer up against the material content of the image through tactile qualities caught on camera and re-presented as photographic installations.

#### 6.19 In Practice: Haptic Visuality and Installation

Haptic visuality echoes the phenomenological methodology of this project – the perceptual tangibility of the image reflecting the affectivity of the experiential landscape (or at least evoking the lived and, by so doing, stirring bodily memory through the senses). Such evocation recalls a kind of loss, reveals a passing and the absence of presence in the imaged, and, in so doing, I suggest aids the elicitation of an emotive or visceral response from a receptive viewer.

Redacted due to copyright



From the *Visible and Void* series (2010 on-going)

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<sup>488</sup> John Wylie (2005), *A Single Day's Walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path*; Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 30 (2), p234-247

<sup>489</sup> Ibid

The choice of still photography for this project and subsequent juxtaposition in installation is deliberate (and echoed in other series) and is intended as a means to implicate the viewer in my work – to invite receptive participation by presenting a broken narrative which might allow viewers to make their own personal connections in the spaces between the images presented. My choice echoes the non-linear temporality of the work – implicit and explicit – which requires a format that permits an approach which encourages a multiplicity of readings. My aim here is to foster a gradual distillation of layers of meaning prompted by strategic juxtaposition of imagery, sensitive installation and the enticement of haptic visuality.

Due to the composite structure of the work, and the non-linear temporality of the content, the imagery can be joined at any point when in installation format, further encouraging the audience to create their own intimate stories as they consider possible connections between the individual images that together form the whole. A basic assumption here is that the mobility of the spectator assists in this intention and is an important part of the inter-action between viewer and viewed. In installation, viewers must mobilise themselves in order to view the work with the possibility of moving back and forth, of viewing and reviewing. Such movement across and between images might activate further readings and make other interpretations possible, might engage the spectator more actively in and with the content of imagery as they make their own way round the work at their own pace.

The fragmentary narrative of an installation also serves to reflect the experiential landscape when understood as an ongoing assemblage of glances and glimpses, a rich composition of multi-sensory observance unfolding in time bringing further bodily associations, imaginings and memories. An assembly of affectivity; suggestions of temporal dislocation as such intimating connections between the physical and psychological landscape – an installation of sensory enticement enhanced via an understanding of the haptic in the maker, an installation where questions might be prompted and where new connections might be made. Where meaning is not singular or defined but happens in the encounter with the place and, later, with the work through the imaged – where, in installation, meaning might be found in participation between viewer and work.

Redacted due to copyright



From the *Visible and Void* series (2010 on-going)

The importance of attention to detail is reflected in my imagery – a direct and assaulting haptic proximity that seeks to bring the sensuality and materiality of the world up close. The *Visible and Void* series strives to viscerally evoke the intensity and density of a multi-sensory encounter and, in this regard, requests a bodily response of its audience – a collection of observations that together attempt to exceed the particular individuality of each photograph. This is the rationale behind my choice of medium, the thinking behind the use of photography as well as the presentation of photographic series in the form of an installation. As artist Gabriel Orozco says: “The constellation of the world that the artist generates ... is in constant movement. The weight of each work is constantly questioned by the others”.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> *Gabriel Orozco* (Thames & Hudson 2006), p137

## 6.20 Roni Horn: An Example of Encouraging Bodily Engagement through Installation

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Roni Horn: *Pi* (1998) – detail of installation

Roni Horn's *Pi* (1998) has provided me with an important model; a series of individual and disparate photographs, with marked differences as well as similarities, exhibited together to form one collective and coherent piece.<sup>491</sup> The images in *Pi* were taken over a sixteen year period in an area of northern Iceland on or near the Arctic Circle – Horn knowing what she wanted but 'not knowing what it looked like':

"The Arctic Circle being this wonderfully invisible but momentous event that I learned about when I was a child, a little mapping device that doesn't really affect nature ... but it affects our sense of the world".<sup>492</sup>

The images themselves are diverse and include close-up and distant shots; interiors, exteriors, portraits, stuffed animals, nests, landscapes, horizons, images from the television, close ups of textures, feathers, eggs and more – all observations on and of place. Initially some of the images appear repeated, although on closer inspection are revealed as separate but near identical images of the same subject. Horn says of this mix: 'once you recognize and step into the logic of this piece, it becomes evident how everything matters'. She

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<sup>491</sup> The images that combine to make the installation *Pi* are also presented in book form as *To Place*, Volume VII: *Arctic Circles*

<sup>492</sup> *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn* (Tate Publishing 2009); Subject Index, p114



acknowledges the complexity of the work, in terms of content and in the way the viewer 'relates to it and, ultimately, puts it together'.<sup>493</sup>

Redacted due to copyright



Roni Horn: *Pi* (1998) – detail

The photographs, a mix of haptic and optical images, are all printed the same size and are intended to be hung at regular intervals across and around the four walls of a gallery in response to the (available) space – such a configuration encouraging the visitor to walk back and forth to view and review the imagery. The images are deliberately hung about six feet off the ground, above eye level, so that, as per Horn's intention, 'you literally come in onto a horizon'.<sup>494</sup> This is a metaphor reflected intermittently around the room in several of the photographs which show simply the horizon line, a meeting of sea and sky uninterrupted by rocks or boats.

Although each individual photograph can be viewed, the height of the presented images forces the visitor to stand back in order to see the relationship between photographs and, in such a way, this means that the piece as a whole becomes more apparent. Horn says that she 'wanted to prevent the viewer from focusing on each image singly, isolating and interacting with individual images out of the context of the whole'.<sup>495</sup> This is important as it actively encourages the visitor to consider the installation as a body of work and to make their own cross references and inter-connections between individual images. The viewer is further encouraged to keep moving round the images as there is no obvious start or finish to the installation. Although several images have close similarities (of content and/or format) or are repeated or reversed, there is no hierarchy and the images are carefully placed to allow

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<sup>493</sup> *Roni Horn* (Phaidon 2003), p16

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid*, p8

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid*, p9

echoes to reverberate across the room. This all helps to promote a conversation between individual photographs across the entire piece. The eyes are kept guessing and the body keeps moving back and forth in search of narrative.<sup>496</sup> Horn states:

“There is no prescribed beginning or end, and, among the images, no single motif dominates. The potential for narrative, which is implied in the nature of the imagery, never actually evolves. Thwarting the narrative is an important way to engage people’s interest”.<sup>497</sup>

Redacted due to copyright



Roni Horn: *Pi* (1998) – detail

This is an installation where other photographs in the series can be glimpsed across the room, where further comparisons and connections can be made, where tensions and contradictions may dispute other alliances, where associations between the individual images as well as between the work and the viewer are all part of an experience of the work. An installation conceived, edited, assembled and presented in such a way as to encourage a multiplicity of reception; where the work can be visited and revisited and alternative narratives imagined, where possible histories might be enfolded, where potential new readings may be found, where individual and collective might possibly overlap.

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<sup>496</sup> As we have seen, in my practice I also strategically (re)present imagery in such a way as to create partial, ‘thwarted’ narratives

<sup>497</sup> *Roni Horn* (Phaidon 2003), p9

*Pi* has proved an instructive model – the eclectic mix of images, the lack of hierarchy and the combination of haptic and optical imagery serving to encourage eye movement, drawing the viewer into some images and pushing back from others.<sup>498</sup> The body follows the eye, having to move forward to inspect individual images but then having to move back again to relate these to the others – echoing the inherent proximity and distance of the work. The coherence in diversity, what Horn terms ‘the logic of the piece’, offers no given narrative – leaving the observer to gather their own meaning, to make their own sense of the work, encouraged by repetitive threads (in this work, the horizon shots).

The rich assembly of images in *Pi* play another important role – that of reflecting the diversity of place. In this work, Horn manages to bring together a range of observations to evoke complex and, at times, unsettlingly contradictory aspects of place and yet the viewer is left with a vivid sense of the physicality of Iceland and its human and non-human residents. No location is singular, all places are made up of myriad hybrid crossings. In my experience, *Pi*, successfully intimates something of the specificity of place (here Iceland) and yet still resonates with my own experiential understanding of other places – invoking memories of personal encounters in familiar locations, such as Gloucestershire or Mull. Although *Pi* is the work and vision of one artist, I propose that this piece successfully crosses socio-cultural understanding to touch more personal and individual experiences and memories of place – such is the power and significance of Horn’s work.

All the various factors outlined above serve to make *Pi* an important model for my research project. As an example of a composite work presented in installation that evidences haptic as well as optical visuality, provides a rich translation of place and encourages bodily engagement and audience participation, *Pi* is particularly relevant to this project.

#### 6.21 The Haptic and *Smooth* Space

Given my line of argument in this chapter and my linking of affectivity with the concept of becoming in Chapter 5, it is significant that both Irigaray<sup>499</sup> and Deleuze & Guattari refer to the haptic in connection with aesthetics. Deleuze & Guattari cite the haptic within their conceptualisation of *smooth* and *striated* space;<sup>500</sup> their differential closely paralleling distinctions made by Marks in her analysis of the haptic and the optical in terms of (perceived)

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<sup>498</sup> Although an important reference in terms of the haptic and re-presentation via installation, I do not always directly follow Horn as sometimes my series contain imagery from both Wotton and Mull rather than here where Horn’s piece consists solely of images of Iceland. This is an intentional move on my part in order to draw attention to the individualities of each place but also to suggest links between the two locations.

<sup>499</sup> With reference to Irigaray, see Section 6.16

<sup>500</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum 2004), pp543-551

distance and proximity.<sup>501</sup> They write of ‘the haptic, smooth space of close vision’ and state that ‘one never sees from a distance in a space of this kind’,<sup>502</sup> noting a disturbed relationship, a dis-unity between figure and ground – an observation echoed by Marks, Nancy and Barthes.

Deleuze & Guattari’s striated space is, to the contrary, described as being that ‘of long-distance vision’ and as constituting ‘a central perspective’. They continue to expand on the concept of the smooth and the striated but the implication is that there is no clear-cut division or duality between the two but rather an oscillating ambiguity. Their primary concern is precisely this inter-action and ‘the passages or combination’ in the way ‘the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth space’.<sup>503</sup> With regard to haptic visuality, I suggest that it is the inter-relationship of haptic and optical, smooth and striated, that is vital to the reception of the image and that it is the viewer’s seeking of a point of elusive stability and meaning – Horn’s ‘thwarted’ narrative<sup>504</sup> – that prompts productive inter-action between ways of ‘seeing’ and ways of comprehending what might be ‘seen’ via other registers within or, more accurately, from the imaged. This is an understanding applied in practice.<sup>505</sup>

## 6.22 Understanding Haptic Visuality in my Practice

Drawing on Deleuze & Guattari and their notion of *smooth space*, Laura U Marks differentiates between haptic and optical vision although she underlines that she does not advocate the haptic over optical. Following Deleuze & Guattari’s expansion on the concept of the smooth and the striated and their subsequent emphasis on the inter-action between haptic and optical registers, Marks proposes that a concern with the haptic taken alongside optical awareness might serve to broaden sensual experience of artworks and awaken embodied receptivity to the seen. Marks states her intention as being ‘to stimulate a flow between the haptic and the optical that our culture is currently lacking’ and notes that ‘ancient and intercultural’ undercurrents continue ‘to inform an understanding of vision as embodied and material’.<sup>506</sup> As we have seen, this is an intention and understanding I share and, drawing on Marks as well as my critical analysis of the medium of photography via Nancy and Barthes, as an artist scholar I propose that strategic use of the haptic together with movement

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<sup>501</sup> It is worth mentioning here that although Marks draws on the concept of *smooth space* after Deleuze & Guattari in her development and consideration of haptic visuality, she states that she does not want to suggest any hierarchy of the visual ([http://www.framework.fi/2\\_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html](http://www.framework.fi/2_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html))

<sup>502</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum 2004), p544

<sup>503</sup> Ibid, p551

<sup>504</sup> See section 6.20

<sup>505</sup> As evidenced in the pairings included in this chapter and other extended works presented in installation where any coherent narrative is deliberately ‘thwarted’ in order to encourage engagement with the work as a whole and assist the possibility of inter-subjective reading

<sup>506</sup> [http://www.framework.fi/2\\_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html](http://www.framework.fi/2_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html) (accessed 12.11.08); ‘ancient and inter-cultural undercurrents’ echoed for example in Neolithic cave art or early sculptural forms

between haptic/optical registers allows creative and productive reflexivity to co-exist between immersion in and identification of the work.

My understanding of haptic visuality (as evidenced in this chapter via the *In Recognition* and *Visible and Void* series of photographs) can be summarised as:

- a research tool used to invoke affect: a means through which to photographically (re)present the phenomenological landscape;

- a route through which to emphasise the affectivity of place and to critically examine the oscillation between an experience of landscape and the reception of an image.

In this regard, haptic visuality is employed to highlight the relationship between presence and absence (in the experiential landscape and in the image) as reflected in the concept of *distinct oscillation*. This is underlined in practice through:

- the juxtaposition of images in installation (a method of encouraging interaction between haptic and optical registers): a provocative move intended to unsettle linear temporality and instead suggest an alternative relationship with time through intense awareness of presence with absence – as such echoing the phenomenology of place through the experience of the image;

- the performativity of the artwork: the combination of haptic and optical imagery encouraging embodied engagement with the work (in a receptive viewer) via sensory and emotional registers as well as critical and intellectual modes of attention.

In this respect, interactions between corporeal and conceptual understandings of the experiential landscape are echoed in artworks presented – inviting and (potentially) advancing interaction between audience and artwork thereby encouraging the possibility of multiple inter-subjective reading of the imagery.

It is the interaction between corporeal and conceptual understandings that I propose serves to encourage the retention of a receptive criticality and prompt an interplay between different modes of attention (haptic and optical, sensory and intellectual) that, in turn, assists more embodied engagement and reading of works presented. As such, my proposition would align with my aim of translating an embodied experience of place rather than simply (re)presenting (a) place as seen.

“We give up believing that meaning is formed after the fact, in our minds, and attribute power to create meaning to the interaction.”<sup>507</sup>

Redacted due to copyright



*Untitled (New Skin)*, Mull 2010  
(from the *Asides* collection)

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<sup>507</sup> [http://www.framework.fi/2\\_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html](http://www.framework.fi/2_2004/visitor/artikkelit/marks.html) (accessed 12.11.08)

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion to this thesis comprises three short sections. The first summarises the approach taken and the argument put forward in this project. It indicates the relevance of the project for practice-led projects in the visual arts generally as well as other cross-disciplinary contexts where research is conducted in the field or where theoretical implications extend beyond the desk, laboratory or studio. In particular, this section draws attention to the performative writing strategy applied in the thesis and underlines the rationale and relevance for such a move in the context of my project. Importantly, this is a move that, I suggest, can be productively applied to other practice-led research projects in the visual arts as well as within other disciplines where research is carried out in the field.

The second section is a short précis of the thesis, reminding the reader of the progression of the research through practice, the thread of the argument and the concepts explored and developed. This section also underlines the cross-disciplinary relevance of the project and the concerns it engages with and/or challenges. In this way, the second section evidences contemporary practice (via examples of significant artworks from my project as well as indicative bodies of work from other artists) and topical concepts/philosophies (pertinent to place-based research as well as practice-led projects in the visual arts) as brought together in the thesis via an innovative format appropriate for dissemination of embodied practice. Here, the relevance of this research project is underlined and the contribution the thesis will make to new knowledge indicated.

The third section reflects on the overall implications of the project – observations that I will develop and considerations that will hopefully be picked up by others in the visual arts as well as within other disciplines in the future. The key issues/concepts examined in the thesis are again emphasised (in particular, the notion of ‘belonging’) and, as a result of the depth of research undertaken in this project, the inter-relationship between a self and a place is further questioned and earlier assumptions challenged. The tension between a basic human need for some sense of rooted stability/belonging and the actuality of mobility and transience in everyday life is once again stressed – as such, echoing the ‘location, dislocation, translocation’ of the title of this project and indicating possible developments for further research projects, by myself and/or others.

## The Performativity of Research: Approach and Argument

This thesis has explored the inter-relationship between a self and a place in practice, as understood via the concepts of dwelling and becoming, through embodied engagement with two specific rural landscapes. It presents an affect-led practice within a framework of thorough contextual analysis informed by poststructuralist critique that draws on a range of cross-disciplinary texts broadly relating to place. The methodology of my visual arts project is largely phenomenological and, as we have seen, a performative writing strategy is employed to disseminate research understandings in a style appropriate to a multi-sensory performative practice that is founded on lived as well as learned knowledge. An alternative writing style has been adopted in order to challenge long-established divisions between general categories of practice (for example artist and academic, intellectual and creative, semantic and somatic), and as a route toward animation (an effective blurring) of any polarisation of schools or genres.<sup>508</sup> In this respect I align myself with political theorist Jane Bennett's thinking, as follows:

“Under fortuitous circumstances, the good humour of enchantment spills over into critical consciousness and tempers it, thus rendering its judgement more generous and its claims less dogmatic. I pursue a life with moments of enchantment rather than an enchanted way of life. Such moments can be cultivated and intensified by artful means. Enchantment, as I use the term, is an uneasy combination of artifice and spontaneity.”<sup>509</sup>

Inspired by the words of Jane Bennett above, this thesis is therefore presented in a performative style which permeates traditional boundaries (as well as disciplines) by moving between word and image, narrative description and critical analysis, artifice and spontaneity in order to evoke the performativity of this visual arts research practice as well as the loci of practice. Building on my analysis of practice-led doctoral dissemination in the visual arts, I have further argued that innovative articulation of empirical research in a manner which reflects multi-sensory embodied engagement by respecting both corporeal and conceptual understandings is not only necessary but an important move forward.<sup>510</sup> The critically affirmative and the poetic are therefore strategically brought together here in an attempt to invoke particular and diverse localised aspects of the two specific landscapes evoked in this thesis.

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<sup>508</sup> Peggy Phelan writes of theory that ‘animates the ash of critical writing’ when advocating writing strategies that draw from direct experience of the ‘performance event’ – where the ‘writing points both to itself and to the “scenes” that motivate it’ (Phelan 1997, p11/12). See also Introduction, p16 (footnote 42)

<sup>509</sup> Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton University Press 2001), p10 – see also Chapter 5, Section 5.11 on wonder and enchantment.

<sup>510</sup> See Chapter One, Sections 1.5 and 1.6



In this respect, the thesis constitutes a significant advance toward an alternative dissemination of practice-led research projects; a strategy that retains clarity and rigour throughout via the staging of a coherent argument through informed contextual discussion and critical analysis *together with* the tacit knowledge accumulated in performative practice as represented by a series of bodies of artwork. In brief, this project creates a thesis and an exposition that together *perform the argument they explicate*. In this regard, I submit the thesis and the accompanying exposition of artwork as a contribution to new knowledge.

### **Summary of the Thesis**

Throughout this thesis, my project is firmly positioned within the contemporary art world, giving examples from other artists (namely Ana Mendieta, Roni Horn and Tacita Dean) whose concerns and interests intersect with the concepts and understandings explored in this thesis. In addition, the thesis is informed by contemporary philosophy that can be usefully applied to practice-based research. The concept of dwelling (after Heidegger and Casey) is understood as mobilised, home as multiple and hybrid, and becoming (after Irigaray and Deleuze & Guattari) as immanent potential. Informed by a range of cross-disciplinary sources (in particular cultural geography and feminist critique), place is recognised here as processual, time as non-linear and identity as non-unitary. This is evidenced via the detailed contextual examination carried out in this practice-led project.

These understandings are explored and challenged through practical projects located in specific rural landscapes around the Severn valley in Gloucestershire and within the Parish of Kilninian and Kilmore on the Isle of Mull – as evidenced via examples from the significant bodies of artwork analysed in this thesis. Although various approaches and media are utilised in my visual arts practice, the primary medium employed in this project is photography. Theoretical concerns relating to issues of the photographic image are discussed and, in this respect, the paradoxical co-existence of presence with absence (as experienced via the experiential landscape and via the photographic image) is critically appraised with reference to Jean Luc Nancy and Roland Barthes.

In order to address additional issues related to the photographic image as well as to analyse the efficacy of my practice and artworks, the concept of affect is explicated via examples from site-specific projects. I propose that theoretical and experiential awareness of the concept of affect as well as a developed understanding of haptic visuality in practice provides a productive route toward encouraging multiple readings of works exhibited and, therefore, more expansive and open-ended translations in the audience. As such, interactions between corporeal and conceptual registers in the phenomenological landscape are echoed in (re)presentation, inviting engagement and prompting meaning in the interaction between a

receptive audience and the artwork. As such, my proposition would align with my aim of evoking an embodied experience of place rather than simply (re)presenting (a) place as seen.

In this respect, the concept of haptic visuality (after Marks) is explored in practice and considered as a vital route to invoking affect in the viewer. In order to underline affectivity between individual images, photographs are juxtaposed (as in the *In Recognition and Visible & Void* series) or brought together as complex large-scale composite works (the *Daily* series). Series of images are (re)presented in installation format in order to create partial narratives and to encourage a level of inter-subjectivity via multiple reading (as, for example, the *Asides* series evidenced in this thesis or extended installations of juxtaposed imagery). As indicated throughout my thesis, theoretical texts from visual culture as well as other inter-disciplinary sources (namely feminist critique, cultural/human geography, anthropology and phenomenological philosophy) reflect both the concerns of this particular practice-led inquiry and contemporary conceptual debates within the discipline. These are debates that (as the broad range of cross-disciplinary sources cited would indicate) often extend beyond the visual arts and have relevance within other disciplines engaged in place-based research practice. As a reflection of a detailed line of critical enquiry that relates to an interdisciplinary field that is clearly of contemporary concern (ie that of adequately articulating the inter-relationship between a self and a place in practice), I consider this project to have positive applications not only within my own discipline but within other disciplinary contexts.

Throughout the past year, several new publications have contributed to a series of cross-disciplinary debates that focus on the core concerns of this project – namely (i) engagement with the concepts of dwelling and becoming in increasingly mobilised societies and related questions around our understandings of home, belonging and identity, and how visual artists address such issues;<sup>511</sup> (ii) the relationship between embodied practice and located performance, between self and place, body and artwork;<sup>512</sup> and (iii) a series of challenges as to what constitutes rigorous ‘academic’ translation of empirical research reflecting research practices that have (similarly) adopted a range of alternative writing styles in order to combine subjective description with conceptual analysis.<sup>513</sup> The critical concerns and observations

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<sup>511</sup> See Meskimmon 2011 (in depth analysis of cross-cultural artworks) and Crouch 2010 (cultural geography)

<sup>512</sup> With regard to recent publications in the visual arts see or Biggs & Karlsson 2011 or Smith & Dean 2010 (especially Chapter 6, pp126-149, where performativity of practice is discussed and where resonance with the concerns of this project may be found). In performance studies see Pearson 2010 (helpful advice on methods/methodologies) and in cultural/human geography Anderson & Harrison (Eds) 2010 (in particular John Wylie who directly addresses the issue of the subject in critical writing) and Crouch 2010 (where case studies indicate the value of lived experience to research understandings)

<sup>513</sup> With regard to practice-led doctoral research in the visual arts, see Biggs & Karlsson (Eds) 2011- in particular Chapter 20 by MacLeod & Holdridge, pp353-367, which deals directly with the issue of writing in doctoral study in fine art. See also a diverse range of on-line journals and magazines that similarly explore alternative writing strategies in visual arts practice (eg *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, *Working Papers in Art & Design*, *The Happy Hypocrite* or *Rubric* Journal). For more detailed discussion on writing in the visual arts and practice-led research, see Chapter One, Sections 1.5

highlighted in these publications of course overlap with each other as well as with my project as reflected in this thesis.

The publications to which I refer are multi-disciplinary (echoing the range of references and sources cited in my project) and, as well as directly representing practice-led doctoral research in the visual arts, range from visual culture and cultural theory to performance studies and cultural/human geography. Although none of these publications directly supersede my own practice-led visual arts project, they serve to underline both the current relevance of the concepts engaged with and the urgency of the need for alternative methods of articulation for embodied practice – methods such as the writing strategy adopted in this project. In this respect, they indicate the relevance of (as well as possible applications for) a model such as this within a range of disciplines in the broad field of place-based research. They also serve to inspire and will, I am certain, aid the development and appropriate dissemination of further projects in this important and far-reaching area of research practice.

In their assessment of the role of writing in practice-led doctoral research, MacLeod & Holdridge consider that writing should be viewed as ‘part of a negotiation between setting out the research as research proof and critical engagement with it through conceiving and making art’.<sup>514</sup> As we have seen, this reflects the position adopted in this project. MacLeod & Holdridge add that this ‘demonstrates a critical reflexivity’ – a vital ingredient for any practice-led project, a quality that evidences integrity and rigour. As such I draw on their claim and propose an integrated project that reflects the making and the conceiving, the experiential as well as the theoretical, in both the writing and the art – a project performed jointly between the artwork and the accompanying text (here the thesis). As artist Mary Maclean so aptly states, the material form of the work ‘takes its cue from the underlying conceptual aspiration’.<sup>515</sup>

MacLeod & Holdridge are clear that ‘methodologies are not subject to theory’ in practice-led research but ‘have to be found within the research arts practice’ in order to evidence the ‘highly reflexive tension between author and content’ (as such reflecting the demands of the project). Importantly, they propose that the writing needs to be ‘empathic to art(s) research’ where the ‘context is in production and the result of embodied learning’.<sup>516</sup> Arguing with MacLeod & Holdridge and assuming a position of ‘critical reflexivity’, I propose that in this way I have progressed my project by bridging two convergent concerns – that of challenging and

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and 1.6. With regard to cross-disciplinary models, see Rendell 2010 (a rich example of a performative writing strategy that successfully combines critical analysis with personal observation) or Anderson & Harrison (Eds) 2010 (in particular essays by David Bissell and Hayden Lorimer)

<sup>514</sup> Biggs, Michael & Karlsson, Hendrik, *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (Routledge 2011), p353 – for the full text see Chapter 20, pp353-367

<sup>515</sup> Mary Maclean, *Considering If...Then...Else* (*Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 6: 3, pp 257-267), p257

<sup>516</sup> MacLeod & Holdridge in Biggs, Michael & Karlsson, Hendrik, *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (Routledge 2011), p355

extending a research practice and that of disseminating a project as a contextual tool that expands the remit of research as practice by moving toward a new paradigm.

From the early stages of research, this project has evolved through walking to performance, from dwelling to becoming, through affect to haptic visuality, from still photography to (additionally) moving image, from singular to collaborative practice and, from a starting point of traditional textual frameworks, toward a performative writing strategy that firmly positions the personal in socio-cultural domains. As we have seen, the development of practice-led research in this project has been carefully calculated as well as intuitive, the result of contextual analysis and multi-sensory performative practice. Building on my review of practice-led research in the visual arts, an examination of the interwoven roles of the thesis and the artwork in this project, and an understanding of the concept of narrative identity (after Paul Ricoeur), a performative writing strategy has been employed in this thesis.<sup>517</sup> This innovative method of dissemination was considered necessary due to the context of my research project and serves to productively reflect the non-linear progression of embodied engagement in two specific landscapes (Mull and Gloucestershire) where abstract concepts abut (and are examined via) concrete particulars. Here, the corporeality of a self and the materiality of place are (re)presented via the thesis and the accompanying body of artwork.

As such, I have modelled a structural framework for the development and contextualisation of embodied practice – via, in this instance, a performative project that explores the inter-relationship between a self and a place through the concepts of dwelling and becoming – presented in the combined form of a thesis and an exposition of artworks. In this respect, this is a project that provides an alternative method for articulation of practice-led research in the visual arts and other relevant cross-disciplinary contexts – the precise style of dissemination deliberately co-constituting the topic of study which, as we have seen, situates the personal in the socio-cultural by building on memoir, cultural history and feminist critique in the context of place-based projects. To reiterate (and drawing on the rationale given by Janet Wolff as examined in this thesis),<sup>518</sup> the alternative writing style in this thesis both performing and co-constituting the focus and material as well as conceptual context of embodied research practice.

In this respect, I propose that my project provides a new model for practice in the field – a model that reflects the implications of practice-led research where, as we have seen, the value of the work lies as much in the experiential as the theoretical and is, in this regard, disseminated via a productive dialogue performed between the creative processes of writing and arts practice. As such, I argue that this research project offers a new paradigm that can

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<sup>517</sup> These are discussed in detail in Chapter One

<sup>518</sup> See Chapter One, Section 1.8

be productively adopted and developed across the disciplines reflecting an enquiry that, in this respect, can be considered a significant contribution to new knowledge.

### **Implications of the Project**

Through the course of this research project, I have been forced to challenge my understanding of the core concepts examined and, although 'dwelling' and 'becoming' remain key points of reference against which to analyse and contextualise my practice, I have been obliged to address earlier assumptions as well as to critically review previous understandings as (re)presented in practice. Of primary consideration have been issues of embodiment and subjectivity in performative practice as well as the experience of belonging in place. In order to critically explore questions raised in research practice, in which I make use of my own female body as well as familial genealogies, I have (as indicated earlier) positively embraced feminist critique and auto/ethnographic methodologies and adopted a performative writing style.

In my examination of 'dwelling', I consider notions of home and belonging and, as a result of critical analysis of feminist philosophies, I have found (and continue to find) the idea of belonging, although productive, deeply problematic. In this respect, the issue of belonging remains a spectre and I have to continually question my understanding of the term in relation to identity and notions of home. Location, dislocation ...

'Belonging' as a concept demands further examination (post-doctorate) as I now ask whether such a thing is even possible. Do I, can I, belong in the landscape; can we, do we ever 'belong'? My certainty at the start of this thesis has been troubled and I now doubt whether it is possible to belong in place for any extended period of time – as Heidegger proposed, it is perhaps a matter of ever learning 'to dwell anew'.<sup>519</sup> My research findings suggest that it is thus, ie more a question of belonging and, simultaneously, of not belonging – as echoed and underlined in the title of my research project, becoming *between* location, dislocation, translocation. How can belonging ever be more than a temporary 'reality' if place is understood as process, as unfolding in and through time?

I would therefore suggest that the issue of belonging, on the whole, is more one of *wanting to belong* due to an underlying desire for stability and a sense of grounded identity. The longer we spend in any one place, the more acquainted we become with the specificities and particularities of individual places through embodied tasks and movement in and through the immediate environment, the more we might feel at home. But my doubt remains: do we, can

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<sup>519</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (Harper & Row 1975), p161

we honestly say we belong? We are transient, mortal beings, we are complex, hybrid and mobile and, as underlined in this thesis, have non-unitary subjectivities – we are constantly becoming. Consequently, I would argue that belonging is a false premise, glimpsed briefly in a co-incidence of self and place but always passing, a fleeting perception and welcome interlude. Location, dislocation, translocation ...

I am not in any way suggesting that we are alienated from the landscape, far from it (as my project testifies). But I propose that we should not consider we belong either, should not pretend or presume that there is any 'natural' or *a priori* connection. Albeit a possibility, in this instance, engendered by conscious attention to localised particularities and intimate acquaintanceship over time. I underline my proposition of the co-constituency of a self and a place as formative of personal and socio-cultural identities as understood through the concepts of dwelling and becoming, with home understood as ontological state as well as material entity, but do not maintain that we belong in any one landscape as such. Rather I argue, as indicated in this practice-led research project, that we are in a state of becoming as we move between places (plural) and oscillate *between* location, dislocation, translocation.

14 April 2011:

early mist after rain, light winds, hazy sunshine with a cool breeze;  
skies clear toward dusk, a pale light lingering over the sea long past sunset.

I am on Mull;

I arrived from Gloucestershire a week ago and am now (nearly) here.

Return ...

to Mull, to Treshnish, to East.

I have food, warm clothing, boots,  
my books, my cameras, laptop,  
sound recorder, pen and paper.

I have returned home  
and yet, at first, I am not here;

I cannot settle,  
cannot find my place, my rhythm

and I am reminded that

it is always the same,

has been ever so ...

on arrival expecting to continue as before,

as I left, easily slotting into life here,

my mind picking up from previous visits

but, starkly, abruptly

(almost violently)

I am reminded.

Disconcerted by an uneasy resistance,  
a body still responding to other rhythms,

alternative songs,

of other places, peoples, lives, roles;

it takes time to adjust,

to absorb,

to feel my way.

Mentally I list what is needed,

all the while knowing that I can't will it to happen,

that Mull seeps at it's own pace;

largely unnoticed, unbidden,  
permeating the membranes  
until I realise that I have been bodily invaded,  
affected/infected/inflected  
and am once again here.

I learn to dwell anew:  
to read the weather,  
the land, the sea;  
to make contact ...  
to touch with more than the eyes,  
to taste the salt, the peat, the kelp,  
to listen and (actually) hear.

A deafening silence,  
a silence that begins to move, to fill  
with the boom of distant waves,  
ewes and lambs from across the hills,  
the humming whirr of insects,  
birds ...  
I become aware that I am more attentive  
to what is here, now, and  
begin, again, to feel (and not just remember)  
the relationships, the lives – human/non-human –  
that came before and the others  
that will remain after I have gone and continue  
until I next return.

And I am carried forward  
to my arrival back in Gloucestershire, to  
my other home, to other lives in other places, and how  
things will be different now,  
of how I will have to find my way once more  
over the days and nights that follow.

Migrant resident;  
now and then, here and there,  
traces of I, you and we  
through time ...



## FURTHER RESEARCH

This final section of the thesis covers further research projects undertaken during the period of doctoral enquiry and gives an indication of my expanded role as artist/scholar and, as such, suggests the possible direction of future research and development in individual as well as collaborative practice.

My research practice remains firmly grounded in the materiality of the experiential landscape while practical projects located in Gloucestershire and on Mull, such as those represented in this thesis, continue to expand into the socio-cultural domain. For example, the *Communion* project has developed into an extended collaboration between me, Anna Saunders (poet) and Robert Perry (composer), with additional input from Matthew Morris (musician) and Josh Biggs (photographer/film editor). What was initially a quiet performance enacted at S'Airde Beinn, Mull, in April 2008 has become an evolving performance in image, word and music and an artist film on DVD.<sup>520</sup> It is my ultimate aim to take the expanded performance back to S'Airde Beinn.

Also out of *Communion*, have come further projects – for example *Mesa*, a collaboration between myself and my daughter performed on Mull and in Gloucestershire (a continued exploration of place and female genealogies) and a multi-media installation work-in-progress *Beyond Return* which, through a series of performances in the present, builds on oral history relating to my maternal ancestors as well as more general archival material relating to life on Mull in the past.<sup>521</sup>

Further research has resulted in my involvement in the establishment of an inter-disciplinary research network for doctoral students in the south west of England and Wales (*Space Place Practice*: on-going – a network that now represents eight institutions across the region as well as individual academics/practitioners). In April 2010, I secured an AHRC grant for a

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<sup>520</sup> *Communion* the performance was first showcased in 2010 (Site 10, SVA, Stroud) and has since been performed at the Textile Forum South West conference, Taunton (invited artist, March 2011) and at Meantime, Cheltenham (April 2011) as part of a programme of performance, poetry and artist films. There are plans to take *Communion* back to Mull in 2012 and to perform live with Anna, Robert and Matthew at S'Airde Beinn and I am in conversation with An Tobar, Tobermory, at present about quite when and how we proceed (currently the intention is to include *Communion* in the 2012 programme of exhibitions and events). An artist film version of *Communion* has been produced (DVD) and is included with this thesis (inside back cover)

<sup>521</sup> Examples from the *Mesa* series of images can be seen in Chapter One. *Beyond Return* is an on-going project and at present comprises 4 x short film pieces, 4 chairs, several tea cups and a (growing) pile of used tea bags (and I am currently working on a sound piece to incorporate into the installation). The work has already been shown in reduced form (2 x film pieces, 2 chairs, 4 tea cups and tea bags) at *Spectral Traces* (BV Studios, Bristol: March 2011) as part of an international exposition of place-based works.

conference/fieldwork event (held in Bristol in July 2010) which resulted in a collaborative publication – *Moving Between the Lines*, launched February 2011 – which I edited and designed using contributions from participants and presenters in response to the two-day event.

The focus of the conference was collective exploration of alternative presentation/writing strategies for dissemination of research carried out in the field (ie embodied practice) and as a result of group fieldwork projects carried out within the immediate landscape, each participant was encouraged to submit a contribution toward a network publication. All those attending the conference were subsequently represented in the publication. *Moving Between the Lines* stands as tangible evidence of shared practice in the field re-presented through a diverse range of writing styles. In this respect, the publication is an example of dissemination of both individual and collaborative practice and illustrates the potential of performative writing strategies for cross-disciplinary application. As such, the focus of the publication shares territory with this doctoral project and relates to arguments put forward with regard to the adoption of a performative writing strategy in my project.

Other recent collaborations have included:

- (i) curation of an exhibition, a series of linked events and a contextual publication with a group of invited artists from Gloucestershire (a project relating to the fragile environment of the River Severn entitled *tidal Severn*; upstairs at the george, Newnham-on-Severn, Glos: August-October 2010) and
- (ii) curation of an event at Meantime, Cheltenham, where invited international artists as well as students from UWE and Chelsea School of Art were represented as part of the Cheltenham Poetry Festival (*Poetry and Visual Art*, a programme of performance, poetry recitals and artist films: April 2011).

Not only has my practice expanded into more collaborative work and already resulted in a productive series of events, exhibitions and publications, but such conversations and projects continue and a new collaborative publication has recently been printed.<sup>522</sup> Building on the research carried out over the period of doctoral study as evidenced in this thesis, I now have a series of further questions to explore in practice in the future. These include the question of belonging (as previously indicated, pp245/246), representations of gendered identity

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<sup>522</sup> Poet Anna Saunders and I have a publication entitled *Communion* (Anna's poems and my photographic images) due for release later this year.

and notions of 'home' (interior as well as exterior landscapes), and enduring concerns relating to experiential time and issues of constancy/change and memory/forgetting.

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