Rewilding

How can Contemporary Art Practices help us to reconnect with the living land?

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Cover Image - *Landbound* (McLeish 2019)

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Introduction

We, as humans, as animals, are becoming increasingly disconnected from the natural world and our wilder selves, perhaps due to our deepening involvement with digital media and increased time spent indoors, (Baruch and Erstad 2018, Kinver 2013, Sackett 2010).

On a personal level, having grown up in the North-West Highlands of Scotland, I have experienced life in a remote and wild place. I spent my childhood walking in the hills, drawing and making sculptures with my hands and feeling connected to the land. Gaelic place-names feature on all of the local signs and I sense the deep connection to land that is felt by the fishermen, crofters, artists and communities. It is my love of the natural world, my desire to create and to understand how we communicate that has inspired this dissertation.

Since early man, artists have looked to the natural world for inspiration and used a wide range of media and processes to explore their themes, (Anthony Gormley: How Art Began 2019). We need art to engage with the natural world for a variety of reasons. Firstly, as hypothesised by Wilson and Kellert (cited in Kahn 1997 p. 1), our yearning for connection with the natural world is innate. 'Biophilia' is "a fundamental, genetically based human need and propensity to affiliate with other living organisms." Secondly, Richard Louv (cited in Sackett 2010 p. 135) proposed the notion of 'nature deficit disorder' which suggests that a lack of contact and interaction with green and natural spaces negatively impacts the health and well-being of people due to alienation from the natural world. Finally, writer and environmental activist George Monbiot (2015 p. 31) proposes that knowledge of natural flora and fauna are being lost with each generation through 'shifting baseline syndrome'. Monbiot suggests that each generation has a different perception and understanding of what is normal and natural due to the environment that they have grown up in. Consequently, it can be suggested that there is a need for art practices which can facilitate and strengthen ways of relating to the natural world and help us feel more connected to it, in order to live our most wholesome and joyful lives.

In response to this, the notion of 'rewilding' offers a potential solution to the current disconnection and challenges of contemporary culture. 'Rewilding' is a new term, introduced to the dictionary in 2011, (Monbiot 2014 p. 8) with multiple perspectives and interpretations of its meaning. 'Rewilding' can be defined by conservationists as returning captive animals to nature, reintroducing native flora and fauna species and encouraging natural regeneration. More recently, 'rewilding' has been considered in relation to humans, exploring how people and our cultures can choose to become more in sync with the natural world (Monbiot 2014 p. 8). The notion of 'rewilding' both our environments and ourselves provokes questions about where we have come from, are now and want to be in the future. What kind of planet

do we want to be living on and how do we interact with the living world around us?

The art explored in this dissertation as 'Contemporary Art Practices' will encompass works by artists created within the past sixty years. The aim is to provide a selection of artists working across different practices, materials and processes which demonstrate that there are numerable ways of reconnecting with the living land through art. The dissertation will cover artists working across disciplines including mapping, poetry, video, performance, walking, photography, sculpture and other multi-media. It does not focus on specific art movements, but rather on the media and process that contemporary artists use and how their practice encourages a strengthening connection with the natural world.

This dissertation will firstly expand on the definition of 'nature' and my choice to use the term 'living land'. Secondly, the significance of language in informing how we perceive environment will be highlighted and the role of place-names and mapping for revealing how we document the land. Following on from this, indoor and digital practices will be explored as a way of mediating an experience and connection to the land that otherwise might not be possible. Finally, performance and walking will be considered for its immersive approach. Thus, the aim is to explore how Contemporary Art Practices can demonstrate and reinforce that naming, experiencing and moving are ways of reconnecting with the living land.

Language and Environmental Perception

"What if the very language we now speak arose first in response to an animate, expressive world – as a stuttering reply not just to others of our species but to an enigmatic cosmos that already spoke to us in a myriad of tongues?" (Abram 2010 p. 4).

Use of the term 'Living Land': *A note to the reader*

The use of 'living land' in this dissertation has been coined by me to describe the animate and alive world we inhabit, interact with and move through in our lives. The term came about due to a variety of reasons, in particular, the idea, definition and limitations of the word 'nature'.

The extent of the impact that humans have on the earth is now clearly understood. Researchers have suggested that we have entered the Anthropocene era, defined as a new time period where all the "atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes are now altered by humans," (Pharand-Deschênes 2012). In short, we can acknowledge that humans have a continuing and significant role in the shaping of the living earth that we experience today.

Even so, 'nature' is often defined as being separate from humans. The Oxford Dictionary defines 'nature' as:

> The phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations, (Oxford University Press 2019).

thus, demonstrating that the traditional perspective of 'nature' is something 'out there' and separate from humans. However, if we consider the notion of the Anthropocene, then we can comprehend that humans do in fact directly influence and impact 'nature' itself. In fact, artist Giuseppe Penone (cited in Sheffield 2001 p. 12) believes "that man and nature are one." Moreover, writer Susan Griffin (1978) reinforces the fact that we are part of nature and expresses our innate yearning for connection with it because we too are living, breathing and dying beings:

> We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature, (Griffin 1978 p. 228).

The complexity of our understanding and preconceptions of how to define ‘nature’ are made clear. In light of this, my choice of terminology to describe ‘nature’ has been reconsidered for this dissertation. For example, writer George Monbiot (cited in MacFarlane 2015) favours the use of words such as ‘natural world’ and ‘living planet’ over terms such as ‘environment’ which he believes “creates no pictures in the mind.” As a result, I too have been inspired to find a term which expresses the land which I know to be living, moving and responsible for the cycles of all beings. So, what about ‘landscape?’

For one thing, ‘landscape’ is a human construct. Isabelle Thomson (2016) argues that ‘land’ becomes ‘landscape’ only through the presence of a human and that ‘landscape’ is “a state of mind,” (Schama cited in Thomson 2016 p. 6). Thomson explains that humans project their own understandings, feelings and perspectives onto the land they experience, and thus ‘landscape’ is “humanized,” (MacFarlane cited in Thomson 2016 p. 7). For this reason, I have been hesitant to use ‘landscape’ to describe all the living elements of the earth such as flora, fauna, the land as well as the physical phenomena such as seasons, tides, moon cycles, and so on. ‘Landscape’ simply does not encompass all of the subtleties and complexities of an everchanging habitat/world/environment. ‘Landscape’ is a human construct evoking a certain kind of perception of land in people and informs a way of relating to it. As a result, ‘landscape’ will be avoided as I believe it is a term which is too embedded in a human perception and way of experiencing the land as opposed to describing the very changeable and animate land itself.

‘Landscape’ is also fixed in the historic desire to design and control outdoor spaces. Landscape architects such as Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown focused on sculpting, structuring and controlling the land to create gardens for the pleasure and enjoyment of people. To illustrate, Brown’s ‘landscapes’ needed “to cohere and look elegant” as well as “provide for every need of the great house,” (Capability Brown Festival 2019). It can be appreciated that the traditional perspective of ‘landscape’ is firmly linked to ‘landscaping’ where the land is shaped to suit human interests. In short, landscapes are cultivated and maintained to satisfy the needs and views of people. It is in this way that I perceive ‘landscape’ as connoting an idealised and static vista as opposed to the cyclical, living and changing land itself.

In conclusion, I do not want to perpetuate a human/nature divide. I feel the need to use an expression alongside terms such as ‘natural world’ which conveys what I want to express. For the purposes of the dissertation, I believe ‘living land’ communicates an animate and alive world which we inhabit, move through and interact with. My view is that these terms open us up to the intrinsic cycles and rhythms that influence all beings. So how can Contemporary Art Practices help us reconnect with the living land?

Language, Place-names and Mapping

It can be understood that perception of the environment and the natural world is directly influenced by the language used. The way we understand and relate to the land changes through the words or names we assign and use to describe it. Nature writer Nan Shepherd's sensual and intimate prose writing in *The Living Mountain* captivates and immerses the reader through her careful word choice and language. Shepherd spent her life walking in the Cairngorm National Park and over time, built up a deep connection to the land. In fact, Shepherd (2011 p. 88) talks of not walking *on* the land, rather she talks of going "into the mountain." In the same way, writer and naturalist John Muir (cited in Shepherd 2011 p. xxi) realised that "going out…was really going in." It is this distinction between walking *on* the surface of the earth or *in* and *with* the land that has influenced my own perspective and changed how I perceive and relate to the living land. Shepherd (2011 p. 8) goes on to highlight the interconnected and reciprocal relationship between her and the land as "something moves between me and it. Place and a mind may interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered." Finally, Shepherd (2011 p. 108) expresses her desire to understand the Cairngorm mountains completely but realises that it is impossible as "knowing another is endless…the thing to be known grows with the knowing." It is my belief that the same is true of language, the closer and deeper into etymology and definitions one explores, the more one realises how much more there is to know and understand. Through her detailed and considered language, Shepherd encourages the reader to reflect on the words we use and the way we experience and relate to the land.

Due to our increasing disconnection from the natural world, writer Robert MacFarlane is concerned for what people may be losing from their lives over time, especially through language. MacFarlane (2015) points out that some words and terms for the natural world which used to be valued are now being deemed irrelevant. For example, "broadband" replaced "bluebell" in the latest Oxford Junior Dictionary. MacFarlane (2015) argues that our language is becoming a "blandscape" with "the outdoor and the natural being displaced by the indoor and the virtual" which reflect the "simulated screen life," of contemporary culture. The fact that such descriptive and detailed language is consciously being removed from young children's learning is a reflection of the wider cultural and lifestyle changes of the population. After all, Tim Robinson (cited in MacFarlane 2015) has observed "how with each generation, more of the place names are forgotten or becoming incomprehensible." It points in a similar way to George Monbiot's (2015 p. 31) notion of 'shifting baseline syndrome,' highlighting how we are choosing to be increasingly cut-off and distanced from the living land instead of interacting with the wider world around us.

Equally, MacFarlane goes on to point out that loss of language can have a detrimental effect on our formation and understanding of how we relate to the world. MacFarlane (2015) suggests that "language

deficit leads to attention deficit," as people become unable to find words to express and explore their relationships to the wider natural world. He argues that "we find it hard to love what we cannot give a name to. And what we do not love we will not save," (MacFarlane cited in The Lost Words 2017). MacFarlane makes clear the importance of preserving language and a variety of words to describe flora, fauna and the land as our relationships and awareness are formed on this basis. The more words we have for something, the deeper our connection is with it. In addition, he highlights that protection of species and the land is only possible if people feel the need and desire to help preserve it which is important when we consider that "we've got more than 50% of species in decline" (MacFarlane cited in The Lost Words 2017). Consequently, we can see that if we continue to limit and forget such words and language, we become increasingly disconnected from the natural world which in turn, damages the living land itself.

It is not only the loss of English words from our vocabulary which must be considered but also Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Artist and writer Amanda Thomson's book *A Scots Dictionary of Nature* has collated Old Scots words with the aim of rewilding our language, as she explains:

> These "found" words evidence a confluence of local and social histories, allude to changing ways of life and shifting connections, and point to fascinating relationships with nature and the land. Some show how land and nature permeate other aspects of our lives, (Thomson 2018 p. 4).

Thomson highlights the significance of relationships between language and how people experience the living land. In addition, she voices her concern that loss of language results in a loss of meaning in our lives. She suggests the historic language found in the dictionaries shows the "attentiveness to land…It seems apparent that we may have lost more than just words," (Thomson 2018 p. 7). For example, 'break-back' is "*the harvest moon, so called by the harvest labourers because of the additional work it entails,*" or 'eard-fast' meaning "*a stone or boulder fixed firmly in the earth*, or simply, *deep rooted in the earth,*" (Thomson 2018 pp. 1-2). Furthermore, "the number of native speakers in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd is now around 58,000," (MacFarlane 2015) demonstrating the dwindling numbers of speakers in Scotland and therefore increasing likelihood of further loss of language. These observations reinforce the danger on continuing down this road of forgetting. There is a need for practices and activities which help to rekindle our love of old language and the living land.

Despite the challenges, artists have helped to reconnect us with language and the living land through their use of place-names and mapping. Artist Alec Finlay (2018) makes clear that place-names are a way of tracing how people's interaction with the land changes over time. He explains that "names are about our belongingness: how we belong changes. Names are a guide to human time, human space, stewardship, and loss," (Finlay 2018). Similarly, in one of Finlay's eco-poetic writings in *some colour*

trends, he explains:

> names are composed of words,
> for what a place once was, (Finlay 2014 p. 16).

Thus, Finlay makes clear that place-names highlight how people relate to the land, through the words and names they assign to it as well as revealing how the knowledge and activities of a place has changed.

In addition, the way place-names are recorded and communicated influence the understanding and meanings of the words themselves. Finlay (2018) argues "words change when they become names; names change when speech is written down; speech changes with the incursion of new language communities and flattening effects of popular culture." Consequently, we can see how Finlay shares similar concerns with Robert MacFarlane and Amanda Thomson, as to what people may be losing or forgetting with contemporary culture. The names reveal how language and understanding are transformed through the way we record and communicate. Whether a name is spoken, written or labelled on a map, the original meaning of the word changes as Finlay (2014 p.17) notes:

> maps of the Scottish Highlands,
> reveal the gaps,
> between speaking & writing.

Accordingly, Finlay makes us aware of the significance of the way we choose to document and record a name. For this reason, taking place-names and mapping into an art practice requires great consideration as well as creating opportunities for exploring new ways of communicating toponomy.

Alec Finlay's and artist Gill Russell's eco-poetic work uncovers meaning behind names in the land. Specifically, the collaborative work titled *some colour trends* explores the traditional Gaelic place-names in rural areas of the Scottish Highlands. Finlay (2014) claims that place-names often describe the flora, fauna or details of the place itself. For instance, 'cairngorm' of the Cairngorm National Park, is a description of the colour of the hill itself. The Gaelic word 'gorm' translates to 'blue' in English, as observed by Milne (cited in Finlay 2014 p.37) who said that the "distant hills are blue" and named the Cairngorms. Equally, other place-names reveal descriptions of not only the colours of the landmark but also the activities that took place there. Specifically, in the poetic work *Garnet Rock to Blue Cairn* (see Figure 1), Finlay explains 'Blue Cairn' is "north-west of Duffdefiance" and the "the rocks are a blue-grey 'heathen' stone," (Finlay 2014 p. 57). Finlay (ibid) goes on to describe how 'Garnet Rock' relates to the "boulder below Clachmaddy Hill" and that "locals would extract garnet to make brooches. The mineral's name derives from the fruit of the pomegranate, *granatum*." Consequently, the natural

colour influenced the original naming of the object or landmark and the descriptive relevance is still visible today. This observation inspired the short toponymic poem *STONE FRUIT* (see Figure 2) and demonstrates a playful outcome which echoes the qualities of the specific site. Finlay's decision to colour the very text in red-brown and blue in *Garnet Rock to Blue Cairn*, reinforces the descriptions provided by the place-names themselves.

Gill Russell went on to map the walk (see Figure 3) between 'Garnet Stone' and 'Blue Cairn' in her publication *Loirg-coise: Footprint* as part of the Hielan Ways project with the Huntly-based organization *Deveron Arts*. In the accompanying poem to the map, she poses the question "why was this one / given a name?" after seeing the Blue Cairn site and notes "no eagles in Glenbuchat today," (Russell 2014 p. 8). Consequently, Russell's poem encourages reflection on what compels people to name a site, especially when there are so many similar sites left unnamed. Equally, her observation of the lack of eagles, in relation to 'eagles' stone' in the map, suggests the changing species and ecosystems of the area. It can be appreciated that Russell's art inspires the viewer to reflect on their own relationships to the living land and consider what they see as important and worth preserving.

Figure 1 *Garnet Rock to Blue Cairn* (Finlay 2014 p. 56)

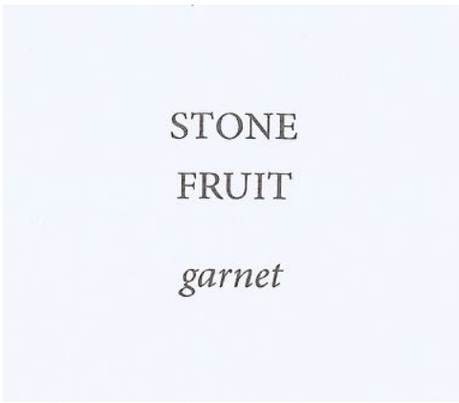


Figure 2 *STONE FRUIT* (Finlay 2014 p. 57)

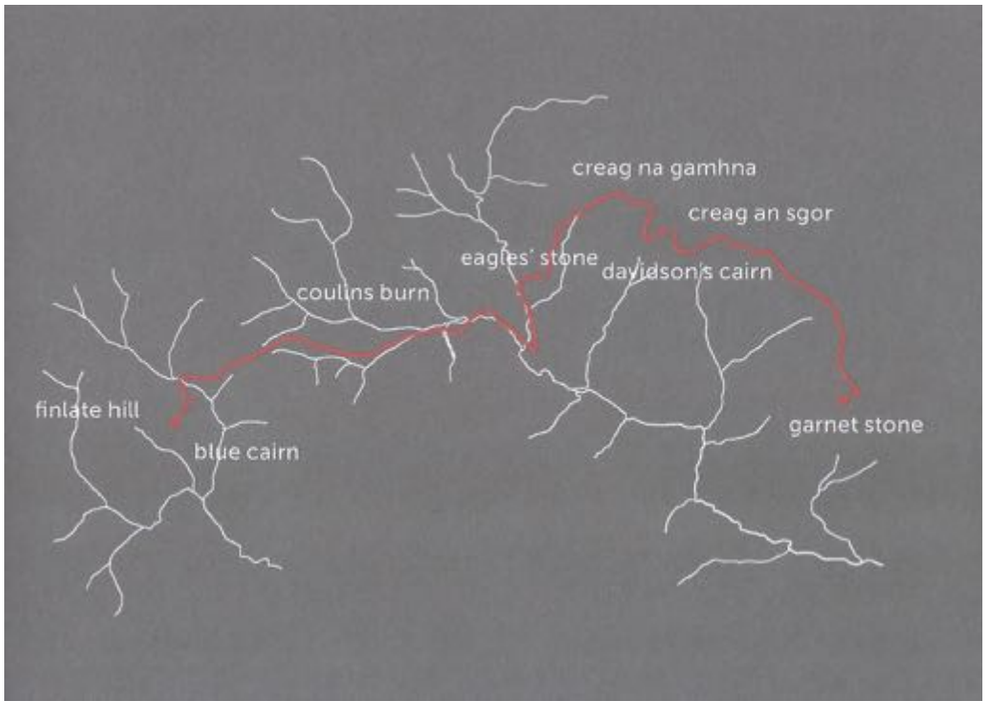
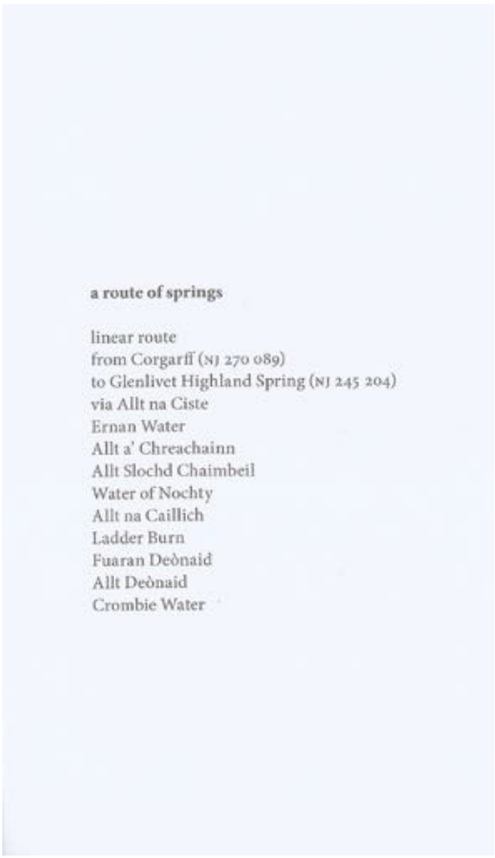


Figure 3 *Garnet Rock to Blue Cairn* (Russell 2014 p. 9)

Equally, place-names can influence the route that an artist chooses to immerse themselves in and map in an artwork. For instance, in *a route of springs* (see Figures 4 and 5) Gill Russell used walking as a form of exploration to map the place-names in the land. Guided by the waterways and place-names instead of the common "soulless landrover tracks," Russell discovers the joy, the "delight in fact" of "making my own routes," (see Appendix A). Russell (ibid) explains that she "chose to explore place through place-names," and to "map paths through landmarks…the same as our ancestors did before maps, before GPS." Russell's unorthodox approach to mapping and walking may draw the viewer to consider how names can be used to change the way we move in and interact with the land. In this way, Russell has influenced my own practice by encouraging a more playful attitude to walking and encouraged consideration of the way my experiences in the land are documented in my art work.

In addition, Russell's practice renews the traditional way that language and names are communicated in mapping. Gill's *a route of springs* features symbols from her piece *Water Motifs* (see Figure 6) which act as a key to reading the maps. In her art, Russell has created cartographic-like symbols of Gaelic names and terms as she explains that "to read a detailed map is like a story...topographical and historical...so place names are integral to that," (see Appendix A). Robert MacFarlane (2017 p. 143) notes that often Ordinance Survey's "rigorous geometry celebrates precision, and suppresses touch, feel." In *a route of springs* map, the place-names, route and watercourses are the focus of the image whilst little attention is paid to the elevation and contours of the terrain. For this reason, the viewer is encouraged to consider the very relationships between waterway and route, place-name and the walker. It can be said that Gill's maps are a way of re-enchanting and rewilding the viewer with a more sensual and intimate experience of place-names and mapping.



a route of springs

linear route
from Corgarff (NJ 270 089)
to Glenlivet Highland Spring (NJ 245 204)
via Allt na Ciste
Ernan Water
Allt a' Chreachainn
Allt Slochd Chaimbeil
Water of Nochty
Allt na Caillich
Ladder Burn
Fuaran Deònaid
Allt Deònaid
Crombie Water

Figure 4 *a route of springs* (Russell 2014 p. 22)

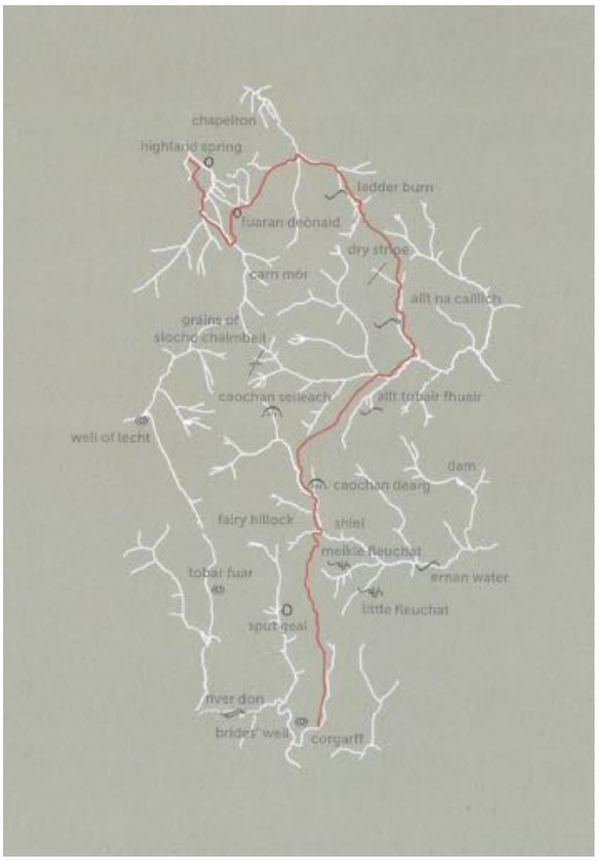


Figure 5 *a route of springs* (Russell 2014 p. 23)

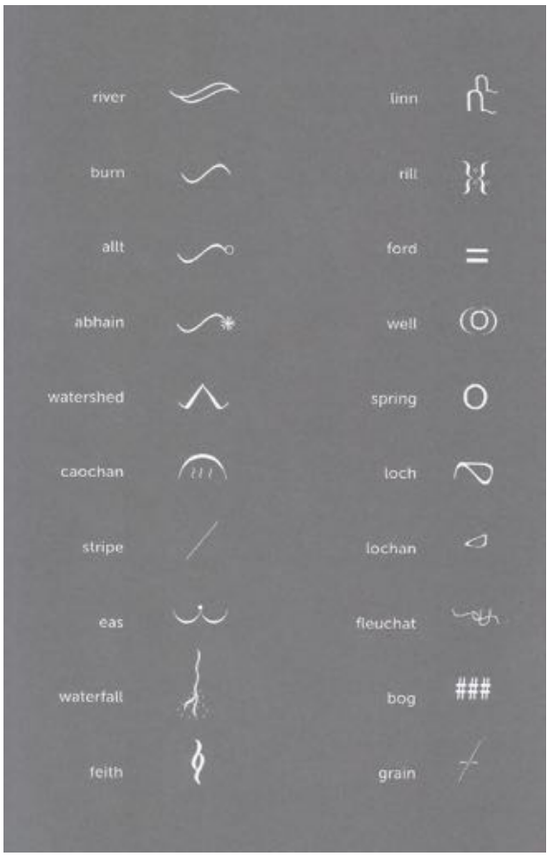


Figure 6 *Water Motifs* (Russell 2014 p. 25)

Similarly, Russell's walking and mapping practice informs our understanding of what place-names represent and mean to the culture and land they belong to. To illustrate, Russell (see Appendix A) explains that place-names "expose the history of cultures of those that have gone before and their relationship with the land." In line with Amanda Thomson's view, the importance of names as a means of establishing understandings of our past is made clear. Russell (ibid) explains that there is a "circular relationship" to this naming, walking and mapping practice (see Figure 7) as:

> the place produces name
> we map names and draw out meanings
> from that we create a walk
> the walk returns the meaning of the name to the place, (ibid).

In addition, Russell (see Appendix A) explains that the poems act as an accompaniment to the maps so that "the reader can form connections themselves," about what the place-names and maps might mean. It can be appreciated that the poems are a way to help visually represent or document a walked experience for the reader. This combination of poetry and mapping inspires the viewer to participate in the outcome as in *Loirg-coise: Footprint*, by reading the map, tracing the route and seeking meaning in the words and names. The A5 format of the publication is easily transportable, and the detailed information supplied through the names, maps and grid references, I believe could inspire the viewer to go out and try the walk themselves. Russell's mapping art has encouraged me to reflect on place-names and meaning in my own locale in the North West Highlands, inspiring me to consider the role of names and how they have and can shape my experiences whilst walking in the hills.

As we have seen, place-names and language influence the way we describe, relate to and experience the land. Artists such as Alec Finlay and Gill Russell have explored how eco-poetry and mapping in an art form can strengthen our connection with the living land. It may be concluded that through naming, people can 'know' and understand the natural world and their relationship to it on a deeper level. As eco-philosopher David Abram (2010 p. 11) explains:

> Whether sounded on the tongue, printed on the page, or shimmering on the screen, language's primary gift is not to re-present the world around us, but to call ourselves into the vital presence of that world – and into deep and attentive presence with one another.

Finally, considering the role of language and mapping with its links to walking, the idea of walking as an art practice will be explored later in more depth, as a powerful medium for encouraging engagement with the living land.

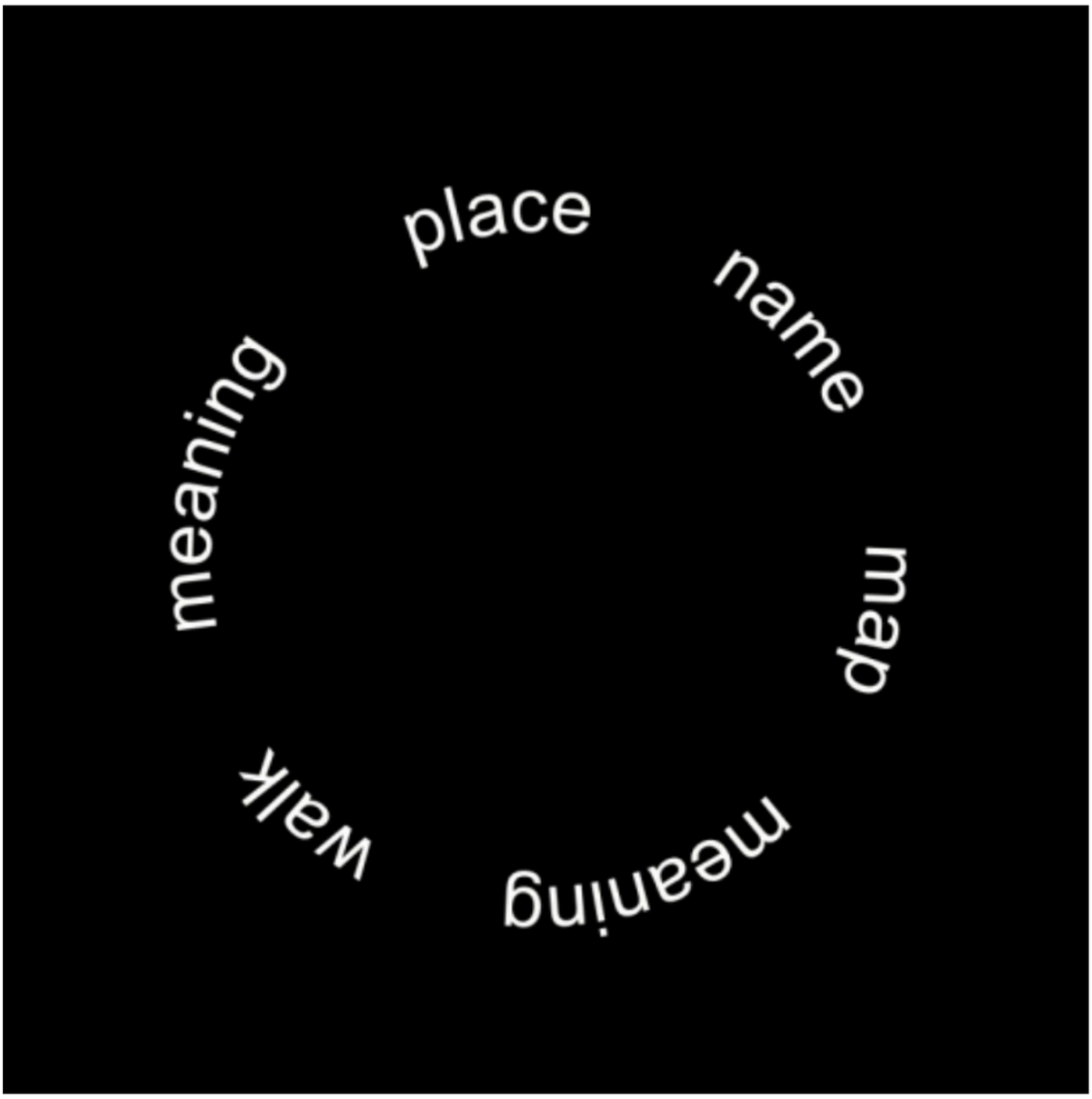


Figure 7 Unpublished Image (Russell, see Appenix A)

Mediated Experiences

Some people cannot to go out directly into the land, whether that be due to physical or geographical limitations. Engagement with the living land can be obtained through a mediated experience. For instance, painter Jackie Morris along with Robert MacFarlane and Alison O'Toole recently completed a commission for the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital featuring illustrations and text on the walls of four floors of the hospital (see Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11) to bring the natural world indoors. The commission was inspired by the initial *The Lost Words* book by Morris and MacFarlane which was a response to the current loss of language and declining species. The book featured illustrations and poetic "spells," (The Lost Words 2017) designed to be spoken or sung with the aim of encouraging people to rekindle their love of the land through language and thus inspire them to help protect it. The commission itself does a similar thing but in a healthcare environment, rewilding patients with language and imagery of the living land who could otherwise not experience it themselves. The element of bringing the natural world inside is significant when we consider the influence that environment has on recovery and overall health as "within healthcare, access to daylight, fresh air and natural materials aids healing, restoring the integrity between mind, body and soul," (The National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017 p. 11). It can be appreciated that not only will this commissioned artwork be reconnecting people with the land through language and imagery but will also be positively impacting the recovery and health of the patients. Above all, the healing aspect of this work is what makes it so powerful and inspiring.

Figure 8 *The Lost Words* Mural (Morris 2018)

Figure 9 Detail of *The Lost Words* Mural (Morris 2018)

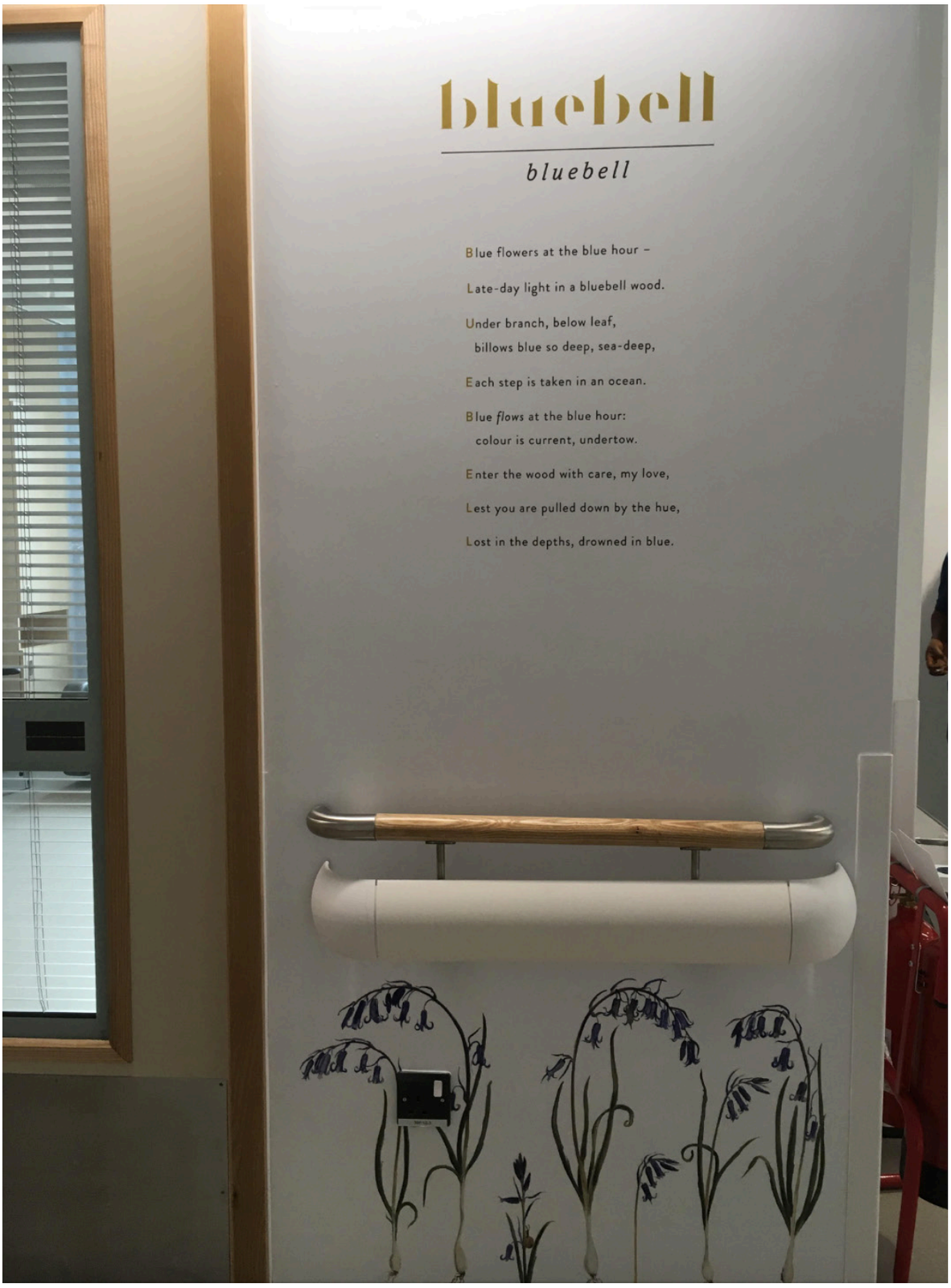


Figure 10 'Bluebell' detail of *The Lost Words* Mural (Morris 2018)

Figure 11 Detail of *The Lost Words* Mural (Morris 2018)

Equally, it may seem that digital technologies only distance us further from the living land yet there are instances where digital art can actually strengthen our connection to the natural world through immersion in a sensory experience. Video artist Pipilotti Rist, in work such as *Pixelwald (Pixel Forest)* (see Figures 12 and 13), transforms gallery spaces with video projections of nature blended with human bodies and technology, as an exploration of "interconnectedness," (Canning 2017 p. 77). In addition, Rist adopts an intimate and organic filming technique, guiding the viewer through the frame and enchanting people with vivid imagery. The immersive experience is constructed through audio of natural sounds such as birdsong, floor to ceiling projections which make the parameters of the gallery unclear as well as incorporating soft, sculptural chairs and beds for the viewer to relax on. It can be said that through her multi-media and large-scale approach the audience becomes engaged and absorbed in the work itself. Viewers are encouraged to reflect on their role and position in relation to the natural world as the lines between natural and digital, art and life become blurred.

Rist's work inspires awe of the natural world in the viewer, yet this is mediated through a digital medium. Writer David Abram (2010 p. 8) warns against relying on digital media as a way of experiencing the living land as "technologies… hold the world at a distance." Thus, Rist could be criticized for making viewers come indoors, into an artificial gallery environment and therefore distancing us further from the land itself. However, Laura Coles and Phillipe Pasquier (2015 p. 5) propose that because both our interaction with the natural world and with technology is sensory, that these two seemingly disparate things can be combined to "nurture, or centre a new awareness or sense of interconnectedness." In fact, *Pixelwald (Pixel Forest)* "fuses the biological with the electronic in the ecstasy of communication," (New Museum 2016). It can be appreciated that combining natural and technological processes has the potential to cultivate and rekindle relationships with the natural world.

All in all, it can be suggested that there are circumstances where a reconnection with the land can be obtained through a mediated experience. *The Lost Words* hospital commission enabled patients to experience and reconnect with language and the land despite their illness. Equally, *Pixelwald (Pixel Forest)* demonstrates how an indoor gallery environment with digital technology as its media, can develop and strengthen appreciation and awe of the land. These two examples demonstrate the accessibility and diversity of artistic approaches. Art practices such as these can create environmental and elemental experiences mediated through indoor and digital-based mediums.

However, it is important to point out that there is knowledge to be gained through a direct engagement with the land. The following chapter explores the power of performance and walking practices for influencing the artist and the viewer for reconnecting with the land.

Figure 12 Installation view of *Pixelwald* (Rist 2016a)

Figure 13 Installation view of *Pixelwald* (Rist 2016b)

Performance and Walking

Art practices have the power to encourage immersion in the land and make people aware of their bodily connection to their surrounding environment. Imagine walking in the depths of a forest, only to come across another person covered in foliage, lying on the ground, moving in the earth, breathing deeply, smelling, sensing and exploring the immediate textures and rhythms of the living land. Eeo Stubblefield's performative dance practice with Anna Halperin explores how dancers can use their senses to feel connected to the living land by listening to birdsong, feeling the textures of plants and smelling the scents of the earth. Stubblefield (cited in Thomas 2012 p. 113) explains:

> My hope for both the performer and the viewer is to refine and extend the senses, to fully sense each place, triggering memories deep in the body. They are old memories and yet in their awakening comes the chance to couple again with the land.

Stubblefield makes clear her aim for encouraging people's interaction with the natural world through an intuitive and direct relational response to the land itself and documents these dances through photography or film (see Figure 14). The practice relies on Halperin's immediate response to her environment, whether forest or beach, through Stubblefield's choice to only provide a basic score and no other directions or set choreography, (Thomas 2012 p. 114). It can be said that the land is the main influencer of the dance. Arden Thomas (2012 p. 123) describes the natural world in these dances as a "co-performer" as Halperin responds to the subtleties of the land surrounding and enveloping her. The viewer can appreciate the extent and depth of the relationship between people and the land. Truly, the dancer does not perform *on* the land, rather, she interacts *with* the living land.

Unlike typical dance practices, there is a focus on stillness, as opposed to movement. Stubblefield (cited in Thomas 2012 p. 114) explains that "a dance does not have to be about movement. Be still. Respond microscopically. A dance is the breath made visible—just breathe, be still." Dances can move away from established practices which celebrate high energy and busy movement, in favour of slower, more meditative practices that help us use our body and senses to reconnect with the natural world (ibid). Halperin (cited in Thomas 2012 p. 113) points out that "there is always some kind of movement, even in stillness. That's how nature dances." The viewer can appreciate that art practices can encourage a direct connection with the land through an immersive and direct approach. In my opinion, both the dancer and the viewer can feel inspired to reflect on their own interaction with the land and utilise their senses to rewild themselves with the world around them. Stubblefield's practice reminds me of the kind of intimate and deep experience Nan Shepherd (2011 p. 90) described when sleeping outdoors in the land as "the mind grows limpid; the body melts; perception alone remains. One neither thinks, nor desires,

nor remembers, but dwells in pure intimacy with the tangible world." Above all, "one has been in," (Shepherd 2011 p. 92) and the walker, the dancer, the human, has immersed themselves in the land and *become* part of it.

Figure 14 *Still Dance with Anna Halperin* (Stubblefield 1999)

"Walking is itself a process of thinking and knowing,"
(Ingold 2010 p. 121).

Similarly, walking as an art practice has the power to strengthen our connection with the living land through the engaging activity of walking. Artist Richard Long helped to forge the path of walking as an art practice. Namely, Long's piece *A Line Made by Walking* (see Figure 15) made when he was a student, involved walking along the same stretch of grass repeatedly in a meadow on the outskirts of London. Professor Tim Ingold (2010 p. 128) observes that "he has not cut the line with his boots, nor has material been deposited" but rather it is the sole presence of a human moving through the land that creates this work. The footprints are the residues of this repeated movement, as MacFarlane (cited in Ingold 2010 p. 127) explains that Long's "legs are his stylus, his feet the nib with which he inscribes his traces on the world." It can be appreciated that walking works rely on the presence of a human, for without the body moving through the land, the work would not be possible.

In addition, leaving traces in the land could be viewed as a way of humans conquering or marking their territory in the natural world. Ingold (2010 p. 129) points out that some may view this tracing as a way of humans "stamping" their mark on the world. Similarly, Friedrich Engels (cited in Ingold 2010 p. 129) expressed his belief that "man alone has succeeded in impressing his stamp on nature." However, Ingold (2010 p. 129) makes clear why this isn't the case as these footprints and traces are not made "*upon* a hard surface" but actually "*in* a surface that is soft, pliable and absorbent," which suggests "emplaced movement." Consequently, it is apparent that this residue made my walking, is not a mark of humans conquering the natural world, but rather traces of people and animals moving *through* and with *it*. In line with Nan Shepherd, footprints are the remnants of a living being directly interacting *with* and *in* the living land.

Equally, A Line Made by Walking becomes more poignant when we consider the work not only explores human interaction with the living land, but also time passing, due to the ephemeral and transient nature of this work. Tim Ingold (2010 p. 129) argues that "footprints…have a temporal existence, a duration, which is bound to the very dynamics of the ground to which they belong." It can be said that traces and footprints only exist short-term due to rain, snow, wind and the growth and change intrinsic to the natural world itself which transform the very ground where the marks were traced.

Figure 15 *A Line Made by Walking* (Long 1967)

Furthermore, as Long's walking practice has continued, his art consistently reveals the cycles of the natural world and how humans move through it. For instance, in his sculptural piece *A Circle in Scotland* (see Figure 16) reminiscent of ancient stone circles, Long has created a work whilst out on a walk in the land itself. *A Circle in Scotland* symbolically reveals the cycles of nature by constructing a circle out of a continuous line of stones. This placement and arrangement of the stones highlights the interaction and relationship between artist and material, walker and land. Anne Seymour (Long, Moorhouse and Hooker 2002 pp. 7-8) explains that there is a difference between "placing" and "kicking stones to form a line…The artist plays his part and nature plays hers." Accordingly, Seymour highlights that there is an interaction between the living land and the walker, each with a role and influence. The land provides the material and the walker leaves his trace. Long chooses to intentionally leave a more permanent trace of his presence in the land through his placing of stones and rock. It can be said that Long's stone work such as *A Circle in Scotland* illustrates a creative, playful and respectful method for engaging with the land. Anne Seymour (Long, Moorhouse and Hooker 2002 p. 9) points out that "Long's touch has always been famously light." Unlike Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (see Figure 17) which involved moving over six thousand tons of earth material in the environment to create the artwork, (Dia Art Foundation 2018) and therefore permanently distorted and mis-shaped the land. An increased appreciation is therefore possible for works that interact with the living land in a considerate way and highlights that there are a range of approaches to making art in the land.

Figure 16 *A Circle in Scotland* (Long 1986)

Figure 17 *Spiral Jetty* (Smithson 1970)

Long also creates sculptures using natural materials in galleries. For instance, *Cornwall Summer Circle* (see Figure 18) resembles *A Circle in Scotland* through his use of stone and circular arrangement yet this piece is created indoors in an exhibition setting. Long works with earth and mud to create art, as he observed that it is "a simple, direct natural material, like water or stones or dust," (Long cited in National Galleries of Scotland 2007 p. 51). He made *Mud Footprint Spiral* (see Figure 19) at the *Konrad Fischer Gallery* in Düsseldorf and created a "mud spiral…made by footprints," (ibid). Consequently, the viewer can appreciate that Long began to create works in a gallery which echo the activities of walking and leaving traces that take place in the land itself. Long moved on to create mud works directly on the walls of galleries as evident in *River Avon Mud Circle* (see Figure 20) through mark making with his hands and splashing the mud. Like the outdoor work, the mud works are "inherently ephemeral" (Long, Moorhouse and Hooker 2002 p. 9) as they will be removed and painted over once the exhibition is finished. Long (cited in National Galleries of Scotland 2007 p. 52) makes clear his use of natural materials as:

> The walks are done with my footprints and it's my hands that make the fingerprint works…My materials are elemental: stone, water, mud, days, nights, rivers, sunrises. And our bodies are elemental: we are animals, we make marks, we leave traces, we leave footprints.

Long is using his body and natural materials to create his artworks and highlights the forces and cycles of the land, in the same way that Nan Shepherd (2011 p. 4) described how "one walks among elementals." In my opinion, Long's decision to work so closely with the land's materials reinforces this notion of time passing and the transient nature integral to the land itself.

Long also employs text in his work to highlight the interconnections between features in the land. For example, in *River to River* (see Figure 21), Long draws the viewer's attention to the relationship between river, wood and tor. Paul Moorhouse (Long, Moorhouse and Hooker 2002 p. 42) argues that this walk physically connects these seemingly separate items through walking from site to site and also "*reveals* a system of relationships." The viewer can appreciate that through walking, Long is bringing awareness to the details and networks that already exist in the land.

Figure 18 *Cornwall Summer Circle* (Long 1995)

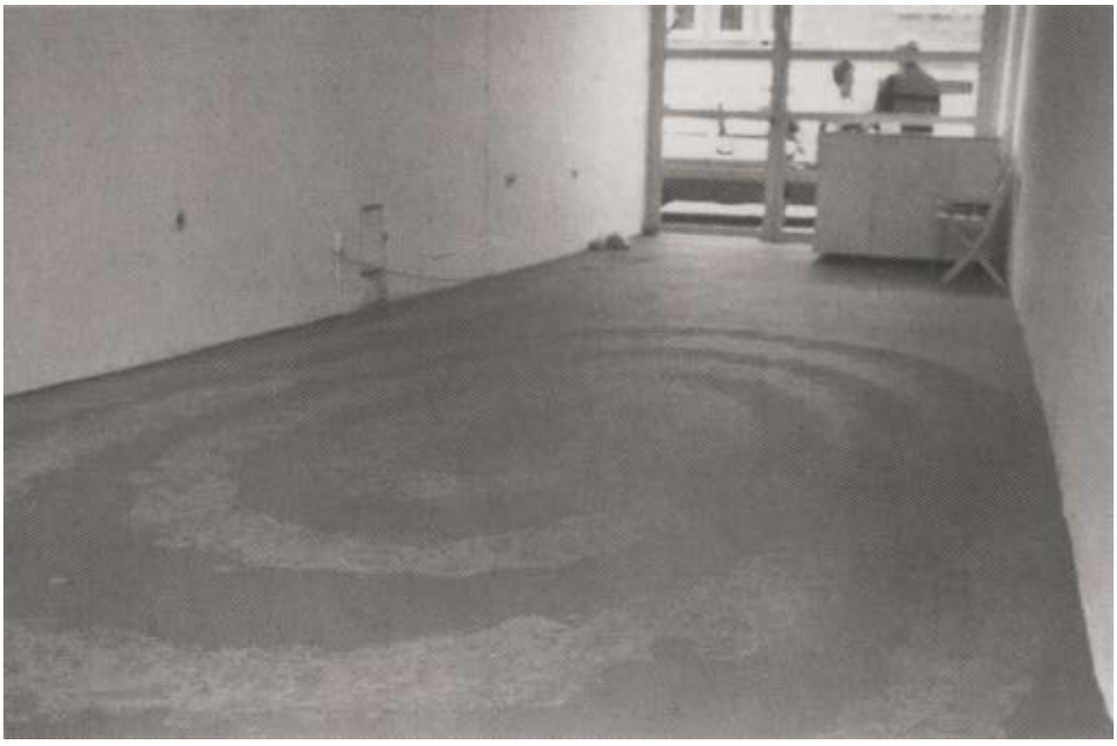


Figure 19 *Mud Footprint Spiral* (Long 1969)

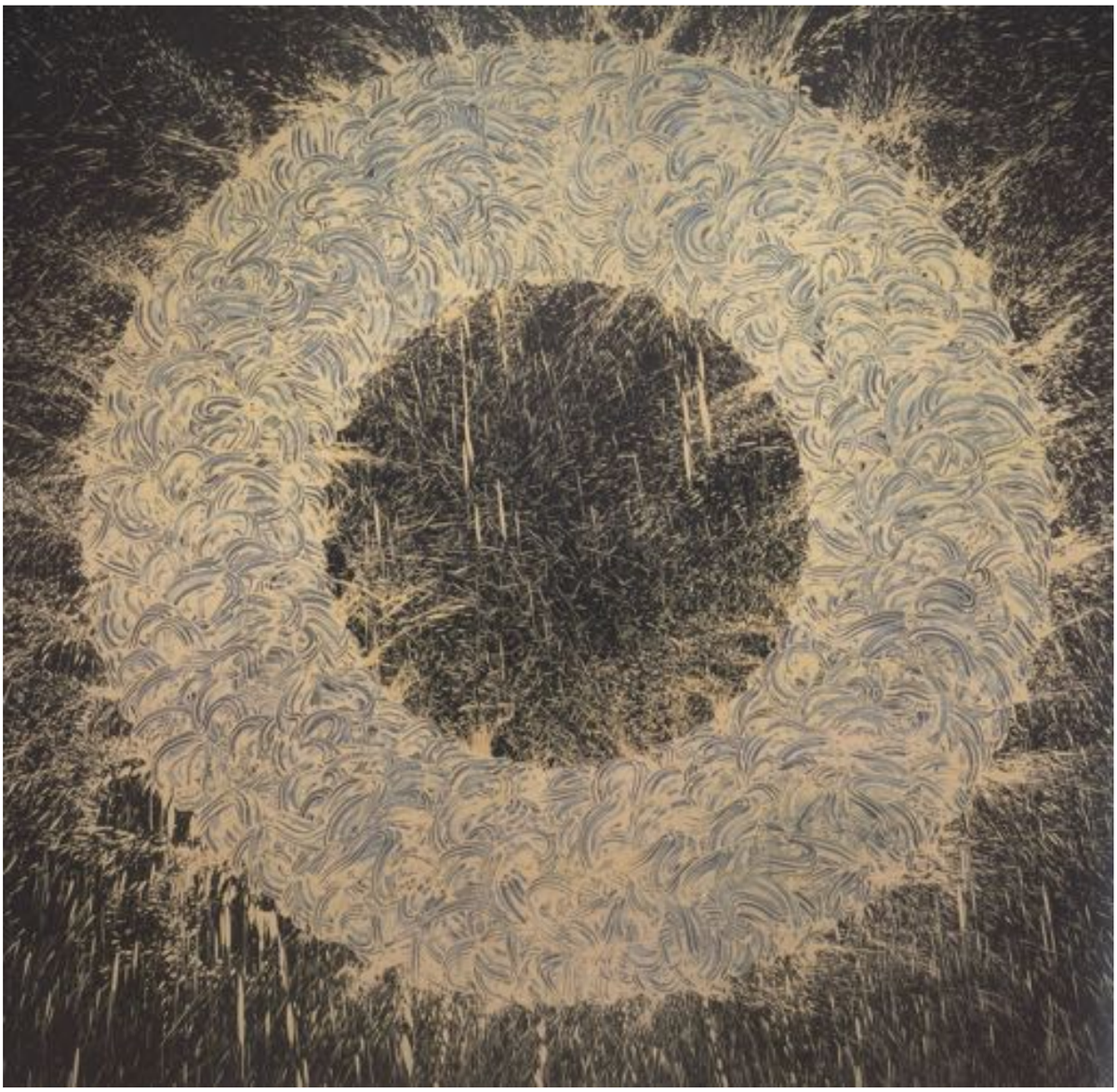


Figure 20 *River Avon Mud Circle* (Long 1991)

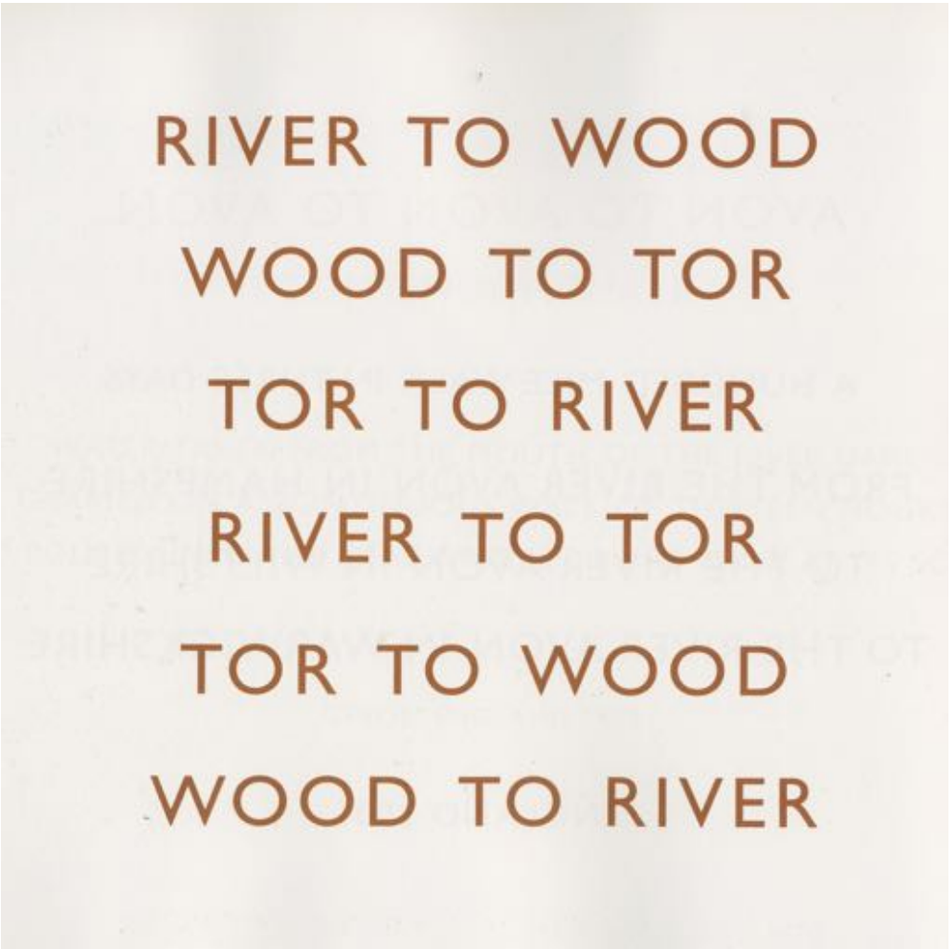


Figure 21 *River to River* (Long 2002)

Likewise, Hamish Fulton is a “walking artist” (Fulton 2010 p. 39) and follows the principle of ‘leave no trace’ in his practice. He claims that the “walk is the work,” (Fulton cited in Slyce 2002 p.22) and creates large-scale wall works from his photographs and notebooks as a record of the lived experience. In a similar way to Long’s *River to River*, Fulton’s *WILD ROCK* (see Figure 22) is a slick and refined text-work which brings attention to natural elements found in the land. Long and Fulton use the cycles of the land to inform the timing or duration of their work. For instance, in Fulton’s text and photographic piece *The Migration North*, (see Figure 23) the ‘circular walk’ begins at the summer solstice full moon. It can be appreciated that walking practices can respect the environment and be ‘in tune’ with the land, using its cycles as structure for the walk. This attention to the land’s cyclical rhythms is also apparent in *A Tree At Its Birthplace A Boulder At Its Resting Place*, (see Figure 24) with the use of text such as “birthplace” and “resting place” reflecting ideas of the life and death cycles intrinsic to the living land. Fulton (2010 p. 77) points out that “each walk marks the flow of time between birth and death,” thus reinforcing the durational and ephemeral qualities of a walk and life itself. Like Long’s practice, the idea of transience and time passing is key to Fulton’s walking art.

It is noteworthy that there is a significance to the use of numbers and placement of text, as elements of the land are reflected in the work. To illustrate, Fulton (2010 p. 50) uses the number seven and seven letter words as he explains “the seven colours of a rainbow...Uses for the number 7 already exist in the world.” In addition, Fulton (ibid) explains that in *21 Days in the Cairngorms* (see Figure 25), “these four words are constructed with 21 letters – 21 letters for a 21-day walk,” or three weeks-worth of sevens. Consequently, the viewer is able to uncover deeper symbolism that features in the work and appreciate how the living land could be seen in this way as a co-artist which informs the final outcome and layout. Furthermore, *21 Days in the Cairngorms* was a walk from Huntly Square in Aberdeenshire to Glenmore Lodge as part of a project with *The Walking Institute* of *Deveron Arts*. In fact, the community of Huntly regularly get involved in walking projects and chose to accompany Fulton for a section of the walk (Fulton 2010). Claudia Zeiske (cited in Fulton 2010 p. 4) highlights how this walk reflected “Huntly’s motto ‘Room to Roam’,” through Fulton’s immersion and exploration in the land so close to Huntly. With consideration to this motto, I am drawn to Scotland’s broader ‘Right to Roam’ act which evokes ideas of openness, freedom and journeying through the land. It is my view that the practice of walking is intrinsic to this act as it is a way of moving through the land and encouraging consideration and appreciation for the wider natural world.

Figure 22 *WILD ROCK* (Fulton 1993)

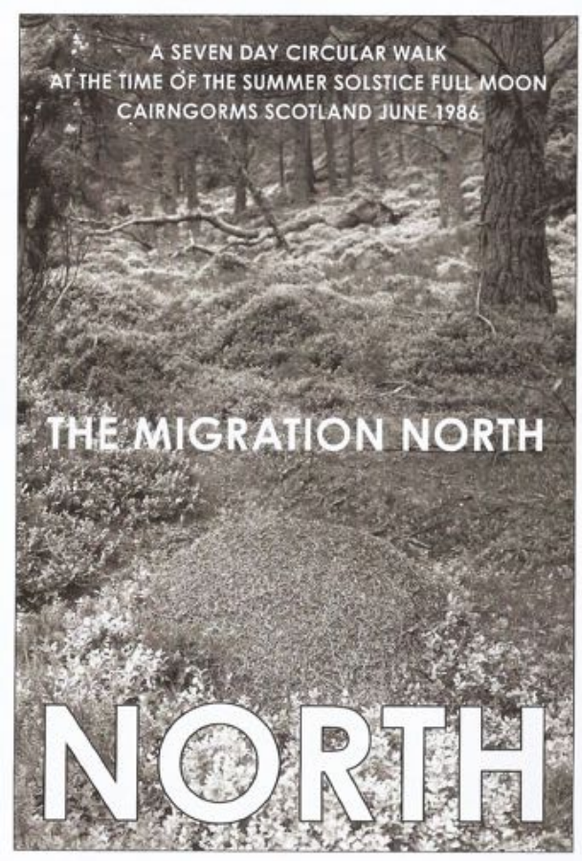


Figure 23 *The Migration North* (Fulton 2010 p. 24)

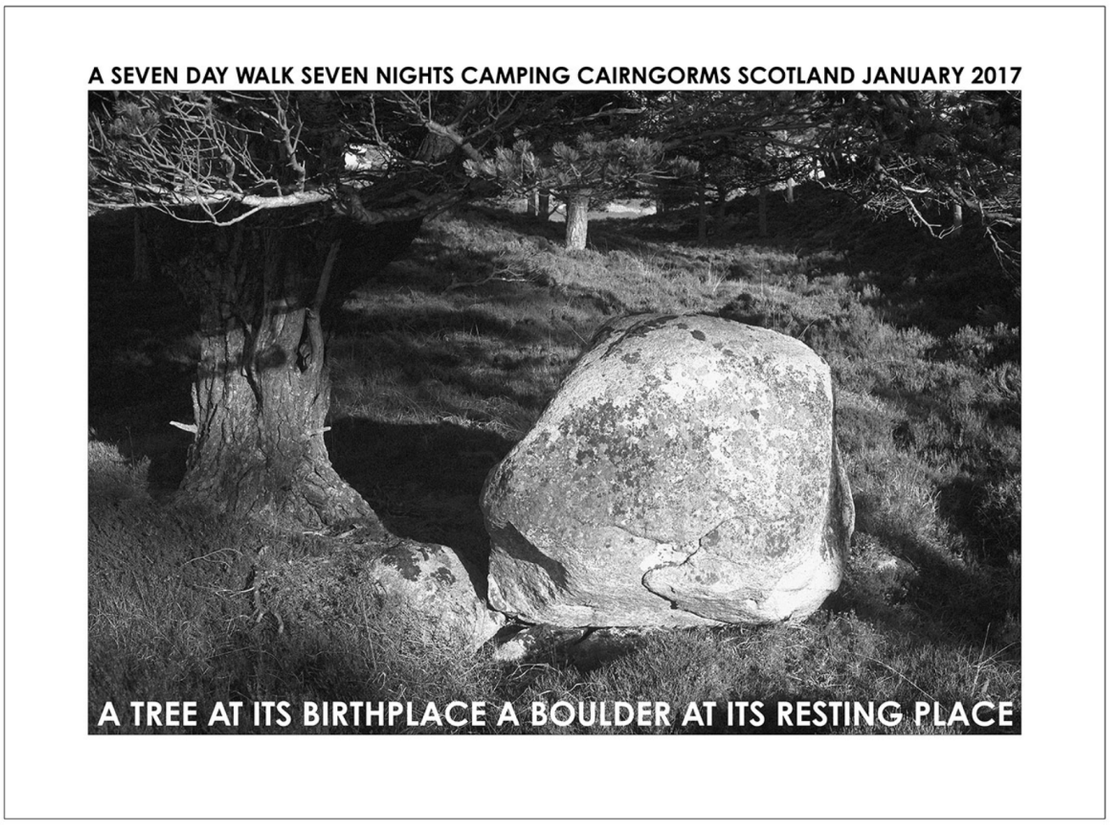


Figure 24 *A Tree At Its Birthplace A Boulder At Its Resting Place* (Fulton 2017)

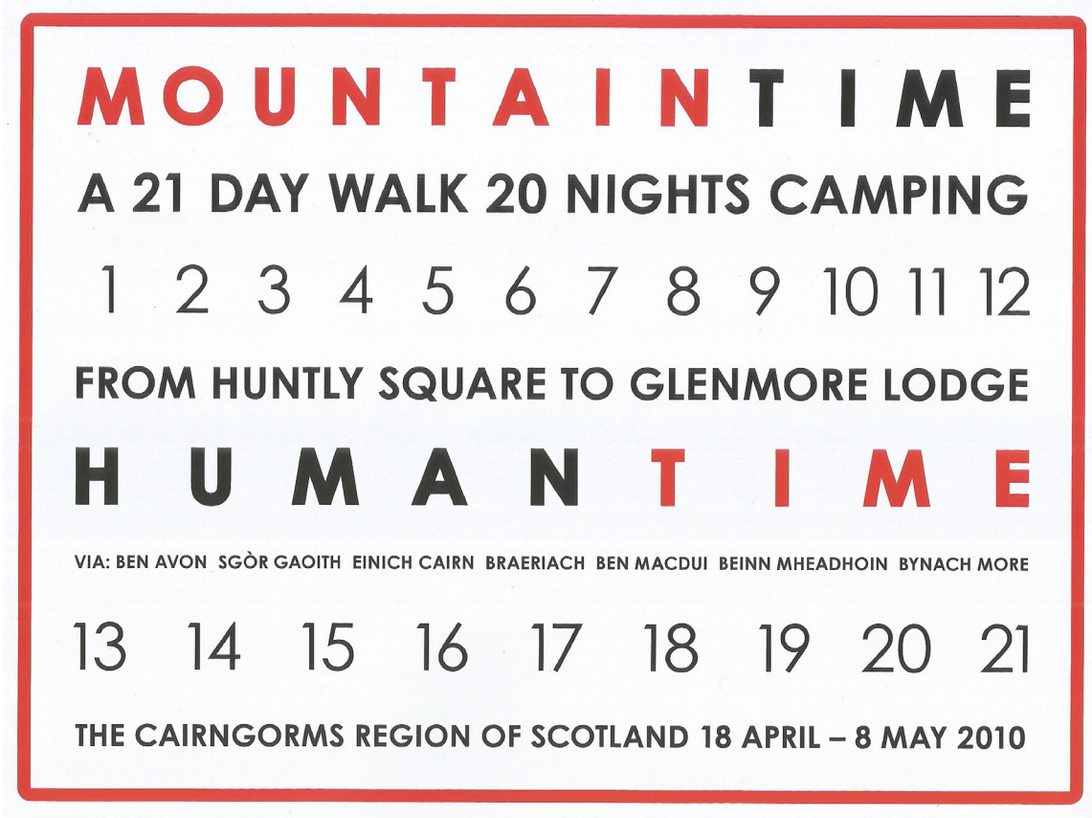


Figure 25 *21 Days in the Cairngorms* (Fulton 2010 p. 5)

Long and Fulton share a similar approach by making work in the land as well as for exhibitions. The way the audience 'experiences' the works must be considered. In both cases, there is the walk created in the land itself and the work created afterwards for galleries and books. Long (cited in Wallis 2009 p. 199) makes it clear that all of his "art is the essence of my experience, not a representation of it." For the indoor work, Long (Long, Moorhouse and Hooker 2002 p. 147) explains that "the real sculpture feeds the senses directly, and the photographs and texts feed the imagination." Moorhouse (Long, Moorhouse and Hooker 2002 p. 38) suggests that "in Long's work, maps, photographs and words relate to a walk or sculpture as a footprint does to a foot," and thus offers enough material for the viewer to "imagine the circumstances which led to their creation." It can be appreciated that there is a distinction between the sculptural work and the photographic or text-based art in galleries because they are experienced differently by the viewer. The viewer can only imagine the walk that took place through the photographs or text yet can respond to the physical and tangible sculptural piece in front of them. The fact that Long's outdoor works are often made in remote places and seen by few people, the photographs, text and indoor sculptures are more accessible to a wider audience, providing the viewers with a "trace" (ibid) or story of Long's direct experience with the land.

Similarly, in Fulton's case, Andrew Wilson (Tufnell et al. 2002 p. 21) explains that the walk itself is the art, and what follows in galleries is always in reference to the walk that has preceded it. Fulton (cited in Tufnell et al. 2002 pp. 26-27) makes this clear as "no walk, no work," and that "an object cannot compete with an experience." Fulton's photographic and text works are simply "tokens for the past event," (Tufnell et al. 2002 p. 27). They do not aim to document or capture the lived experience but rather act as a "noticeboard…gazing back out at the world," (Fulton cited in Tufnell et al. 2002 p. 108). Wilson (Tufnell et al. 2002 p. 31) explains that the photographs and text work offer "observations that provide a sense of place, season and measurement" which reflect the structure of the initial walk. Like Long, Fulton's wall works are impermanent and will be removed when the exhibition finishes; they too will eventually become a past event. In my opinion, it is this belief that the walk is the work which makes the practice so powerful. The viewer will never be able to feel exactly what Fulton or Long experienced. I believe that these walking practices encourage a reconnection with the land as people seek to go out to make their own walks and their own works *in* the land, and to know how that *feels*.

Walking and movement practices encourage a sense of interconnectedness and unity with the land. Richard Sennett (2008 p. 174) argues that when immersed in an activity people "are now absorbed in something, no longer self-aware, even our bodily self. We have become the thing on which we are working." In doing, we become. Equally, walking is a verb, it is a form of 'doing', we move *in* and *with* the land, yet walking can also be a form of 'being'. Indeed, Lee Craigie (Mort 2018 p. 67) explains that we are "human beings. Not human doings," after all. In addition, writer Jay Griffiths (cited in Fulton 2010 p. 17) argues that "walking always encourages the walker to be fully present and in time with the rhythms of

the earth. For the earth itself is a walker," rotating and moving all the time. Movement and immersive practices bring the performer or walker back into the present moment through direct engagement with the land; *feeling and sensing* their connection through movement. Truly, the performer becomes an expression of the land itself. Furthermore, Nan Shepherd (2011 p. 106) observes that after walking for hours that she can "discover most nearly what it is to *be*. I have walked out of the body and into the mountain. I am a manifestation of its total life." In the same way that Griffiths (cited in Fulton 2010 p. 17) believes that through walking, the land "is inwritten into the human being…the walker enters the world and the world the walker," Shepherd and Griffiths make clear the profound relationship between the walker and the land, and how the act of walking facilitates this process.

These immersive practices encourage me to reflect on my own experiences of being in the land. I have walked barefoot in the mud, moss and heather on the hillside behind my family home, enjoying the feel of the ground beneath me and sensing the smells, textures and feel of the land. On walks in the hills which I know so well, I am reminded why I go into the land in the first place. I yearn for the open hillside, the space to walk, think and breathe with the land, to be completely myself in a moment in time. I wholeheartedly share Shepherd's (2011 p. 15) belief that:

> often the mountain gives itself most completely when I have no destination, when I reach nowhere in particular, but have gone out merely to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him.

It is my opinion, that there is a reciprocal relationship between myself and the land. We leave our own mark and trace on each other, neither quite the same after the experience. *A Line Made by My Family Walking* (see Figure 26) shows a stretch of hillside that myself and family trace our footsteps and presence in, as we walk in the land each day.

In conclusion, direct engagement with the land, whether that be through dance or walking as illustrated here enables both the artist and the viewer to understand their place and relationship with the living land better. *Being* in the land enables a person to *sense* and *feel* their deep connection, as we know that "going out" is actually a way of "going in," (Muir cited in Shepherd 2011 p. xxi).

Figure 26 *A Line Made by My Family Walking* (McLeish 2019)

Conclusion

All in all, we can understand that there is a need for art practices to explore our relationship with the living land in order to help people feel more connected to the world around them and to have enriching lives. Our yearning to connect with the natural world is innate and artists continue to use the land for inspiration and exploration of their ideas.

As we have seen, Contemporary Art Practices through a variety of mediums, can help us to rewild and reconnect ourselves with the living land. Language, place-names and mapping have a great influence on how we relate to and document the natural world. In addition, there are cases where indoor and digital practices can cultivate a mediated experience for people who otherwise might not be able to go out into the land directly. Furthermore, the immersive approach of performance and walking enables reflection on our immediate interaction with the land for both the artist and the viewer. These art practices demonstrate that naming, experiencing and moving are ways of reconnecting with the living land.

My own experiences of a rural childhood, spending time walking in the hills and making art has strengthened my love of and connection to the living land. Every time I return home to the Highlands, I feel that I am rewilding myself once again through engagement with the natural world.

The Contemporary Art Practices explored in this dissertation, are a calling, a cry to us all, to name things, to experience and walk in the land and to know that we are part of it. As in the words of eco-philosopher David Abram (2010 p. 3), he encourages:

> Owning up to being an animal, a creature of the earth. Tuning our animal senses to the sensible terrain…Feeling the polyrhythmic pulse of this place – this huge windswept body of water and stone. This vexed being in whose flesh we're entangled…Becoming earth. Becoming animal. Becoming, in this manner, fully human.

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Appendix A

Personal email correspondence with Gill Russell

GILL RUSSELL - Thu 07/02/2019 23:18
Isabel,
here is an 'off the top of my head' reply to all the questions. I am really happy for you to ask/challenge me on anything I have said – you have made me think hard!

yes - no probs - use whatever you like
but please can I get an electronic copy of your final dissertation ?

The following questions are in relation to your mapping, walking and language artworks - particularly your 'Lorg-coise : footprint' publication.

- Why is walking important to you and your art practice?

the slow pace and the way of experiencing landscape- both in terms of access (you can roam anywhere in theory) and experience (pace of absorption) allow internal reflection/thoughts / mood etc and external stimuli to weave in and out of one another and they reinforce each other into something that is (I suppose/hope??) potentially profound...

- In what way does your walking practice help you engage with nature?

oh I have difficulty with that word 'engage' and that question !

The obvious answer is that you are able to go anywhere that your fitness/strength lets you.

Also , i imagine it is something more to do with the pace of it... and the speed of cognition...plus the 'felt' landscape -the wind on your face, the sounds of boots on ice and also..the smells...

The places I can go ..the sounds of the burn-a delightful audio journey to the watershed etc ... following a burn is exciting ...in a kind of furtive sense..secret pools and soundscapes.

(extreme opposite:- in a car I get car sick and have to look at the road !)

I have noticed an amazing smell recently-walking in the snow I get a whiff of something really pleasant... sort of elusive ...nutty and musty.....in places where deer have been recently ...and then its gone. ... but I am perplexed about how long it took me to sense this..as I have been walking for years in the same place without noticing

which brings me to the importance of the repeated walk

all my pals think I am really boring for repeating the same solitary walk every day or so

but it is this which brings the most profound sense of what you call perhaps call ??'engagement'?

noticing the minutiae ...the change of light , the river -never the same...

I ski down the river from my house

and now ice forms on the river ... dynamically with the flux in temperature ...freeze thaw / freeze again... every hour the river changes....

- What are the challenges you face in terms of visually representing or documenting a walk?

HUGE ... basically I can't ! I just try hard like any artist to distil it the best I can.

poetry/words seems to be key to that...because the reader can form connections themselves ..their own experience feeding in and mixing with what I suggest in words..

I have always avoided 'over visual' documentation

e.g. photography ...as I can never create the same feeling as the 'real thing' .

BUT There are people that can,....e.g. Hannah Devereax (who I worked with on the Gathering project) ...her photos are special in the way they capture fleeting patches of light on the hill ... there is something she manages to do that is really interesting.

- What links or relationships do you see in relation to paths/walking routes and rivers/ watercourses?

well a lot of the paths follow rivers/glens as that is the easiest route...but there are gradations of what one calls a 'path' in terms of functionality

so... a Landover track follows the glen in a practical sense to get from a to b

a path might meander closer to the river for aesthetic reasons

but in areas like our vast shooting estates (on my doorstep)..with low populations eg Cabrach/North Glenbuchat estate etc where walking is not encouraged ... and there are not a huge numbers living in the area who actually want to walk for leisure ...the only easy option is the soulless landrover track.

So when I started the Heilan Ways project with Deveron Arts is 2014, I sought other ways...

eventually finding that following burns in this (superficially) bleak landscape was the most rewarding..a delight in fact...making my own routes...but this involves a decision that is not about covering distance ...as the going is hard -so the distances travelled were less ...but I hope/know that the experiences more intense (see poems in Lorg Coise)

- I understand that you often make work based in rural Highland areas, how do you perceive or define 'wilderness'?

does 'wilderness' imply untouched by humans? I wonder...maybe ... I think there is no such thing as true wilderness ? today of course we are always (with)in a **cultural landscape** (see writings of Robert MacFarlane etc)

I am uneasy about the current cult of a Nan Shephard revival . I love her writing but a lot of it was almost common sense (in the true meaning of the word) to me and my walking friends here..and we knew about her writing ages ago when it was first published..it was not new to us

its the subject of a whole other essay of course ! but please see the bit at the end about Nan Shephard shooting and Nan*****

but what rural Highland landscape offers is ... more **space**...and the places I have gravitated towards e.g the west highlands / Glenuig /Moidart have a sense of the ancient and the primordial ??(for want of a better description) which inform and inspire my work ..there is a **felt permanence** and a connection that resonates with something beyond..whatever that means !

> • In your opinion, what role does language play in our relationships and connection to place and nature?

a central role in that it exposes the history and cultures of those that have gone before and their relationship with the land..see below

> • How do the place-names inform the way you approach a walking and mapping artwork?

they hugely inform me..a lot of my work has been about this....to read a detailed map is like a story..... topographical and historical..so place names are integral to that .

The place names are our connection with the dwelling lands of a vanished community... they retain a significance , perhaps even more so in this peculiar landscape. and the mix of Gaelic, Scots and English.

and talking about maps..I am starting artworks that map paths through landmarks ..so the same as our ancestors did before maps, before GPS etc

I am making a 'secret' path now ...and the description is held in my mind ..for example ..part of it is...

''I go from the double larch tree on a gentle rising contour west to a group of old birch trees....at the end of the birches stands a single young oak .. from where I head directly uphill through a patch of moor grass between heather ' etc etc

so I am currently inventing a route and description in terms of landmarks ..

.hmmm...going off the subject ... It is too big a subject to give an answer here, but I hope you can see this clearly through my work.

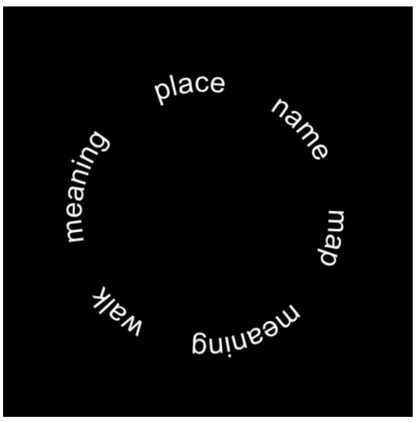
e.g. http://www.gillrussell.co.uk/p/shore_1.html

> • Would you be able to comment on how poetry and walking are connected or impact each other in your work? For example, do the place-names' and language determine the routes you choose to walk? Or rather does your poetry act as an accompaniment to the walking maps as a way of helping the viewer or reader understand more about each walk - as in Lorg-Coise: Footprint?

ahhh! place names and routes DO influence each other..its dynamic always

I chose to explore place through placenames...always searching for meaning

here is a wee thing I came up with with Alec



So there is a circular relationship ...
the place produces name
we map names and draw out meanings
from that we create a walk
the walk returns the meaning of the name to the place

shooting and Nan*****

When I joined the project at Deveron Arts , there was already an artist working on it whose project was titled 'following in the footsteps of Nan Shephard'.

As an inspirational poet and writer, Nan explored extensively in the Cairngorms writing around the 1940/50s ... when hills were being reduced to contours, trig points, miles walked, number of Munros climbed.... Shepherd offered a different path. She was a keenly acute observer with an ecologically sensitive approach. She did not talk about walking up mountains but walking into them.
She enthused about aimless wandering saying:
'the mountains give themselves most completely when I have no destination'.

There is a bit of a Nan Shephard revival - even put her on an RBS £5 note

I thought these shooting estates were odd places to try to follow in the footsteps of Nan .. considering these vast tracts of heavily managed land were solely for blasting birds to bit... which you could not really ignore as a walker.

So in a sense there is this landscape which functions as a playground for the wealthy ... scarred by burnt heather, vermin traps , grouse butts, Landrover tracks, discarded cartridges and carcasses .. a kind of 'cultish' crazed stage set

which has an uneasy juxtaposition with

the current enthusiasm for a more gentle interaction with the landscape which takes a sensitive and ecologically aware approach... inspired by such things as the Nan Shephard revival , writings of Robert

MacFarlane and various re-wilding programmes taking place e.g Trees for Life.

So there are exchanges of consciousness. ..and we all bring a cultural awareness which is in a way , a translation.

And lorg-coise attempts a kind of 'translation' or 'framing'... not so much of (what we think we mean by) the 'natural world' ..but by an awareness of this odd cultish landscape.... such as it is !

Best wishes, Gill

ISABEL MCLEISH - Fri 08/02/2019 09:59

Morning,

Thank you very much for such a detailed response! I will of course ask any more questions that arise or want clarification of.

Actually, the bit about 'Shooting and Nan' at the end of your email - is that your own writing in response to the other Artist's work at Deveron Arts or is that a reflection on your walking practice in a shooting estates area?

Also, the wee thing with Alec you made showing the cyclical relationship, can I ask for the title and the year you made it? Was it also 2014? Is it published anywhere, I don't think I have seen that before?

Thanks again, Isabel

GILL RUSSELL - Fri 08/02/2019 14:22

Its my own thoughts- NOT a criticism of the work of the other artist - more a general reflection

I think its about the understanding the land we walk on –including its cultural politics which can't be ignored

so Nan Shephard was a deeply sensitive soul in perceiving and connecting with her environment.

what connections would she have made of the shooting estate ? and the land management policies therein?

burnt heather, animal traps etc etc...

it is dosed with a little bit of my black humour I suppose!

the 'wee thing' is just a mock up image I did for a talk and readings of lorg coise

(that I was asked to do at an academic symposium at the University last year)

'the dooble tongue': modern poetry and translation

it was to illustrate the circular relationships of my practice and work with Alec

Gill

ISABEL MCLEISH - Mon 11/02/2019 17:31

Hello again Gill,
Thank you for clarifying that. I was having a re-read of your response to my questions and wanted to ask about the 'shooting and nan' reflection you made again. At the very end you explain that there is a strange contrast between the shooting estate and the current gentle, rewilding projects. You said:
"And lorg-coise attempts a kind of 'translation' or 'framing'... not so much of (what we think we mean by) the 'natural world' ..but by an awareness of this odd cultish landscape.... such as it is !"

What do you mean by "cultish landscape" - is this referring to the "cultural politics" of natural environments and landscapes? I was just unsure of the word "cultish" and hoped you could elaborate?

Many thanks, Isabel

GILL RUSSELL - Mon 11/02/2019 17:44

cultish as in the *forms of 'cultish' behaviour* e.g. cultish craze of shooting ...and elaborated here in Lorg Coise p52...

This walk of sixty-five-plus miles is a Hielan' Ways Safari, composed of animal related places, gathered together in the spirit of Munro bagging. Darker realities force themselves upon our attention, in habitat erosion, traps, wildlife crime and 'factory' shooting of 'game'.

Most of the place-names are taken from Gaelic –indicative of use and animals of cultural or cultic significance – while a few have been invented, to reflect contemporary fauna and human interventions, themselves representative of forms of 'cultish' behaviour.

In May 2014, a black water-vole, a protected species, was found in a mink trap in Glen Ernan. This spot marks the start of the walk.

Burn of the Black Water-vole (nj 270 127)
to The Dovecot (nj 357 204)
The walk can be extended 30-40 miles, by way of The Deer Trap, and The Devil's Park, giving a total of 29 animals 'bagged'.
Distance: 65 miles, extension 36 miles
Ascent/Descent: 5500m, extension 2700m
Accommodation: camping
Transport: car to Glen Ernan, then cycle to star

Gill

Appendix B

Personal email correspondence with Alec Finlay

ALEC FINLAY - Mon 28/01/2019 15:25

Dear Isabel

It's always pleasing to have interest, but really I'm so busy I couldn't answer so many questions with the attention they deserve. More importantly, the best thing is to refer to all the blogs I have online, and see some of the key books. I try to give background to my ideas in these places and so they really offer the best answers to your questions. They give much detail about my practical methods and the wider ideas.

The other reason to answer in this way is that I don't necessarily know what I think about climate breakdown, except in the work that I make about it – I mean that the projects themselves are my thinking, such as it is.

Can you try to see a copy of 'gathering', my most recent book? It's the most detailed day far.

In terms of the blogs, if you look at the road north and then a company of mountains, you will see how the more recent work evolved from them – the road north was a tour when I grasped the importance of viewing; a company was an attempt to apply that in a specific landscape, and the Gaelic ecopoetic and rewilding work evolved from these. I think reading it all in order would help.

If you can come to Edinburgh I am happy to show you all the books and let you spend a day reading them, if you cannot get them from the library at Gray's. I am doing a show at Peacock in April and can also meet then.

If you do have a specific question after you have done some of this reading I will do my best to answer it, but when you ask "Which of your projects or artworks do you see as being particularly effective in encouraging a reconnection with nature?" I feel firstly, it would be up to you to judge that, and secondly, the following project would be my best answer, as I tend to solve problems by making new work.

I think there is more than enough here, but if you need more on names and rewilding I have an unpublished ms I can share.

1. On bees:
   http://www.the-bee-bole.com

2. On the recent urban rewilding project, Wild City – the book has a better sense of this project. We sell it for £5.
   https://wildcityglasgow.blogspot.com

3. An older piece giving a basic overview of my evolving practice:
   http://www.company-of-mountains.com/p/overview.html

4. My 4 year project in Cairngorms, probably the most useful source

http://gathering-alecfinlay.blogspot.com

These especially

http://gathering-alecfinlay.blogspot.com/p/knowe-or-knoll_27.html
http://gathering-alecfinlay.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_15.html
http://gathering-alecfinlay.blogspot.com/p/nadokoro-deeside.html
http://gathering-alecfinlay.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_28.html

5. On rewilding, including a film

https://www.commonground.org.uk/a-wolf-among-wolves/

6. More on the same project, about names and rewilding

https://the-wolfs-crag.blogspot.com

7. An audio work relating to rewilding and gathering

https://gathering.bandcamp.com/album/cairngorms-fauna-jukebox

8. A lot of my recent work evolved out of this earlier project:

http://the-road-north.blogspot.com

Kind regards and good luck

Alec