

**Unfolding Imagos:** *An inquiry into the aesthetics of Action-Phenomenology*



**Submitted for the Ashridge-Hult Doctorate of Professional Studies in Organisational Change.**

**Paul Stanley**  
**Church Stretton**  
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Supervisor: Steve Marshall

Examiners: Margaret Gearty, Geoff Hill & Peter Reason

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Paul Stanley (Student no: M00463855)

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## Epigraph

If we think of the Peony, with its thousand different varieties, we have a striking image of this cornucopia of meaning. The Peony gives us an astonishing picture of the plant's *potency to be otherwise*, which it expresses in *becoming other in order to become itself*. So the variety, which we see extensively as many different plants, is organically One plant coming into being intensively as different modes of itself.

Nobody complains about relativism among the Peonies.<sup>1</sup>

Henry Bortoft, from *Taking Appearance Seriously*.

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<sup>1</sup> Bortoft, H. 2012; 121.

One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream. Daydream undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates grandeur. And this contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other, that the daydream transports the daydreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity.<sup>2</sup>

Gaston Bachelard, from *The Poetics of Space*.

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<sup>2</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 201.

## Acknowledgements

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A few people have kept me ‘on the road’ and invested in me when I’ve been skint, in financial, and other ways: Sarah Butler, Craig Campbell, Roger Chamberlain my business partner, Carl Davies, Gilbert Davies, Ann Edlund, Ian Forbes of Church Stretton motorcycles, Annemiek Friebel, Amanda Harman, Allen Hasledine, the late Paul Radley, Katherine Semler, Mike Stanford and Angela Winterton spring to mind. There are surely others whom I have forgotten.

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I thank you all.

## Abstract

In modern civilisation, magic in its instrumental (sorcerous) sense would appear to have been completely superseded by science, but that should not blind us to the (arguably) *reliable efficacy of invocation, nor to the metaphysical implication of this efficacy*—that it points to the *psychophysical nature of reality*.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis is an inquiry into the use of imagination as being restorative of identity. Working experimentally with *poetic-aesthetic* method—writings initially, then visual images—I use altered states of mind, and access to the otherworldly, in order to offer re-arrangements of local realities. Preoccupied as most people are with *everyday realities*, radical proposals—animism, enchantment, non-ordinary ways of knowing and being—don't often find room: in our everyday lives, workplaces, relationships; or in action-inquiry. The body of this inquiry reflects the qualities of what Bachelard terms an *immense philosophical daydream*.<sup>4</sup>

My claim in-depth is, firstly that working with *poetic-aesthetic* method in this way is restorative: of individual, groups, societies; secondly, that the framings offered in Part V *Light* are the bases for further in depth research. Initially proposed as inquiry into the healing of disrupted identity (a consequence of organisational and procedural abuse), the focus of inquiry shifts, unfolds. Inquiry into writing, poetry, aesthetics gives way to a deeper inquiry into connectedness; uncovering healing engendered by *Seeing* connections: to the *more-than-human* world (animism), the *otherworldly* (enchantment).

Questions of *knowing* and *being* surface, along with how to relate these *back to the world*. In *A Language Older Than Words*, Jensen relates a story of connecting a plant—a dracaena cane—to a polygraph. The story relates the plant's responses to a researcher imagining harming it; plant becoming attuned to human; yoghurt responding to death of remote microbes. This leads to altered ways of knowing and being not often in our consciousness; preoccupied as we are with *everyday realities*.<sup>5</sup> *Atelier*—a series of *experimental practices*—provokes deeper inquiry: into the nature and frameworks of inquiry, and, ultimately, theory.

The problem, the contradiction the scientists are stuck with, is that of *mind*. Mind has no matter or energy but they can't escape its predominance over everything they do. Logic exists in the mind. Numbers exist only in the mind. I don't get upset when they say that ghosts exist in the mind. It's that *only* that gets me. Science is *only* in your mind too, its just that that doesn't make it bad. Or ghosts either.<sup>6</sup>

Experience of trauma, abuse, offers distortions of mind and self. These distortions are ascribed as illness but provoked through the deepening inquiry of a series of *experimental practices*: referred to in this work as *The Atelier*. I come to suggest that this is a problem of mind; and of our relationship to the *unscientific*. Playing with these distortions unfolds access to rarely accessed realms: of consciousness; of seeing. Inquiring into these fields of identity reveals new putative fields: *Imago-Unfolding*; *Via Arbora*; *4th-Person Inquiry*; *Action-Phenomenology*. These fields occur—in layers—throughout this text, and in mind.

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<sup>3</sup> Mathews, F. 2010; 7 emphasis mine.

<sup>4</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014a; 201.

<sup>5</sup> Jensen, D. 2000; 292-295.

<sup>6</sup> Pirsig, R. 1999; 42.

## Notes on structure

The world doesn't make sense, so why should I paint pictures that do? Pablo Picasso

The academic vector of the inquiry—theoretical, philosophical—may be traced via the following: Introduction *On becoming*; Chapter 1 *Analogic resonances*; Chapter 5 *Invisible skeins*; Chapter 8 *Immanent disclosures*; Chapter 13 *Nam-shrub*; Chapter 15 *Flights on fictional planes*. (The remainder of the chapters within the first four sections relate the evolution of inquiry, and initial literature referred to.) This leads to the unfolding of *Part V: Light*, and the emergence, discovery, of *Action-Phenomenology*.

Concomitant with the academic, theoretical and philosophical vectors there are layers—*under-stories*—initially emergent in the prologues. These under-stories thread in and out of the inquiry as it progresses. The main, tangible narrative arc of inquiry may be traced via *The Trees* series of experimental writings, which further explore and deconstruct backstory: *this inquiry needs to be experienced-seen-as well as read*.

This work has been noted as having a quality described as *kaleidoscopic*. Within *Part V: Light* I explore the layered and granular *kaleidoscopic* natures: of time; inquiry; light; realities. Within which further fields of inquiry become revealed. It is these fields noted in *Part V: Light*—along with previously noted methods of Imago-healing—which constitute my contributions: to knowledge, to practice; and to what defines—constitutes—the widening fields encompassed by the terms: *action-inquiry* and *post-conventional scholar*.

## Supplementary abstract

Inquiring into identity revealed—in addition to *Imago-Unfolding*—three putative new fields: *Via Arbora*; *4th-Person Inquiry*; *Action-Phenomenology*. Following further writing and feedback from the examiners, I decided to explicate the last, *Action-Phenomenology*, as a means of sign-posting—for students, researchers and practitioners—ways in which this aspect of practice is both manifest, and, to a degree, carried out.

In *The Elegant Universe* Brian Greene writes: [that physicists] ‘*make choices and exercise judgments about the research direction in which to take a partially completed theory founded upon an aesthetic sense—a sense of which theories have an elegance and beauty of structure on par with the world we experience.*’<sup>7</sup>

With *Part VI: SpaceTime*, I have created a supplement to the thesis. This supplement—an elucidation on *Action-Phenomenology*—as well as being explanatory, indicates a trajectory for further inquiry: into *Via Arbora* and *4th-Person Inquiry*. In that at least, the work retains its original sense; one of inquiry into aesthetics. And it becomes more: an inquiry into the nature of *Action-Phenomenology* as a discrete, distinct, paradigm. Necessitating, in my view, a shift in title, to: **Unfolding Imagos: An inquiry into the aesthetics of Action-Phenomenology**.

I note too, that *Via Arbora* and *4th-Person Inquiry*, whilst readily permeated and explained by *Action-Phenomenology*, are not particular to this method or theory. The fields of Eco-Theology and Theology respectively spring readily to mind as valid, powerful avenues of inquiry; both similarly ‘*founded upon an aesthetic sense of which theories have an elegance and beauty of structure on par with the world we experience*’.

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<sup>7</sup> Greene, B. 1999 in Stevens, M. 2020.

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## Prologue

[i vignettes; under-stories]

*Reflection: Within the play with light and enchantment and lines of poetry, there becomes, sometimes, a floating out of truths that may be both more universal, and also ineffable.*

*What is the impact of these truths?*

A floating out of truths...

A floating out of truths in the light of my 25 days so far in the stream making photographs and soul-writing the process; I find within truths other, more hidden verités:

About love, about power, about the sense of long lost connectedness and how this pertains; about the beauty of 'merely' being, of observing a place that I love, with a cat who helps me to see things in new ways, constantly.

I learn of inner calm, and leaning into difficulty, and keeping calm and centred - in the stream - in the face of apparent craziness; hostility even.

Within all of this, to maintain a trajectory of love, via this *via arbora*: this wooden duct, this way towards other realities, towards other worlds; worlds yet to come.

What a lovely view...



Untitled. France, 2007.



Untitled (Me). Tendon France, 2007. <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Photographer unknown



Untitled. Jura, Swiss/French border, 2007.

## Dom's

October 2016: A month after returning from Bled, I went down to Dom's bike stop on a whim. I needed to get back on the bike, unsure why. It was a Saturday afternoon. I was headed for trouble, but didn't really know it.

Dom was pleased to see me, remembering me by name, to my surprise, asking how I'd been. It was the first time I'd been there in over a year.

I told him this was the first day I'd been out on the bike since I got back from Bled. I didn't tell him I was feeling a bit ropery, and that the ride-out to his bike stop was a lifeline. I did tell him that I'd been saving my tyres all year for the Bled trip.

Next to me at the counter was a biker who'd arrived on a new looking GS. He started asking me about my trip to the Balkans. He'd been there in the war. He was huge. And, something about him suggested, a bit broken too.

We sat on adjacent tables. I struck up conversation with him. Turned out he'd done both Gulf wars, and the Balkans. And he too had PTSD.

He told me he'd taken up riding bikes five years ago, that it was the best thing he could have done for his mental health.

I told him a bit about my inquiry. I mentioned the Welsh trial, which he knew of.

I suggested a ride.

We left - me leading - for a ride out to The Smatcher, me and The Vet.



Untitled. Lingen, 2010.

## Prologue

[ii back-story]

*Hello Isabel*

*Firstly thank you for your interest in my work, of which I attach examples.*

*In order for you to be able to access both the examples, and gist of my work more readily, some of the following context would probably be useful, even vital!*

### **Potted biography:**

*Attended school in the midlands in the 60's and early 70's. Always wanted to be a pilot, but told I wasn't clever enough. (My careers interviews rather echoed that in the Ken Loach film Kes, if you've ever seen it. Coincidentally KL came from the next town.)*

*Options on the career card: work in coal mine; car factory or for the council. I chose the latter, becoming an apprentice gardener for Coventry City Council.*

*Did that for 5 years. Then while hitching a ride in a truck from friends at university (nobody ever went to university from our school), I thought I'd like to become a lorry driver, which I did. Did that for 5 years, latterly driving a mobile library. At this point I'd started taking photographs, and via someone at the mobile library encouraged me to apply to what is now the University of Derby to do a degree in photography. (At that time—1982—there were only 4/5 such courses in the country, no tuition fees, and you got a grant. I was very lucky.)*

*After leaving art school the one thing I was sure of was that I didn't want to go back to driving lorries. I moved to the Welsh marches of Shropshire, where I still live. After a couple of years I started an MA (again, no fees, grant to attend, free travel and materials), at what is now Manchester Metropolitan University. While doing that I found I had a knack for teaching, while teaching under grads as part of my course.*

*On completing my MA I became a part time lecturer in Burton on Trent (I had moved 'temporarily' back to the Midlands). I also started flying sailplanes and took my Private Pilots Licence (this will become relevant). At the same time I witnessed workplace bullying, and resolved to leave if it ever happened to me. It did, I left, and went to fly planes towing gliders, eventually for 2 summers. At the end of summer two I met someone and decided I'd better get a proper job, applying to be a University lecturer in a post '92 institution. (In my writings I refer to this place as The Leviathan, for reasons which will become obvious; I have no objections around revealing its identity, even though I'm subject to a gagging clause, it's just that other Leviathans are available).*



*For 13 years life was good, I taught people to fly in the summer (by now having my Commercial Pilots License and Flying Instructors Rating), and for the rest of the year, taught people—similar to my younger self—who had fallen through the educational net. I became, if I say so myself, good at both of these, not least the teaching which required helping students to navigate an increasingly Byzantine, complex, and dysfunctional bureaucracy: One designed, it seemed, to prevent us, rather than support us, in the stated aim of the institution, namely: educating those from ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds and widening access/participation to HE.*

*After 13 years I had risen to the dizzy heights of Senior Lecturer, and had no wish to progress further due to the (increasingly poor) management of the institution: by this time it had transitioned from dysfunctional to toxic. I was then given some minor managerial responsibility (more work, no more pay). At this point I became aware that some staff for whom I was now responsible, and me, were being bullied. Determined to do the right thing this time—and not be bullied out of my job again—I informed HR, the UCU and a senior colleague. I was then suspended for 13 weeks on a trumped up charge. At that point I started to become ill. I also started doing an MBA at Aston Business School, as I was curious as to how organisational affairs should be run.*

*After 10 months off work—13 weeks, plus six months sickness—I returned as the offer to leave was not sufficient (around 4 months pay, as I recall).*

*All was well for a few months, then the bullying started again (by this time I had a new boss, the University having fired the previous one, even though there was deemed to be no case to answer re his bullying of me and others). The new boss was a ‘better’ bully. I lasted 2 years more, completed the taught part of my MBA, became ill, and was suspended again (this was about the 4th disciplinary charge against me). I went to the doctor, who said that I was one notch off suicidal on the DSM test. He prescribed me Prozac, which I resolved not to take. I also resolved not to return to The Leviathan, and engaged a lawyer of my acquaintance. I was eventually fired in Dec 2010, and I became more ill (with PTSD which I still have) in 2011. My tribunal case went nowhere (my lawyer not being as smart as he liked to think).<sup>9</sup> At the same time I started my MBA project under the aegis of John Peters on optimised decision-making.*

### **Illness:**

*Due to my illness I was given extended time to do my MBJ project, I took 18 months. Then John Peters was fired as the programme that he’d been hired to run didn’t recruit. I was an inconvenience so I was disposed of too on a technicality. At around that time, John introduced me to a former RAF colleague of his, Dr Steve Marshall. I was urged to apply to undertake the Ashridge Doctorate in Organisational Change, and was accepted.*

*Starting that programme felt like going back to art school, freer if anything. After 9 months I started writing of my experiences on The Leviathan, using experimental writing and poetry. This proved to be very therapeutic, and after 30,000 words plus of poetry, I was able to re-contextualise my experiences, and thus put them to some use.*

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<sup>9</sup> Note this is not any of the lawyers mentioned in my acknowledgements.

*At the same time I was earning no regular wage, just some income from flying instructing, which was absorbed by a plane I had acquired, and also by now a small pension from my former lecturing job. This put a strain on both my relationship, and my partner's health, she having been diagnosed with 'biological depression and anxiety' in mid 2015, and prescribed citalopram. (We parted in early 2016, after she had been to see a lawyer—Direct-Debit Debbie in my writings).*

**Healing:**

*At the time of our parting I resolved to make a series of pictures as an act of benediction. This turned into The Alder Altar Project. For 40 days over 43, between the pagan festivals of Oestre and Beltane, I got up before dawn and stood in a stream and took photographs of flowers. I was accompanied in this endeavour by a cat called Yosser. I also wrote about what I was doing, and posted it out to an ever growing band of followers. This then morphed into making pictures of flowers and posting them out. By the end of the summer I was feeling much better—having found that resonating with the natural world, and connecting to Yosser, and making pictures and writing about these experiences—to be of benefit.*

*Then I went to Bled in Slovenia on my motorbike, to present my ideas around healing resonances. However the preceding session was about a Performance Review. I had written about my last one of these on The Leviathan, so read it out, along with a couple of others about the aesthetics of organisational dysfunction. It caused quite a stir, some of those in the room became traumatised.*

*On my way back from Bled I made the connection—between aesthetics, and trauma/healing—whilst riding my motorbike (I think that in this it relates to EMDR).*

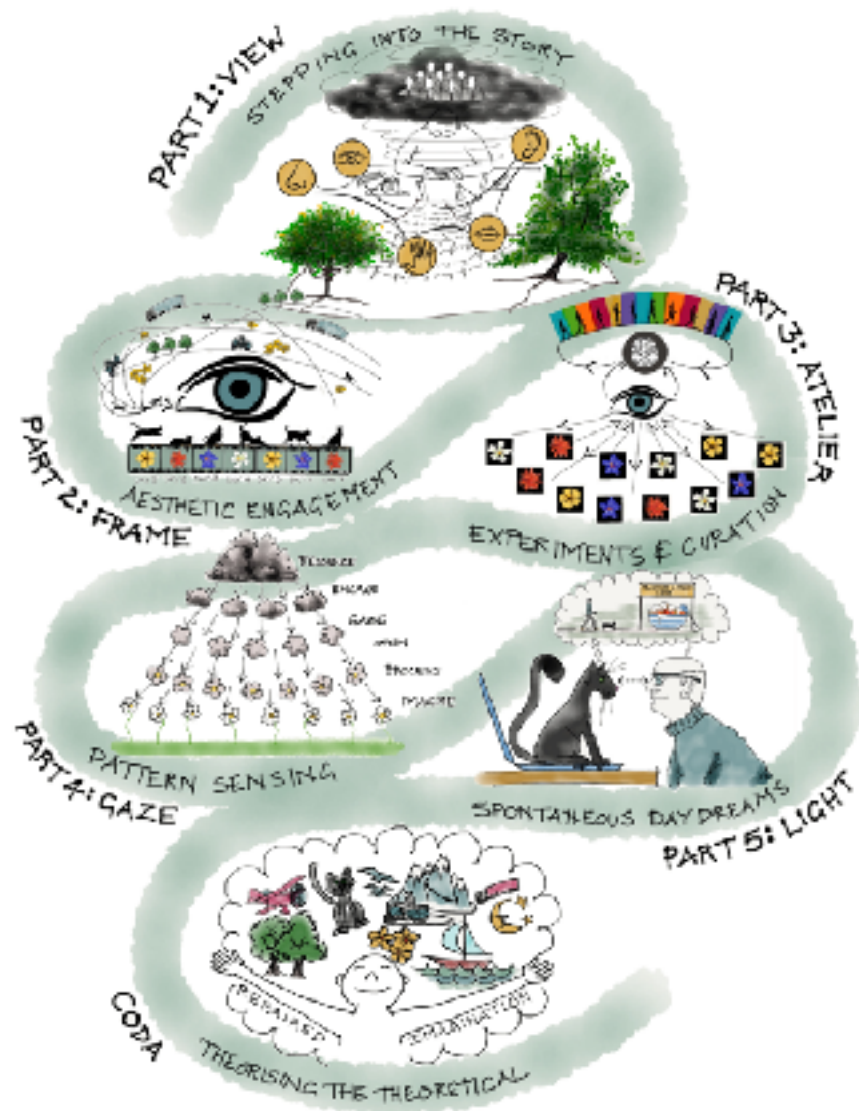
**Practice:**

*In January 2017 I had my practice viva, where my practical findings were endorsed and well received (I had more scholarly work to do). I wrote the first 3 chapters of my thesis, up until June 2017. Then I re-became a truck driver as I needed to earn money. This paused my writing until November, when I started work on the thesis again, with experimental narratives (on Imago chapter 4). This time I experienced the aesthetic of truck driving as also healing. I reflected on the concept of Imago: how the seed of who we are becomes other; how it maybe deflected; how this can make us ill.*

[Derived from email to Isabel Hardman 3.3.18]

Preludes

Diagram: A reflexive research narrative & structure.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Illustration by SB.



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<sup>11</sup> Sinker: a weight used to sink a fishing line or sounding line. Sinkers 1-4 appear here. Sinkers 5, 6 & 7 enfold Part V *Light*.

### **Sinker 1. Stepping into story**

This inquiry started out as one into healing; the deployment of artful means in order to effect improved [mental] health and wellbeing. Initially I set out by writing poems as a way of both expiating anger, and of sense-making of an organisational situation that had eventually led to a deterioration of my own mental health. In order to *write my way into the thesis* I wrote an account of the elements of this part of the inquiry: word; mind; imago (identity).

Alvesson and Sköldberg write that their: *interest and competence lie in the space between abstract philosophy and narrow questions of method.*<sup>12</sup> This inquiry is similarly layered, in both practice and theoretical contextualisation. At the initial writing of Part I *View*, I had deployed theory that most readily and directly interpreted my experiences. Upon revisiting the text at first draft stage I wrote *Analogic resonances*, in order to make sense of the wider theoretical considerations (particularly at that stage Artful Inquiry and First-Person Inquiry). Aiming to see how these supported (or otherwise) my unfolding methods, and to determine any gaps: i.e where, or why did the theory deployed not match with what I was finding out? The obvious (for me) antecedents: artful-inquiry; lyrical inquiry; social process. The processes—along with the theory contained in the chapters—adequately, but not wholly, delineated the theoretical grounds where my initial (literary) explorations and experiments were carried out. This first *poetry* phase related—in time—from January 2014 until April 2016. These first steps into ‘*the existence of a reality beyond the researcher’s egocentricity and the ethnocentricity of the research community*’ were my way of beginning to ‘*be able to say something insightful about this reality.*’<sup>13</sup> Having written around 60 poems/30,000 words of poetry, I thought that with poetry and inquiry that I had found my metier. But poetry, though instilling a certain level of (writing) discipline and risk-taking, and being of some aesthetic merit, was not becoming the *full story* in terms of process.<sup>14</sup>

My poetic impetus was diverging: into experimental writing, and the (for me) ostensibly *safer ground* of image-making: specifically *image-making as ritual*. My contextual impetus diverged too: from the antecedents of artful and lyrical inquiry, into deeper phenomenal, metaphysical foundations. Reading further into phenomenology helped ground the theoretical base from which my practice was precessing: *Referring to philosophical ideas without really reading them is pointless, bewildering and means a waste of time and energy of both the researcher and of his or her unfortunate readers.*<sup>15</sup> Emerging from these first tentative steps into story were the foundations of deeper, more radically innovative inquiry: an interweaving of the imagined and real as *flights on fictional planes*. In my experimental writings I noted the value of the power of paying attention and noticing: as a foundation for practice; as a way of working with the more-than-human and otherworldly; as encountering non-local realities. *Writing-as-method* also opened up further areas of exploration: art-therapy, aesthetics and working with the spontaneous as a means of healing identity.

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<sup>12</sup> Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. 2000; vii.

<sup>13</sup> Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. 2000; 3.

<sup>14</sup> Richardson, L., & St Pierre, E. 2005; 959–978.

<sup>15</sup> Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. 2000; 7.

## **Sinker 2. Aesthetic engagements**

At the inception of the Alder Altar ritual in the spring of 2016, it was clear the poetry had, at least for a time, become redundant as an aesthetic appropriate to inquiry.<sup>16</sup> I reverted to photography (my background and training). But with twists: it was to be ritualised, *low tech* (iPhone); I had Yosser, a stray cat, as an assistant; a means of *making* the act of *seeing* occur differently, more spontaneously. Thus my aesthetic *choices* became ostensibly *restricted*, re-defined: by the apparently random *windows-on-being* offered by a cat.

These qualities of engagement—ritual; low-tech; cat ontology—far from being restrictions, became overtures to deeper, more radical inquiry. Constraints became precursor to breakthrough: a phenomenon that I'd observed previously during my years as a photography tutor when making my pictures as a way of self-healing by entering altered states of consciousness and awareness on the Long Mynd in the 1990's.<sup>17</sup>

Working with Yosser helped me to work my way into two new realms of experience: animism and phenomena. There was also a necessary shift in the theoretical grammar needed to inquire into these areas: having laid the pathway in, the realms of standard action-inquiry (even artful-inquiry), art therapy, and psychology were not sufficient. I shifted towards narrative inquiry and phenomenology in search of both deeper meanings, and material that would both support, interrogate and inspire emergent practices.

Narrative inquiry as practice and phenomenology as theoretical framing helped me to inquire more deeply: into the ways in which images showed up; how they may be worked with; spontaneity as method. In these initial instances of working with phenomena as method—*Action-Phenomenology*— it increasingly felt as though method (and theory) were choosing me, rather than me choosing method. I was an observer to an unfolding of method, albeit my own. It often didn't feel that I was complicit in this unfolding, merely attuning to deeper wisdoms, discovering for myself what Alvesson and Sköldbberg term: '*Unique adequacy of the methods, and becoming the phenomenon*' and also '*Scenic display*'—forms of '*incongruity experiments [...]* which mean in one way or the other disturbing the conditions of the actors' common-sense ideas.'<sup>18</sup>

Exploring deeper aesthetics, the proposition of the magical cropped up; along with some attendant concepts: the social and societal noticing of *Part I View* giving way to more subtle apprehending. The idea that my inquiry was of the nature of a magical journey, or sacred adventure had cropped up around the time of my progression viva. *Part II Frame* saw a shift towards these more metaphysical framings: in which earlier considerations—mythic forms; psychology, narrative inquiry—became overlaid by more transcendent, phenomenal inquiry. Aesthetically an interleaving was occurring: I was still making some pictures of flowers (and of Yosser), whilst driving trucks; and a continuation of *The Trees* writings. This confluence of practice was rooted in my work of *The Atelier*—a series of makeshift studio(s) and magical journeys, which remained with me throughout the inquiry, further unfolding into new theories and paradigms of change. This is explored in *Part V Light*.

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<sup>16</sup> See Part III *Atelier*

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 6: Unearthing Imagos.

<sup>18</sup> Alvesson, M. & Sköldbberg, K; 40.

### **Sinker 3. Experiments & curations in the Atelier, a reflection**

In *Atelier* I begin to encounter the essence of my inquiry for the first time. Sociological and psychological methods and methodologies having eluded the essence, practice shifted: from *poetry*, to a broader, and for me deeper, inquiry of *poetics*. I write (paraphrased) of *a deepening gaze of connectedness surfacing during the ritual of the Alder Altar and as the Atelier of the world emerged around me*. Initially moving from poetry into (ritualised) photography, I extended method: to encompass communion with the more-than-human world (flowers, Yosser); to involve peregrinations (by motorbike, trucks, plane). Occasionally thereby encountering altered states of being and perceiving.

In making my curations I was engaging experimentally, in a non-linear manner. With a genuine '*I wonder what happens if I...?*' predication to my actions, in a cycle of noticing, making, showing, reflecting and re-making. This extension of my practice did of course involve conscious decisions and was borne of some experience. From my years of teaching (similar photographic) method I knew that something interesting would happen if I created a 40 day photographic ritual. I had no idea what; nor indeed how powerful, and contributory to ongoing practice, this period would prove to become. This much was a conscious choice not to take up an invitation to engage directly with toxicity and abuse of process, as Christine Oliver writes: '*We do not have to take up these invitations to participate, but choosing not to take up a subject position offered in a pattern, requires critical reflective skills and the ability to act, when appropriate, counter-intuitively.*'<sup>19</sup> I recall hosting a group call on *curating the sacred*: what it felt I was doing in this period; a matter of invocation, more than of purposing. Curating conditions for emergence, observing, playing with—re-iterating—patterns and phenomena, practices overlapped: *The Alder Altar* became subsumed by the *Daily Flowers*. These were in turn subsumed by other visual, and written epiphanies: *The Bled Travelogue*; *The Trees* writings; pictures made when trucking. Then, more latterly, by photos of skies and other 'empty' landscapes.<sup>20</sup> Working through Bortoft and Van Der Kolk on the Bled trip was particularly useful in terms of inquiry: reading, and theorising my trip on the hoof, thus engendering deeper inquiry.

Chapter 8, *Immanent disclosures*, is a reflection upon this emerging kaleidoscope of practices. At the point of writing that chapter I was, necessarily, seating my theory on antecedents: artful-inquiry, lyrical-inquiry, narrative-inquiry. I had yet to disturb to any great degree the disclosures available and attending to deep inquiry into phenomena and the sacred. I had intimations that it was there, but it seemed too daunting and complex to even begin to unwrap. In that sense *Atelier* is very much an—albeit significant—interesting waypoint to what became the meta-inquiry: Inquiry about how to inquire into such matters as the sacred, the soul, identity, phenomena, the more-than-human, the otherworldly.

Once this meta-inquiry field opened up, *Atelier* shifted too: morphing from waypoint to turning-point. *Atelier* led me to the notion of *inquiry as sacred journey*—a series of poetic practices—where aroused curiosities provoke deepening aesthetic engagement and invocations. Thus arousing further inquiry into the phenomenal and the sacred, and how to approach this.

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<sup>19</sup> Oliver, C. 2005; 13.

<sup>20</sup> This becomes more apparent in *Part V Light*.

#### **Sinker 4. *Pattern-sensing, a reflection***

What had become clear to me during, and immediately post *The Atelier*, was that the shift in my practice into the realm of poetics—as much a way of being and micro-actions as artful form—was lending greater possibilities to the work. In any situation, especially confusing or difficult ones, it was possible to form poetic responses: planting trees, making pictures, relating to a cat, riding a bike to the Balkans, driving trucks, creating ritual, sacred adventure. Wider possibilities opened up as a result: deeper connection to my home; renewed and deeper facility with photography; experience of animism; insights into journey-as-practice; regained confidence through the challenges of trucking and working with the *Atelier* in the everyday. Simply a matter of pattern sensing; then of playing with the patterns attendant to a situation.

This, for me was revelatory, empowering, liberating. I had been doing similar for many years, but my (linear) brain had not caught on that this was method, let alone the possibility of it being action inquiry. Because, put simply, it didn't look like (according to my linear brain) action inquiry. I was engaging still with theory in the manner of a polar bear stepping from one melting ice floe to another: not outstaying my welcome, not finding a home. Theory—Bortoft's insights into Goethe and Van Der Kolk's into trauma in particular—had been especially helpful, *vital*, in getting me to this point. But they weren't the whole point. I sought solace and wisdom in phenomenology, revisiting Merleau-Ponty at first. Then more usefully, encountering Gaston Bachelard for the first time. This re-encounter, then new encounter, space led me to reflect more deeply on the possibilities offered by the interposition of the theoretical and the practical. (It also gave me to consider whether this dissertation was a work of fiction, or non-fiction: *where did the truth lay, who owned it?*)

I settled upon Merleau-Ponty's phrase '*flights on fictional planes*' as a satisfactory, poetic, means of, if not resolving, at least sidestepping, the issue. Inquiry had taken not only a phenomenological turn, but also a quasi (quantum) physical one: if I was working with micro-patterns and realities then physicality of the situation was called into question too. At the same time practice was shifting, unintentionally. I was *working* with images, but more loosely even than before: minor noticings, often tangentially relating to my work as a truck driver, captured by iPhone. This—at first barely noticed—shift acquired by my practice became a new rhetoric: one to dance with further, with which to inquire into the very nature of the theory of inquiry. Alvesson and Sköldböck propose three reductions of ethnomethodology: phenomenological; eidetic; transcendental.<sup>21 22</sup> My inquiry—still linked to identity—indicated different framing or framings were required.

I had already approached three frames for deeper inquiry by name, these being: Via Arbora (*physis*); 4th-Person (sacred) inquiry; Action-Phenomenology (poetics). It became clearer, that my initial inquiry had deepened into the territory of *transcendental reduction*: '*By this is meant that we pass on from studying universals, invariances, general phenomena—that is, essences—to investigate how these are constructed.*'<sup>23</sup> Namely, the very nature of what constitutes describable process; the paradigms necessary to support such inquiry. What, in such fields, constitutes theory? Is theory, in this instance, separable from practice?

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<sup>21</sup> *Eidetic*: relating to or denoting mental images having unusual vividness and detail, as if actually visible: an eidetic memory.

<sup>22</sup> Alvesson, M. & Sköldböck, K; 36-37.

<sup>23</sup> Alvesson, M. & Sköldböck, K; 37.



## Introduction

*On Becoming*: the evolving inquiry

Restless days and sleepless nights  
always fighting  
with all your heart and soul so as not  
to fail at living.  
Who could ask for anything more?

Seamus Heaney



Untitled (Convolvulus). Lingen, 2016.

Early August 2016, 7am. I'm called into the garden by a flower: sunlight refracting through a *Convolvulus* that had been growing on a young apple tree in the North garden of Archers Ford, our home in north west Herefordshire. I don't remember if Yosser was with me, but he would have been around somewhere; his avatar appears on the shadow on the flower. Between 07.00 and 07.06 that day I made a number, fifty-six, pictures of this flower. A couple of hours after these photographs were made, the Gopher from the toxic lawyer—who became known in my poems as *Direct-Debit Debbie*—turned up.<sup>24</sup> These events—the making of the flower picture; the appearance of the Gopher; the resultant writings—*The Trees* stories, *The Direct Debit Debbie* quintet of poems—form emblematic sutras: threads, that weave through my practice.

There were precursors of these events too—the Qatar trip and writings; the advent of the *Alder Altar* project; 40 dawns in a stream photographing flowers; the ensuing *Daily Flowers*; the story of my relationship with Yosser the cat—all converging at an omega point: making this series of photographs of a bindweed flower, just after dawn in August 2016.<sup>25</sup> Events, and particularly their photographic and writerly emanations, were essential pre-sensitisers; without which the *Convolvulus* flower would have gone un-noticed. Distilled, these transcriptions manifest as sutras—a thread on which jewels are strung—and evidence emergent practices.<sup>26</sup> Loosely, the intertwining sutras may be termed: lyric; narrative; healing; artefact; gaze—arising from my observations, reflections and reading on and around my nascent, emergent, practice.

In combination they assuage adversity and promote the unfolding and integration of those aspects of identity that I term *Imago*, or *Imagos*.<sup>27</sup> (Throughout the thesis I develop my own definition of *Imagos*, and invite readers to evoke their own. For now I use as a shorthand: *that being which we are meant to become, as an acorn becomes an Oak, or a pupa becomes a Butterfly*.) This process is largely in my practice an aesthetic one. Within this thesis it is framed: by critique; by meta narrative; and by scholarly context or interpretation. Worked with as a whole these sutras and practices have something of the quality of the magical about them: within their patterns and inter-weavings, non-ordinary energies and ways of seeing become manifest.

My term for this practice is *The Imaginal Gaze*: that gaze emanating from the processes attending an unfolding of *Imagos*; often in the presence of elements of the more than human world. It is a reciprocal, erotic, difficult-to-hold-in-direct-focus, process, that, simply put, apprehends, and plays with, patterns. It is phenomenal in nature, phenomenological in context.

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<sup>24</sup> This inter-narrative will emerge through the body of the thesis.

<sup>25</sup> Both Teilhard de Chardin and Ken Wilber refer to Omega points. The OED defines it thus: Omega point, *n.* *Theology*. With reference to the writings of P. Teilhard de Chardin: a hypothesized end to evolutionary development in which all sentient life will converge into a supreme consciousness; God or Christ as this final end. Also more widely: a final purpose, an end. Cf. omega *n.* 1b. The translated text of the first edition of Teilhard de Chardin's book uses *Omega*, not *Omega point*.

<sup>26</sup> Katagiri, D. 1988; 186. Definition: Sūtra (Skt.) Literally “a thread on which pearls are strung.” In the Therāvadin tradition the sūtra is a text forming part of the Pali cannon and containing oral teachings of the Buddha. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, sutras are not necessarily the actual transmitted words of the Buddha, but are his teachings. I define the sūtra as encompassing the jewels as well: the thread(s) being the inter narratives between the vignettes, aphorisms, or images (jewels).

<sup>27</sup> Definition: imago | ɪˈmeɪɡəʊ | noun (plural **imagos** or **Imagos** | ɪˈmeɪdʒɪnɪz | )

1 *Entomology* the final and fully developed adult stage of an insect, typically winged.

2 *Psychoanalysis* an unconscious idealized mental image of someone, especially a parent, which influences a person's behaviour.

Reflecting now on the image of the Convolvulus flower made in early August 2016, it occurs to me that this image falls at the nexus of the inquiry: in emergent practices; in linear time of events that gave birth to practice; not least, in terms of my own awakening. The Convolvulus flower called me; I photographed it for around 6 minutes. The aesthetics of the experience of looking at the flower, and those attending its making, draw me to being present. The flower becomes my teacher: I come to know it; at the same time it comes to know me. We resonate: our gaze, mutual and imaginal, reciprocal. We are attuned. Eckhart Tolle asks:

Have you allowed that familiar yet mysterious being we call a plant to teach you its secrets? Have you noticed how deeply peaceful it is? How it is surrounded by a field of stillness? The moment you become aware of a plant's emanation of stillness and peace, that plant becomes your teacher.<sup>28</sup>

It is that quality of reciprocity—of gaze as a part of a process of unfolding—that is the inner arc of this inquiry; cropping up repeatedly—apparently unbidden—at surprising times. Often, as here, the flowers would come to meet me, issuing invitations to engage. Again Eckhart Tolle observes: *You need nature as your teacher to help you reconnect with Being. But not only do you need nature, it also needs you.[...] Through your recognition, your awareness, nature too comes to know itself.*<sup>29</sup> There is, of course, a back story: a framing of events within which to situate such a claim, which will emerge in the layered narratives.<sup>30</sup> As Judy Marshall puts it: *Sometimes [first person inquiry] means cleaving your independence, belligerence even, asserting repeatedly what is **not** your way, until some form arises that is, and has its mark of 'you' that will make people who know you smile.*<sup>31</sup> The resulting thesis, and underlying narratives, are layered: no narrative claiming overall truth, each fragment and image interplaying within the patterns of the whole, with Revets—academic fortifications of inquiry—delineating narratives for the academy, prefacing each of the four parts.<sup>32</sup> The five frames, or main voices, explored within overall structure of the work are:<sup>33</sup>

1. View: Explores writing—as a liminal activity; as means of accessing other phenomena; as a descriptor of Imago;
2. Frame: Describes emergent practices and templates; and offers some critique;
3. Atelier: Emergent practices as series of artefacts encapsulated within the thesis body;
4. Gaze: Explicates a refinement of method and critique; suggests potential trajectories—of further inquiry; of applications; of research;
5. Light: Deeper inquiry into method and research framings;

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<sup>28</sup> Tolle, E. 2003; 82.

<sup>29</sup> Tolle, E. 2003; 84.

<sup>30</sup> The best, attenuated, version that I might offer is an excerpt from an email to Isabel Hardman, See prologue.

<sup>31</sup> Marshall, J. 2016; 41.

<sup>32</sup> The four Revets: Chapters 1, 5, 8, & 13 seek to delineate the Inquiry in the terms of the academy. This does not, in my view, render them any more or less *truthful*.

<sup>33</sup> There is a fifth frame: Light—further explication of method—[*theōria*; *seeing*]. This is expanded upon in the addendum to this introduction.

These voices, or named sections, derive from the method of teaching photography that I developed, post attending a workshop with Charles Harbutt, circa 1995 (Subject, Viewpoint, Framing, Time and Light). During my ADOC work this practice returned unbidden to inhabit me, taking up residence; permeating my work—subtly at first—with what Vidhura terms ‘vignettes’.<sup>34</sup> Within these frames wind other threads, or sutras: narrative inquiry; artful healing; connection to the other-than-human; the role of the imaginal; the lyrical; the beautiful; the liminal: connectedness to nature; to the other-worldly; to the sacred. Process is largely spontaneous--crucially, Castaneda notes the role of luck: '*Usually we are too busy, or too preoccupied, or just too stupid and lazy to realize that that is our cubic centimetre of luck. A warrior, on the other hand, is always alert and tight and has the spring, the necessary gumption to grab it.*'<sup>35</sup>

Which surely relates to awareness and levels of consciousness, of being, accessible to *the warrior*, at any given time? In working with Imagos, particularly with the aesthetic processes around un-folding of Imago, I seek to reveal that identity—often apparently, even actually, socially constructed—runs, like an underground stream that underflows a surface one.

My initial *theory* (claim) is that Imagos unfolded have the power to transform that is beyond the simply egoic, or societal; that connection to this power is relatively simple, with a little guidance, preparation, and discipline; working with aesthetics: of a situation; phase of being; or state of becoming. Ken Wilber describes this level of consciousness as *Centauroic meaning*: '*Meaning is found, not in external objects or possessions, but in the inner radiant currents of your own being, and in release and relationship of those currents to the world, to friends, to humanity at large, and to infinity itself.*'<sup>36</sup>

The *Trees* writings sometimes describe events, sometimes frames poems and characters. Often they were written shortly after the events described, as an act of sense-making, or of sanctification. While the events were real, at least to me, the *Trees* writings are flights on fictional planes, and as such, one more narrative layer within the work.<sup>37</sup> In this way the poems offer something of a methodological post-script to *The Leviathan* songs: in real time they dissolve a particular, and potentially damaging (to me) narrative; supplanting it with something to my mind truthful, more generative.<sup>38</sup>

Poetic process, along with the writing-nature connection of the experimental *Trees* writings, is connective of the same soul-tissue, the same Imago, as the image that I made of the *Convolvulus* flower; those images of flowers made in the stream in the spring of 2016; and the tens of thousands that have followed it.

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<sup>34</sup> Dr. Vidhura Ralapanawe, fellow supervision group member, and now graduate of ADOC 4.

<sup>35</sup> Castaneda, C. 1990b; 250.

<sup>36</sup> Wilber, K. 2001; 108 *emphasis mine*.

<sup>37</sup> Marshall, J. 2016, xvii-xviii, 54, 173.

<sup>38</sup> *The Leviathan Songs* are a series of 16 poems written in order to process an experience of prolonged exposure to workplace bullying, and its aftermath, PTSD. See appendix 1 *Poems*.

I see the Convolvulus flower; it apprehends me; it turns its gaze towards you.

Are, or how are you, affected; apprehended?

Dainin Katagari refers to such 'practice' as Sanzen: *'Literally sanzen means to surrender ourselves to the tranquility or simplicity in life. Simplicity is manifested only when our life, our circumstances, are very clear. When our life is clear it is a great opportunity for us to manifest simplicity or tranquility in life.'*<sup>39</sup>

In order to see the Convolvulus flower, I had needed to hone, and to simplify, photographic practice: acquire discipline; deploy rite and ritual as a means of seeing into, without holding in regard, at a distance. I had needed to become open, (re)connected: to 'remove' the camera and photographic process. In my beholding of the Convolvulus it beholds me; beholds you; as you behold the flower.

Dainin Katagari sees this as a kind of intimacy, or (potential) reconciliation: *Emptiness and everyday life are working together, but we don't exactly understand this oneness or intimacy; that is we don't participate directly in intimacy itself. We see intimacy at a distance.*<sup>40</sup>

My writings, and my images, act as a precis, or glimpse, of practice; tracing my journey from evasion to grappling, to—occasional—intimacies. A journey which may, in time, help others to work similarly; in their own way. These humble beginnings offering a sketched map on the wall of a cave: callings to journey; templates—modes of practice—from which others may build far greater things: take up its invitation, via simple acts of experimental curiosity: *What happens in our worlds, our lives, and with our loved ones, when we attune to, and deploy, our Imaginal gaze?*

"Of course, I love you," the flower said to him. "If you were not aware of it, it was my fault."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

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<sup>39</sup> Katagari, D. 1988; 44.

<sup>40</sup> Katagari, D. 1988; 59.

## Addendum to the introduction

'One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream. Daydream undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates grandeur.' So writes Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*.<sup>41</sup>

The body of the inquiry contains methods which reflect the qualities of an *immense philosophical daydream*. In order to break down further how such a state may be entered, utilised and explicated; and in response to the invitation to further expound on method, I have written further. Firstly, a series of reflective narrations—*Sinkers*—which preface each section bookends the last one. Secondly, an additional part to this dissertation: Part V: *Light*. This comprises four short chapters within which I break down further that which, within this academic context, constitutes *method*. These chapters are markers; further explicating methods employed; and indicating three specific paradigms of research within with to situate method(s). These being:

1. **Roots:** Notes on the *Via Arbora* (animism)—complimentary to the extant *Via Creativa; Via Positiva; Via Negativa; Via Transformativa* posited by Fox and Reason.<sup>42, 43</sup>
2. **Runes:** Notes on *Action-Phenomenology*.
3. **Rites:** Notes on *4th-Person Inquiry*.
4. **Light:** Coda.

*Roots* (the practice of the *Via Arbora*) is further broken down, into: *The Sacred* (access to the other-worldly); *Place* (making and curation); *Communion* (with the more-than-human world); *Shape-shifting* (playful, transgressive, knowing) *Time* (fluidity). This in turn is approached via a number of lenses: quantum physics; eco-philosophy; eco-psychology, eco-theology, and what I would term *eco-phenomenology*.

Which leads to the putative arena of inquiry: *Action-Phenomenology*, subject of the *Runes* chapter. Here I consider my key practices—*poetics-as-method; action-phenomenology as method*—using images made on my iPhone. This is done through the *theoretical* lenses of Bachelard; Husserl; Merleau-Ponty and Sartre.<sup>44</sup> It is not a treatise on *phenomenology*; more a speculation as to what kind of thing may be done with that construct when deployed as *action*. Considerations of the definition of the *theoretical* are invited too: standard definitions being prone to breaking down when dealing with both *Action-Phenomenology* and *4th Person Inquiry*.

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<sup>41</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 201.

<sup>42</sup> Fox, M. (1995). *The reinvention of work: A new vision of livelihood for our time*.

<sup>43</sup> Reason, P. (2000). Action research as spiritual practice [Online paper]. Retrieved from [http://www.peterreason.eu/Papers/AR\\_as\\_spiritual\\_practice.pdf](http://www.peterreason.eu/Papers/AR_as_spiritual_practice.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> In *Part V: Light*, I raise questions as to what constitutes, or defines 'theory' [*theōria*].

In *Rites* I express *4th-Person Inquiry* as *inquiry into the sacred*, which it is, and more. I explore the notion of practice as *radical prayer*: experimentally deploying shifts in attention and ways of being as *invocation*. Freya Mathews writes: ‘*For one way it may be possible for us to address the world is via invocation, in other words by asking the larger scheme of things to manifest its self-meaning to us.*’<sup>45</sup>

Working with light, and the apparently happenstance, I deconstruct process and discuss the relevance to *method*: what method might mean in our context; how this relates to mind; and how practitioner-mind relates to extending fields of practice—into realms that some might consider as *radical*, or *unscientific*. Pirsig writes:

The problem, the contradiction the scientists are stuck with, is that of *mind*. Mind has no matter or energy but they can’t escape its predominance over everything they do. Logic exists in the mind. Numbers exist only in the mind. I don’t get upset when say that ghosts exist in the mind. It’s that *only* that gets me. Science is *only* in your mind too, its just that that doesn’t make it bad. Or ghosts either.<sup>46</sup>

Viewed through the perspectives of theologians and writings on theological practice, I interweave a deconstruction of my own practices to illuminate poetic ways of working that others may find helpful; cognisant at all times that *mind* is a core phenomena in play, is *data*. I work also to the roots of words; which allows more fluid, insightful, meanings to emerge than by implied theological, academic, boundaries.

Combining the above—three *methods*; two proposed new action-inquiry paradigms—I propose a re-constitution of power. Mathews uses the term *ontopoetics* to describe such practices: ‘*We might use the term **ontopoetics** to denote both the order of meanings that structure this inner aspect of being at large, on the one hand, and the practices by which we engage with this order of meanings, on the other.*’<sup>47</sup>

There are narrative sequences and interweaving throughout this dissertation. Within *Part V Light* these become more condensed, elucidated, contemplative. Bachelard writes: ‘*And this contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other, that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity.*’

The trajectory of this dissertation is towards these disclosures—inner aspects of being; practices, poetics—by which we engage with both inner and outer order and disorder as healing. And the ways that we—as *dreamers*—may be transported beyond the poetics of the immediate and everyday: becoming both *ontopoetic*, and *omni-poetic* as we unfold.

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<sup>45</sup> Mathews, F. 2010; 5.

<sup>46</sup> Pirsig, R. 1999; 42.

<sup>47</sup> Mathews, F. 2010; 11.



## Notes on referencing, writing, quality (ethics).

Voice, idiom, and layered narrative are key qualities of this thesis: qualities upon which its efficacy rests. I have started with the premise, and the promise to myself, that the work will be accessible and meaningful beyond the academy; that it will look like a text that people will wish to read. It is work about aesthetics: thus it finds and defines its own aesthetic level and terms. To that end I have adapted the expected American Psychological Society protocols, in order to help the text flow, and to be more accessible. What this means in practical terms, is that—rather than adopting the standard, and to my mind and eye, clunky, way of citing significant authors—I have instead used footnotes, which may be skipped, if wished. Additionally, I introduce the title of the text, and cite the first initial of the author, as I have for instance, cited two different authors with the surname (Shah). Not to do so is both potential confusing and illogical, even if adhering to the letter of the APA protocol. Above all, I have tried to apply common sense.

This has two principle advantages. Firstly, it takes dates and names out of the main text, thus enhancing the flow when reading. Secondly, it means that texts are introduced to the reader more fully, without necessitating recourse to the bibliography, which can be tedious and time consuming. It is, in short, one of my ways of taking care of the reader. In *Stylish academic writing*, Helen Sword expresses it thus:

Lengthy citations violate, or at least risk violating, two key principles of stylish writing. First, they slow the text's momentum: how can you possibly tell a compelling research story if you have to stop and cough every few seconds? Second, much in the same way that discursive footnotes and endnotes lend themselves to excessive erudition, parenthetical styles encourage extravagant but often meaningless name dropping.<sup>48</sup>

It is beyond me to describe the properties outlined in purely descriptive, *academic*, words. Throughout this work I am reliant upon visual images, and poetic, lyrical, imagery; in order to evoke that, which by the constraints of solely conventional, academic, logic, could not exist. My practice starts of by working with poetry, then experimental writing, followed by image-making on my iPhone. Alongside these shifts in practice arise questions to hold whilst reading this thesis:

*What would have happened to me had the expiation afforded by the embalmed emotions underpinning the poems not been afforded an outlet?*

*What is it about the enhanced noticing—precipitated by working with Yosser and image-making—that is a contribution to method: creating practice; relationship to practice?*

*Where do emergent practices fit, or otherwise, within the body of knowledge as scholarship: what surrounds or contests; what are the novelty, depth, nuances, applications of emergent qualities?*

*What constitutes quality: how have I done it well, do I know this is good, on what grounds?*

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<sup>48</sup> Sword, H. 2012; 144.

The qualities, claims, of the work that I would nominate as contributing to overall quality are: <sup>49</sup>

Persistence: discipline in developing a practice of imaginal repair;

Preparedness: to take risks and experiment;

Aesthetic merit: being guided by aesthetic judgements that I am able to articulate.

Allowing: emergence and synchronicity; noticing, taking into account and amalgamating these theoretically, practically;

Paying attention: working with the interfaces between the human, the more-than-human and the otherworldly (non-ordinary, non-local realities), in an innovative, challenging and compelling manner; <sup>50</sup>

Condensation: into four elements—discipline; discernment; aesthetic solutions; transcendence;

Evolutionary shift: into three further, and new fields (frames) of inquiry: Via Arbora; Action-Phenomenology; 4th-Person Inquiry. Plus indicating the ground for a deeper inquiry into the theorisation of inquiry;

Combined, these elements may show up as magical. In this work I use Magus—which could also invoke or encompass Dervish or Shaman—to refer to one who convenes energies and power in way that may appear magical, inexplicable, non-local. <sup>51</sup>

I also refer to *Angels*: vectors for *Magical* powers and energies; to the Imaginal Gaze: transceiver of such energies; and to Magic (or apparently magical): what happens at the confluence of these energies. I propose in turn that this falls within the bounds of radical, *transgressive*, practice: violating or challenging orthodox societal, organisational, educational, familial boundaries—using, and representing, unconventional behaviour, experimental forms. <sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> I acknowledge a conversation with Professor Geoff Mead, in Kingscote on 20.6.19 as contributing to the development of these criteria. These criteria are added to in Part V Light, where I expand on and define method, specifically: Via Arbora [animism], Action-Phenomenology, and 4th-Person Inquiry [The Sacred, The Numinous & Non-local Realities].

<sup>50</sup> Mindel, A. 1994; Castaneda, C. 1990a, 1990b.

<sup>51</sup> Definition: magus | 'meɪɡəs | noun (plural **magi** | 'meɪdʒɪ | ) a member of a priestly caste of ancient Persia. \* a sorcerer.

<sup>52</sup> Seeley, C, Thornhill E. *Artful Organisations* 2014.

Which raises the matter of ethics and the interleaving of ethics with quality; Carolyn Ellis states:

When we write about intimate others who are alive, we have an opportunity to discuss with them what to tell. Often we operate under the fear of the unknown; we don't know how intimate others will react to what we write, and it feels safer to stay in the accustomed disclosure (or nondisclosure) system that is predictable and comfortable.<sup>53</sup>

In the making of the text I have endeavoured to create work with qualities that *'[offers] a multiplicity of perspectives, each of which is fragile fluid, tentative and epistemologically humble.'*<sup>54</sup> And in which there is significant self disclosure; where I show up artistically as *'a writer rather than author.'*<sup>55</sup> The ethical questions to bear in mind while reading are, in my view:

*To what extent is the the inquirer, and where appropriate, identified co-inquirers, exposed—frangible, vulnerable—in this process?*

*Are aspects of the inquiry (justifiable) activism?*

*Is the level of exposure commensurate with effective and impactful artful inquiry, or activism, without being gratuitous?*

These questions seem inseparable from wider qualitative questions and criteria around developing artful method. In *Alternative ethnographies, alternative criteria*, Laurel Richardson proposes five criteria: *Substantive contribution; Aesthetic merit; Reflexivity; Impact; Expression of reality.*<sup>56</sup>

The overall aesthetic and ethical questions being:

*Do the disclosures in this work—such as they are—serve the above qualitative criteria in an effective, non-gratuitous, way?*

*Does the work appropriate power, effectively, appropriately?*

*Could anything have been done differently, given the circumstance and context of the inquiry ?*

*Does the work increase qualified connection—communion; porosity—appropriately?*

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<sup>53</sup> Ellis, C. 2007; 17.

<sup>54</sup> Barone, T., Eisner, E. 2012; 133.

<sup>55</sup> Barone, T., Eisner, E. 2012; 107-109; 134.

<sup>56</sup> Richardson, L. In Neilsen, L. Cole, A. & Knowles, J. 2001; 249-250.

This latter question is vital. The works in this thesis were in part made from a space of alienation. Yet paradoxically my ambition is to neutralise toxicity, thus decreasing separation. Carol Becker points to this paradox:

Art may be focussed directly on the issues of daily life, but, because it seeks to reveal contradictions and not obfuscate them, art works which should spark recognition and effect catharsis actually appear alien and deliberately difficult. Art easily becomes the object of rage and confrontation. [And artists], frustrated by the illusion of order and well-being posited by society... [may] choose rebellion as a method of retaliation... [In] so doing, they separate themselves from those with whom they may actually long to interact.<sup>57</sup>

The overriding quality, and ethical, question is, therefore:

*To what extent is this work effective in enhancing connectedness—between each other; between worlds—in becoming part of a pattern that connects?*

Thus I start with a flower: a picture of a flower; story of a flower; story of a picture of a flower; story of looking at a picture of a flower. One of 56 images, made over a period of 6 minutes—from 07.00-07.06, on the 6th of August, 2016.

It was a magical time. One of many such times that this thesis seeks to recall in order to pose the question:

*What happens to us on a deep level, when we shift our gaze; when we engage, grapple, move through space; when we feel the aesthetic of the more-than-human world, and the otherworldly, recasting our world differently: via a different space; frame; viewpoint; time and light?*

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<sup>57</sup> Becker, C. 1994; xiii.

## The Trees #1

### Saturdays.

*2016: August, a Saturday; that Saturday in August was the day that the Convolvulus flower on the apple tree sucked me outdoors at 7am to photograph it; was the day that I really noticed the quality of light echoing those days at the Altar; was the day me and Yosser had slated to listen to the test match from Edgbaston; was also the day that, just after nine, the Gopher from the Toxic Lawyer pitched up, replete in crocs and shorts, looking like an extra from Carry on Camping. 'Evil spirits can't cross flowing water,' my brother had written to me in the spring. Well, somehow, this fucker had, and he didn't smell like a healer.*

*It was the day too, that I rumbled the narcissist in the mix; the day too, that dispelling my anger and confusion and perturbation, I split, and stacked, the rest of the logs from the Alder tree that I had felled on good Friday; while Yosser hung out in the shade of my motorbike, listening to the cricket. I think that he knew I was upset.*

*December, a Saturday: New Year's Eve in 2016 fell on a Saturday. The day before, whilst on a dusk walk, my inquiry had slid off the table, and onto the floor: it wasn't an inquiry into becoming whole at all, but into the magical journeys on the way. I'd Skyped Kathy, got my head straight about the whole thing, then, as part of my writing ritual, ended the day with a dusk walk along the Lime Brook valley towards the ruined abbey, turning back, as usual, just before Mary Bedford's small holding. Also, as usual, about a hundred yards from the East boundary of Archers Ford, I called Yosser. I hear his mewling and we meet on the Altar. By this time it is virtually dark. The other night he'd perched on the Altar next to me on the eastern end. And stayed until I'd said 'time to go and get tea Yos' - when he'd got up and led the way across the stream. We'd even got to do a bit of Jinn chasing.*

*Not today; he went and hung out in the shadows of the remaining Alder boughs on the opposite bank. When I came across, by padding through the stream, he headed straight for the back door, as though he knew that we were in for a celebration. I had thought I'd walk to the pub for a pint. I started cooking; chicken curry. There were fireworks outside, distant. I called Yosser, in case he got spooked. I had a bath, Yosser had hunkered down on the fleece blanket on the sofa.*

*Waiting for the rice to cook, I cracked open a beer and lit a fire with logs from the Alder tree. Sitting by the wood burner opposite the sofa, supping beer, it suddenly came to me: all that we'd been though since this time last year, when I'd been in Doha, unaware of what was about to befall me. Life could be worse. On the opposite sofa came snoring. For once I seemed to have agreement, at least from a cat called Yosser.*



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2016.

## Part I: View

'You belong,' sings Rumi in one verse,  
'to the world of dimension.  
But you come from non-dimension.  
Close the first "shop", open the second.'<sup>58</sup>

Idries Shah, from *The Sufis*

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<sup>58</sup> Shah, I. 2015a; 155.

## Chapter 1

***Analogic resonances:*** a brief inquiry into form

If you are capable of living deeply in one moment your life, you can learn to live the same way in all the other moments of your life.

Thich Nhat Hanh





Untitled (Nettle). Lingen, 2016.

[Revet i. *Action inquiry*]

In this, the first of four *Reverts*—containers, reinforcements, for my inquiry—my intended shift is from working with experimental writing and photography, to inquiring into those modes of knowing: engaging with the aesthetics and polemic of academic knowing. The role of this *Revet* is as both an action inquiry framing for the first section, and departure point for what is to follow. These roles—framing, departure point—anticipate a process of sense-making. The work in Part I stems from, and lives in, the realms of first person action research and artful inquiry.<sup>59</sup> As will be seen subsequently, situating the work thus is foundational to a more esoteric position: inquiry into, and of, the phenomenal; the numinous. Given this proposition, a grounding at this point in more established modes of inquiry provides a datum.

I see the work that I have done for this inquiry as documents for practitioners; experiments; the methods and disciplines described examples; foundations to work with as a starting point, maybe interlude: in practice; coaching; life. *An approach of non-linear, artful, and post-artful experimentation and knowing. It is my approach, more than any situation-specific method, that I claim to be of use.*

There is fragmentation present: the reader lands in a prologue and a reflective piece written by me on day 25 of the *Alder Altar* project.<sup>60</sup> I write in the prologue of the '*Via Arbora*', and of the *floating out of truths* toward other realities and planes of existence. In researching for this *Revet*, I encountered an article by Peter Reason, wherein he refers to the four paths of action research, (based on Mathew Fox's four paths of creation spirituality), these being:

*Via Positiva;*

*Via Negativa;*

*Via Creativa;*

*Via Transformativa.*<sup>61</sup>

For me the fifth path, the *Via Arbora* is a membrane, a tissue of connection and apprehending. I alighted on that insight through a combination of forms: writing, image making, connecting to nature, interspecies communication (with Yosser), and prolonged residence in liminal, or thin, spaces.<sup>62</sup>

The method: create a space and or ritual; observe the space and my reactions to it; play with creative media; see what happens; show others.

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<sup>59</sup> Seeley, C, Thornhill E. 2014.

<sup>60</sup> See Part III: Atelier.

<sup>61</sup> Reason, P. 2000.

<sup>62</sup> Yosser, a formerly stray cat, became involved in the inquiry in 2016, and has been ever since.

Together these factors seem to have convened a *practice / praxis* that may be described as spiritual, or sacred.<sup>63</sup> It has felt, largely, that I was just along for the ride; to make notes of the journey. The fragmentation is continued, exacerbated even, with the juxtaposition of both forms, and authors within the prologue. There is a photograph, made by me whilst riding a motorcycle across France. There is a poem by AE, written of me when I was doing the Alder Altar project.<sup>64</sup> There is a photograph of me, made by an anonymous photographer, by a waterfall in France. There is an excerpt from an email by an ADOC colleague. There is a photograph by me of my motorbike in the Jura, on the Swiss / French border. There is a piece of writing-as-healing that relates to and anticipates my *Trees* writings. And, there is a photograph, made by me, of my motorbike, abandoned, beneath snow. In mind, when I made the prologue, was the opening credit scene from a film, possibly with voiceover instead of text. In the chapter *Finding form in writing for action research*, Judi Marshall writes of what she terms ‘*analogic appropriateness [...] a concatenation of resonances*’.<sup>65</sup> And then goes on to aver: ‘*Finding form is partly an aesthetic matter. But it is not about potential beauty, harmony, elegance. It is about the aesthetics of whatever needs to be, including that of ugliness, fragmentation, or discord, if appropriate.*’<sup>66</sup>

Marshall writes of claiming *author-ity*.<sup>67</sup> My intention for this Revet is a similar claiming of *author-ity* for the various voices and modes of expression that occur throughout my work. These opening writings are observations upon an emergence of method: explications of disciplines and openings; irises on practice / praxis. The form(s) found in this inquiry were formed by encounters: by openings of necessity; by happenstance. My role has been to notice these. Sometimes to develop, or encourage them. Now to curate and organise them. Curation largely in line with Marshall’s *concatenation of resonances*: a drawing of and upon threads or connecting energies emerging in the work.

My writings, and my photographs, were born of experiment and uncertainty. The images and texts of the prologue exhibit this quality: collected in the manner of shells and stones on a seashore. I did not get up in the middle of the night to make a picture of my motorbike in the snow; I found it abandoned there, during a period of insomnia. As writing—and various writing voices—developed and became method, so did my imaginal discernment: the creative voice became a curatorial one, with its own development of expression.

My writing of my photography, especially during *The Alder Altar* project, became a part of my *noticing* and *attending*. The account of practice points to a *reveal of layers of process*; starting out in the experimental: poetry, then writing, ritual, image making.

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<sup>63</sup> Chambers and Hasbe-Ludt, 2008.

<sup>64</sup> See Part III Atelier.

<sup>65</sup> Marshall, J. 2008.

<sup>66</sup> Marshall, J. in P. Reason, H. Bradbury eds. 2008; 685.

<sup>67</sup> Marshall, J. in P. Reason, H. Bradbury eds. 2008; 691.

The report *Artful Organisation*, by Dr Chris Seeley with Ellen Thornhill, offers a four part framework through which artful and creative activity might be categorised, comprising: *Artful Knowing*; *Design Thinking*; *Entertainment and Skill Building*; *Branding*.<sup>68</sup> It seems that my practice as it developed falls into the quadrant of *Artful Knowing*:

### **Artful Knowing**

Transgressive/transformational

Learning by doing

Uncertain, ambiguous, personally risky

Embodied

Questions what is “normal”

Cultivates the body and senses as explicit seats of knowing

Is concerned with the evolution of society, ecosystems and consciousness

May start to reconfigure the organization itself

Expands capacity to come to know in many different ways - shifts the ground on which you are working.<sup>69</sup>

At the same time my initial forays were with the written word, more accurately, the transcribed spoken word of poetry; then prose. I wrote my way through trauma recovery, into writing poems for others around psychological and social dynamic matters. Then back into writing poems for myself: to understand both love, and mental illness; my own; that of a loved one. Within the extended period of writing mainly poetry, I started to find my academic writing voice: making peace with a writing process that had eluded me through a couple of degrees and a job as an academic.

In Chapter 2 I elucidate this process of first person inquiry. It became a way of reengaging the senses; of observation and assimilation of aesthetics (clues, data) of complex, uncertain, unclear situations. I started to become curious about how my work of poetry writing might extend into the lives of others. It was within the unfolding of events and health crises alluded to in Chapter 2: *Healing: liminal mind*, that my noticing of micro-signals and phenomena came into being: through prolonged immersion in nature at dawn, and making pictures about the experience on my iPhone.

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<sup>68</sup> Seeley, C., Thornhill E. 2014; 14.

<sup>69</sup> Seeley, C., Thornhill E. 2014; 15.

A discipline of concurrent writing about this time and these events enabled a deeper seeing into—deeper engagement with the other-than-human world—to unfold:

Like creatures in a forest, sometimes this knowledge can only be glimpsed through the trees or with a sideways glance. Often it goes unacknowledged altogether. Our point of contact with this *creaturely knowing* comes through an invitation we must freely issue over and over again. Our responsibility is to make space for this embodied, vital conversation and gift it our attention in all the ways we can. <sup>70</sup>

In finding my own *creaturely knowing*, as Seeley and Thornhill term it, I began to find my *practice / praxis*: that of noticing, and playing with, the invisible: of exploring this dimension of knowing by means of *montaged, juxtaposed fragments*; a series of pictures and glimpses of text. *The Trees* writings, articulating my own healing: micro-practices which I continue explore. Seeley and Thornhill propose three levels of artful knowing:

a first level, participants described the more transactional aspects of the activities they undertake [...] a second level, participants said that their work serves in ways which may be seen as transformational [...] and a third, more far reaching and potentially transgressive level, some participants in this research articulated the following in their work [...] <sup>71</sup>

It is at this third, *potentially transgressive*, level that I propose, perhaps ambitiously, to situate my work. (In so doing the qualities of the transformational level are assumed.) Particularly:

an opportunity to revisit, re-imagine and re-cast their lives in both a work and personal context;  
gaining a more profound trust in the world itself;  
understanding more of how creativity and innovation operates (or otherwise) at a group/organisational level and how such processes may be developed;  
learning to look back at what [people] do from a very different vantage point. <sup>72</sup>

These qualities create a foundation for deeper inquiry. But it is the *creaturely knowing* of the transgressive levels that have come to fascinate me since the spring of 2016. The qualities of the transgressive level being holarchic: transgressive, potent, modes; of practice, intervention and inquiry. Ken Wilber states:

It is precisely because the world is arranged holarchically, precisely because it contains fields within fields within fields, that things can go so profoundly wrong, that a disruption in one field can reverberate throughout an entire system. And the cure for this pathology, in all systems, is essentially the same: rooting out the pathological holons so that the holarchy itself can return to harmony. <sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Seeley C., Thornhill E. 2014; 17 *emphasis mine*.

<sup>71</sup> Seeley C., Thornhill E. 2014; 22.

<sup>72</sup> Seeley C., Thornhill E. 2014; 21-22.

<sup>73</sup> Wilber, K. 2000; 30.

The thesis (claim) arising is therefore: *that materialist ways of knowing, and therefore operating, break down under certain circumstances (in manipulation or abuse of legal process, for instance). As do many models of action research: Empirical, linear, ways of knowing and of operating, fail. It becomes incumbent—vital even—to shift into other ways of knowing and operating, in order to influence, or survive, the unfolding of events.*

Such shifts exhibit the following qualities: non-linearity; detachment from outcome; engaging with the aesthetics situations. Disregard, or scepticism, for empirical stimuli. Use of synthesis from available phenomena: looking *into*, over looking *at*. (Seeing is not believing; seeing into is believing; seeing through is desirable, essential.) *Method* runs counter to: *‘the basic empirical standpoint, as developed initially by the philosophers David Hume and Immanuel Kant.’*<sup>74</sup> Allan Kaplan disrupts reductionist ways of seeing:

‘Things’ have disappeared; as scientists delved deeper and deeper in their search for basic building blocks they discovered that such blocks, such things, finite and discrete, do not in fact exist. Instead they found that things change their form and properties in relation to each other, as they respond to each other (and to the scientist observing them). [...] Thus the world is now seen to consist of ‘relationships’ rather than ‘things’. And what we think of as things are actually indeterminate states in a constantly changing network of interactions and relationships.<sup>75</sup>

The emerging practice seeks not only to see into and acknowledge these *‘indeterminate states in a constantly changing network of interactions and relationships’*, but to harness, to become empowered by them. Such a ways of working may variously be: disruptive; radical; transformational; transgressional. I find it to have been transformational too: in terms of unfolding *Imagos*. What started out as a poetic, literary, inquiry, shifted. Upon the advent of the *Alder Altar* project it became an *inquiry-of-all-the-senses*: which started to show up mainly visually; then in life-shifts. As Frederick Franck puts it in *The Zen of Seeing*: *“I know artists whose medium is Life itself, and who express the inexpressible without brush, pencil, chisel or guitar. [...] Whatever their hand touches has increased Life. They SEE and don’t have to draw. They are the artists of being alive.”*<sup>76</sup> A congruent and co-incident shift also occurred; my shift from that of being *observer/see-er*, towards that of *observer/see-er/participant*. This shift that predicted, or precipitated the method that I now term in subsequent chapters *The Imaginal Gaze*, and falls into four strands:<sup>77</sup>

Seeing of social processes and structures : Seeing into social processes and structures;  
Seeing of other than human : Seeing into the other than human;  
Seeing whole : Seeing into the otherworldly;  
Seeing as becoming : Re-imagining identity

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<sup>74</sup> Kaplan, A. 2002; 5.

<sup>75</sup> Kaplan, A. 2002; 7.

<sup>76</sup> Franck, F. 1973; 129.

<sup>77</sup> Expanded upon in chapters 8 & 13.







Aesthetic elements hollow out the way for further inquiry [stanza 17]: *After, when the abused are away / or fleeing, / before the room is next free / it's easy for HR to stay: / pause, / reflect, / and wipe off any / incriminating / extraneous / HR DNA: Alluding to criminal activity (perjury) attending the abuse.*

My experiences in The Grooming Room (the place) and my enumeration / elucidation of these experiences in *The Grooming Room (the poem)*, facilitates shifts: in perception; in relationships; in power. The Grooming Room was the venue for the unfolding of (badly) orchestrated organisational psychodramas. *The Grooming Room* illustrates a significant turning point: a perceptual, cognitive shift; one of many in the development of this work, and method. *The Leviathan Songs*, and *The Grooming Room*, illustrate post-cognition: sense-making via the seeing of, and into, social processes and structures—*the mystery that repels*—reflexively.

In the *Direct-Debit Debbie Quintet* this extends further towards the field of seeing into and preparation. Seeley and Thornhill see the utility of poetry thus:

Poetry and similar 'soul work' (this arts-based, emotionally intensive, yet natural approach) serves to bring right-brain and left-brain together in fruitful and rewarding ways. In the left-brain tyranny of organisations, metrics and faux-logic, this is doubly important for senior leaders if they are to avoid further failures of imagination such as happened at Enron, Lehmann Bros and Northern Rock. By structuring events that stimulate the senses and deepen people's experience, one is able to address important human (and thus leadership) issues, including empathy, context, imagination and embodied responses.

And:

At its best I think [this work] helps to bridge the human concerns of the *life-world* with the organisational imperatives of the *system-world* so that people act at work in ways that are more congruent with our wider participation in the human and natural worlds.<sup>82</sup>

This exploration has been a first-person and post-cognitive journey: much of the material referred to refers also to events post-facto. In the context of the above quote the depiction of events in *The Grooming Room* is very *life-world*, on the surface. *System-world* is hinted at, but not explored (the post-facto context eliminating the possibility of the work having any import in terms of overt, or covert, intervention).

In the ensuing chapters within *Part I: The Frame*, the evolution of this method: *First-Person Post-Cognitive*, is traced, alongside the morphing into deeper inquiry into what Kaplan terms *Invisible skeins*: those deep aesthetics, narratives, (and limitations of seeing), and Heron & Reason term 'qualities of knowing' (*experiential; presentational; propositional; practical*), which prefigure in what I come to term *Action-Phenomenology*—phenomenology as something the inquirer or activist does, rather than simply a way of intellectualising of *seeing* the world.<sup>83 84</sup> The next three chapters trace the first part of this journey.

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<sup>82</sup> Seeley, C., Thornhill E. 2014; 29.

<sup>83</sup> Kaplan, A., 2002; 22.

<sup>84</sup> Reason, P., Bradbury H. 2008; 378.

## Chapter 2

***On writing:*** the liminal word

Perhaps the story you finish is never the one you begin.

Salman Rushdie



Untitled. Lingen 2016.

In the time of snowdrops I pause at Aardvark books in Brampton Bryan. I had just called in to the nurseries at Bucknell in order to find out about getting some trees, particularly Scots pines, for S's birthday. The last time I had called at the bookshop I had been with S, just before the Christmas writing marathon. That time we had been to the nursery, to pick up a Christmas tree. That day it was sunny. This day it was pouring down with rain. In Brampton Bryan I was pausing, for soup. I had my computer. The shop warm from its log stove, I decided to extend my pause, and to write. On the weekend call Vidhura had urged that I start academic writing. I started. What came out was a first person account of my relationship with trees; specifically the trees at our home, Archers Ford.

With writing the *Trees* something of significance was needing to emerge: an offering to the gods to offset the threat to my home? A diversion? Or a way into my concerns: these writings containing both keys and clues as to my anxieties, and threats to my wellbeing? In this sense, they bear witness; within this witnessing, lies a common thread of my writings: to expose hidden, unverified, veiled, truths. And in so doing, to move towards wholeness: a key ingredient of *Self-Authorship*, spanning a spectrum from the *writerly* to the *readerly*; embracing the *academic readerly* within its compass.<sup>85</sup>

Bearing witness: finding voice; writing into the curiosity of the invisible; evoking healing, spiritual practice. Through my emerging practice I define, or imagine, self-authorship to the re-imagining and re-writing of a life: towards a more healthy and sustainable one; righting (writing) wrongs by sense-making; connecting to the magical; bearing witness. This journey is one of experimentation with non-linearity. Yet within this narrative, layers of the experimentation are revealed in a linear manner. And of a different kind: the sense-making of the magical journey; the apprehending, unlocking, and reworking of repetitious patterns. Therein lies a question too: *Is there an identifiable practice that we might term: Self-Authorship?* In *Saved by a Poem*, Kim Rosen suggests the advantages of forgetting, of learning to '*slip through the tear in the fabric of the predictable and welcome the gifts to be found there.*'<sup>86</sup> Richer inquiry is to be found by welcoming the moment of forgetting:

However, when I really think about it, the greatest peace I have ever known had nothing to do with resolution. I remember hearing Pema Chödrön, the Buddhist teacher and author of *When Things Fall Apart*, exploring the idea of resolution:

The truth is "you can't get no satisfaction." All the time we're motivated to get some resolution, get ground under our feet... Then we don't have to touch that shakiness, that vulnerability. But this work is about giving up all the old ways we protected against feeling anything unpleasant or unwanted. Finally we're willing to relate with it as honestly and as gently as we can. Stepping more and more into groundlessness.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> This concept of self-authorship subsequently morphs into Imago Unfolding. I retain both the term and method as a part of the latter process.

<sup>86</sup> Rosen, K. 2009; 138.

<sup>87</sup> See Chödrön, P. *Awakening compassion* Audio CD.

Like Pema's Buddhist practice of stopping at the moment the mind ceases to remember can train you to develop the capacity to tolerate groundlessness. Even to dive into it.

John Keats, one of the principal English poets of the 19th century, speaks to the heart of this practice and the need for it in the creative process:

'At once it struck me what quality went to from a Man of Achievement... I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.'<sup>88</sup>

Keats's "Negative Capability," like Pema Chödrön's "groundlessness" is a prerequisite to true inquiry. It is key that unlocks the minds repetitious patterns, allowing something new to appear from beyond the borders of the known.<sup>89</sup>

Within the medium of writing—in the first instance by writing poetry—I commenced my journey: from erasure to enchantment; from invulnerability and closed-ness to being more open; from relative impermeability towards a more permeable, sensual, posture. A posture that invites the key qualities of perception that are a pre-requisite of the magical: pattern recognition; playing with patterns. This relationship with patterns is not necessarily congruent with 'resolution' in the linear, Newtonian sense. It is more the foregoing of control or attachment to outcome. An entrusting of both inner, soulful, senses—with the benefit of attunement to more natural, and supernatural visible and invisible forces—to work with divination, alchemy, the numinous.

This is the *magical journey*. A journey that started, as many magical journeys do, in an unlikely manner; with an invitation: in this case to join a creative writing group. I had been challenged to make some images about the kangaroo courts that I had been invited to attend at *The Leviathan*.<sup>90</sup> I had written of *The Pillock* for my acceptance paper. Now the invitation from the writing group was to write about 'Men in Ties'. The *Pillock* had been wearing a tie. This was the beginning of my—in the first instance cathartic—writing practice.

Emergent early on during the writing of the poems was my complicity in the oppression dynamics of *The Leviathan*.<sup>91</sup> My poem *The Rapper*—number ten from the initial sixteen—sets the scene, of life on *The Leviathan*, and it also introduces the *dramatis personae*.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> John Keats, from a letter dated December 1817.

<sup>89</sup> Rosen, K. 2009; 138-139.

<sup>90</sup> The most recent such court I'd had the misfortune to attend was at the business school where I had done my MBA. They had refused to allow me to submit my competed dissertation. I had written about this experience for my inquiry proposal, in a piece of writing entitled *The Pillock*; Chris and Kathleen had both liked it, to my surprise.

<sup>91</sup> See Friere, P. 1986.

<sup>92</sup> Excerpt from *The Rapper* 12.2.14. Appendix 1: *Poems*.

## The Rapper

In our tale now  
I take a bow,  
relieved from the ship's prow  
and into the heart of the matter  
meet the rapper:  
never happier.

Though the Captain  
sacked me,  
never been more relaxed, me  
could have hit him with an axe, he  
ducked: I'm fucked.

So I'm here as your interlocutor  
prosecutor,  
happy insectocutor  
ready to get into your computers;  
ignoring those refuters  
telling stories  
not working for Reuters:  
no William Tell  
but hell

I need to  
Tell of *The Buffoon*  
*The Charlatan, The Guard* and  
gold doubloons  
that we came to rely upon  
when sailing in *Leviathan*:  
not whaling  
but pirating,  
a fighting  
psychic prison ship:  
strange relationship.

[From The Rapper PS 12.2.14]

Whilst in the *data gathering* phase of my former employment—those final three years on *The Leviathan* after raising the issue of workplace bullying, but prior to being fired—I hadn't fully appreciated the degree to which the situation was making me ill. It was during, and subsequent to, the writing of *The Leviathan Songs*, that I started to become more fully aware of the extent to which my brain had effectively become rewired—my personality altered—by the effects of prolonged exposure to such behaviours and oppression. I left *The Leviathan* with the feeling that I needed to be on a witness protection scheme. No wonder that I lost my voice. No wonder I became unwell. With the poems *The Rapper*, *The Buffoon*, *The Guard*, *The Charlatan*, I started to redress this de-voicing: to re-connect to my own narrative.<sup>93</sup>

Writing and voice-finding became more experimental: moving from working with anger—via psychology, humour, reflexivity—to love and longing. Then back to illness again. Eventually to move from poetry to photography and other, even more layered, means of exploring the obliquities of the invisible: using experimental writing, and then combinations of these practices. I noted this arc or transition in November 2015 when I was starting again to use photography.<sup>94</sup> It is instructive to dip into this, as the main part of the texts lends some insight into the texture of the culture on *The Leviathan* with which I was grappling when writing *The Rapper*, and other *Leviathan Songs*. (The shift in noticing anticipates later shifts—into the phenomenal and phenomenology—explored further in sections *Frame*, *Atelier* and *Gaze*. I have edited and altered to the text to improve flow, and to fit in with the referencing protocol employed in this thesis.)

Subconsciously or otherwise, I have started a theme of photographs and poems on a 'window' theme. In so doing I have been working with an invisible subject, working with making the subject invisible; as a means of *underlining* with what John O'Donohue calls '*the secret crevices where the surface of things is strained*'.<sup>95</sup> This raises for me questions around the connection; between being *invisible*, and *disappearance*. [...]

And:

Counting, and the Counters, become in a way, the evidence: the 'strained surface' of the ineffectiveness of leadership; the misguided, probably corrupt, almost certain hidden agenda: third / fourth rate education, for the 'third / fourth rate'. The children of managers, academics, cabinet ministers, did not attend *The Leviathan*. They were indeed invisible reminders of the 'strained surfaces' - the realities - of that environment. Perceiving, apprehending, these strained surfaces, forms a thread of this inquiry.

I wrote of, and into, my illness, in my poem PTSD, excerpt follows:

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<sup>93</sup> In 2018 I note via LinkedIn there is now a 'Student Voice Manager' in post on *The Leviathan*.

<sup>94</sup> My 2015 paper: *Unutterable intimacies: an artful inquiry into soul-fluency [Part 3: meta data]*.

<sup>95</sup> O'Donohue, J. 2004; 85.

## **PTSD**

For a while I have  
thought to write of  
a long fight for me:  
that of a struggle, with PTSD.

Post, as in after  
but may be during, too  
with little laughter,  
most lightness taboo.

Trauma, as and drama  
without the good lines;  
the cure being harm-  
free, space and no fine.

Stress, as in diss  
with no obvious cause;  
the pain being to miss  
life: all on pause.

Disorder, as in drunk and  
without the good fun;  
of reeling and good feelings  
'bout the good team what won.

Flow, interrupted  
and all closeness too;  
intimacy disrupted:  
numb, in a zoo.

Cure, as in 'pro'  
is not at all real:  
I get on my bike,  
eating good meals.  
After, as in math  
is not really clear -  
we just want to be normal, bathe  
and feel cheer.

[From P.T.S.D 14.05.14]



These three poems: *PTSD*, *Performance Review*, *The Grooming Room*, form the backbone of the poems that I share about my experiences on *The Leviathan*. At *Empowering the Intangible*, the AoMO conference at Bled, I offered these poems in workshop; as a response to the topic of performance reviews. It seemed to have the effect of *giving permission to speak*: for people to voice their experiences and concerns.

This deep first person inquiry started—as these things seem to—with a little adversity, extra work post transfer viva: I framed a poem, in a paper entitled: *Writing on the walls: The poet as inquirer*, written around a poem: *Boxes two*.<sup>96</sup> The poem opens with a question: *Who am I?* This question is a precursor to the first person inquiry in the ensuing poem. There are glimpses of what Jay Griffiths calls the ‘*wasteland of the psyche, the underworld where the souls are lost*’. It introduces me as ‘the researcher’.<sup>97</sup> Is there an *us*, in this *who am I* land? Is there that thing that William Ayot speaks of, that ‘*we’re both called and driven by... even when we don’t know what it is*’?<sup>98</sup>

If ‘*Who am I?*’ is fundamental to action research and researchers, action inquiry requires humility; a tempered ego is suggested: we need to know what we think we know, and to be aware enough to accept other forms and perspectives. Paolo Friere writes that, ‘*Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from inquiring is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision making is to change them into objects*’.<sup>99</sup> Schein states that: ‘*The essence of confrontational inquiry is that you insert your own ideas but in the form of a question*’.<sup>100</sup> ‘*Who am I?*’ is inserted into the confrontational tone and content of the poems, along with ‘*Why is this happening to me?*’, ‘*Who is this happening to?*’ These poems, as an *insertion of ideas*, could be interpreted as an egotistic rant.

Or a more humble: ‘*Why?*’. Schein proposes three types of humility:<sup>101</sup>

1. *Basic Humility*
2. *Optional Humility*
3. *Here-and-now humility*

My poem *Boxes two*, built on layers of humility, operates for me as an illustration that inquiry isn’t all about tangibles. It may be about energies: loss, death; voice-finding, creativity; nascent outsidership: the losses entailed. These energies can be metaphorical, or something more tangible.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> A transfer paper supplement, December 2014.

<sup>97</sup> Griffiths, J. 2006; 415.

<sup>98</sup> Ayot, W. 2012; 143.

<sup>99</sup> Freire. P. 1986; 66.

<sup>100</sup> Schein, E. 2013; 46-48.

<sup>101</sup> Schein, E. 2013; 10-12.

<sup>102</sup> Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. 1980; 25.

The healing powers of poetry are not to be underestimated. Kim Rosen writes of the magical quality of poetry:

Many ingredients combine to work the poem's magic. One of the most powerful is the physical dimension of the poem. The rhythms and sounds, the visual shape on the page, and the way the poem affects your breathing and pulse have important consciousness-shifting effects, often without your awareness.

And:

The body of a poem affects your body. Literally. At first you may only be conscious of the conceptual level: what the words mean to you. But whether you are aware of it or not, your breathing has changed. You are feeling the beat of the poem's rhythm in your blood. You are hearing the song of the words inside you. It is even affecting the subtler pulsations of your cerebrospinal fluid and the waters inside your cells.<sup>103</sup>

From the disruption of over three years of persecution in the workplace, I was connecting: to a disruption of my own; to the disruption of received organisational narratives; to my own disrupted life narratives. I was connecting to the healing of self-authorship, becoming authentic again. Though not consciously aware—I had yet to read Rosen—my embodied awareness was becoming clear: I was finding my voice; being heard; feeling better. Writing was improving my health, and my relationships. In finding my voice, I was becoming far less inclined to be de-voiced in any way. This was not without its problems.<sup>104</sup> Having written that poem, this all changed; writing poems was changing me, re-writing me:

For instance, as you read the poem, the length of the lines has a physical impact on your eye movements. The eyes are the only part of our bodies that literally touch the brain. Moving the eyes causes ripples in the cerebrospinal fluid that encases the brain and also flows down the centre of the spine.<sup>105</sup> This can create biochemical changes that affect your consciousness.<sup>106</sup>

Rosen goes on to point out that this process is similar to Eye Movement De-sensitising and Reprocessing ('EMDR'). *These processes work with eye movement to cause subtle changes in brain chemistry and activity so as to release trauma and effect healing.*<sup>107 108</sup> Rosen goes on to quote Ted Hughes from the film *Sylvia*:

"It's magic," he says, speaking of poetry. "It's not *about* magic. It's not *like* magic. It *is* magic... Incantations, spells, ceremonies, rituals, what are they? They're poems. So what is a poet? He's a shaman, that's what he is."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Rosen, K. 2009; 82.

<sup>104</sup> Chapter 2 Healing: *liminal mind. The Bled travelogue* also refers.

<sup>105</sup> Emilie Conrad's Continuum work: [www.continuummovement.com](http://www.continuummovement.com)

<sup>106</sup> Rosen, K. 2009; 82.

<sup>107</sup> Rosen, K. 2009; 83.

<sup>108</sup> See "What is EMDR: Frequent questions," [EMDR.com](http://EMDR.com) [www.emdr.com/q&a.htm](http://www.emdr.com/q&a.htm).

<sup>109</sup> Rosen, K. 2009; 83.

Themes—magical, and magical inquiry—emerge and re-emerge throughout my work in this field. I was drawn to Lyrical Inquiry along with Artful Inquiry and Narrative Inquiry, as ready descriptors. The thread of Lyric Inquiry informs and illuminates the others: though the media may change—weaving Poetry, the spoken word, Rap, the short story, experimental writing, photography and iPhone-ography; combinations and glimpses—the threads of Lyricism and the Lyrical maintain. How else could one hope to deal with *The Magical* as data? Lorri Neilsen expresses the problem thus:

When narrative forms and writing as inquiry were introduced to social science research about 20 years ago, a struggle ensued to wrest the methodology from criteria associated with rationalist discourse and positivist assumptions about research. The struggle continues today with questions about whether literary works can be accepted as dissertations and theses, and the degree to which these documents must adhere to rationalist forms of dissemination in order to be considered “knowledge.” *Again the issue is ontological: How do we know, and how do we tell?*<sup>110</sup>

If we are to discuss phenomena that are in essence aesthetic—*The Magical; The Otherworldly; The Enchanted; Erasure*—then epistemologies that are aesthetic in nature are surely required? The essence of successfully doing so lays in having the readers come along willingly on the journey. To at least suspend—if not set aside completely—scepticism; previously held beliefs. In making my works—in re-imagining for myself—I invite others: to witness or re-imagine, with me, alongside me. My leaps into *uncertainty* may become theirs. An invitation to be comfortable with a magical journey is an invitation to embrace the unknown: to become curious; to leave anxieties alone; to find beauty within that realm of renewal that attends the magical. In this realm the *knowing* becomes wonder at the mysterious: patterns; resonances; a different, indescribable, kind of data. Becomes a different way of knowing and communicating. Lorri Neilsen again:

For the reader to embrace the ideas, she must be as willing as the writer to be comfortable with uncertainty. Lyric inquiry is marked by the willingness to let go, and with the recognition that aesthetic writing *is* the inquiry. *Impact, in other words, can be achieved with resonance as much as with report.*<sup>111</sup>

Disrupted, fragmented, realities of *Leviathan* life became subsumed in re-telling of the tale. Poetic writing became an opening: transformational. In ‘allowing’ those conversations that have been disallowed by culture, the poetic experiment, opened a space for a different quality and content of conversation. Writing underwrites the questions of the mysteries of applied despotic power: *Why this happens? How it happens? How is such power underwritten organisationally by systems and procedures designed to call to account the misuse and abuse of power?* The poetry of *The Leviathan Songs* does not pretend to know these things: requiring of the listener a posture of uncertainty. A posture of why, and how?

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<sup>110</sup> Neilsen, L. in Knowles, J. & Cole, A. 2008; 99 emphasis mine.

<sup>111</sup> Neilsen, L. in Knowles, J. & Cole, A. 2008; 94 emphasis mine.

Leggo describes this:

In poetry I am not trying to close anything down; I am not trying to understand everything; I am not seeking to control. Instead I am open to the world, open to process and mystery, open to fragmentariness, open to understanding as an archipelago of fragments. [...] I am fundamentally *agnostic*, knowing that there is much I will not know, and will never likely know.<sup>112</sup>

Between lyric and poetic inquiry an accurate description of phenomena: where legal and procedural ‘documenting’ *spells* fail, strands of qualitative inquiry step into the space. Within evocations of fragmentation appear moments of coherence; other openings: illnesses; love; resonance and beauty—via *the gaze*.<sup>113 114</sup> DeSalvo writes:

The therapeutic process of writing goes something like this:

We receive a shock or a blow or experience trauma in our lives. In exploring it, examining it, and putting it into words, we stop seeing it as a random, unexplained event. We begin to understand the order behind appearances.

[...] Ultimately, then, writing about the difficulties enables us to discover the wholeness of things, the connectedness of human experience. We understand that our greatest shocks do not separate us from human kind. Instead, through expressing ourselves, we establish connections with others and with the world.<sup>115</sup>

Within my own *exploring, examining, putting it into words*—as in *The Rapper* and *Performance Review*, and later the *Direct-Debit Debbie* quintet—there is a semblance of ordering: explication; indignation; incredulity. Writing of disruption and dissonance within the organisation—and the concomitant effects upon my health—I point out disconnections. In sharing by writing I open up connections for deeper and more meaningful dialogues: this work would not have happened without the disruption; neither, maybe, would some of the wider deeper reaching consequences. The challenges proposed by writing into this, and other life situations, are multidimensional. Working with images; with the imaginal and ritual; has been to create transformational spaces and ways of living creatively with challenges, illnesses, and trauma.

Moving towards a more humorous approach to writing of organisations, I wrote a poem, *Shafted: a love song*, for H—a colleague at a flying club that I worked for part time—who was being bullied out of her job.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Leggo, C. in Knowles, J. & Cole, A. 2008; 168.

<sup>113</sup> This writing, though preceding the advent of the *Direct-Debit Debbie* poems by around one calendar year, also predicts them in terms of nascent *method*.

<sup>114</sup> See Part IV Gaze.

<sup>115</sup> DeSalvo, L. 2000; 43.

<sup>116</sup> Appendix 1: *Poems*.



H. 2017 <sup>117</sup>

**Shafted: a love song**

Hello,  
my name is H,  
and I give you fair warning  
that my mood is quite thorny:  
cos I've been shafted,  
from behind, this morning;  
-while not feeling horny.

I work  
for a club  
(mainly for love)  
and do my best,  
-taking very few rests-  
(and lots of crap from above)  
to do a great job:  
in spite of those pests.

My job  
is complex  
covers all sorts of bases;  
from cleaning the bogs-  
to ordering ball races:  
(Or should I say did,  
Cos I found my P45  
taped to one toilet lid).

[From Shafted: a love song. Lingen 17.07.14]

I read *Shafted* for H at her leaving party, and I presented her with a framed, illustrated version. H was delighted; and I sensed, re-empowered. Writing of the traumas and organisational dilemmas of others proved strangely therapeutic for me. In helping to empower others I found a route towards furthering my own re-empowerment. Louise DeSalvo proposes: '*Through writing we change our relationship to trauma, for we gain confidence in ourselves and in our ability to handle life's difficulties. [...] Writing supplants our feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and victimisation about a traumatic event.*'<sup>118</sup> And then goes on to quote Henry Miller, whose account I find to be closer to my truth, one of enjoinment to *the great universal stream*:

The work which was begun as a refuge and escape from the terrors of reality leads the author back to life, not *adapted* to the reality... but *superior* to it.... He sees that is was not life but himself from which he had been fleeing.... The whole past life resumes its place in the balance and creates a vital, stable equilibrium which would never have resulted without the pain and the suffering.... [Writing] lifts the sufferer out of his obsessions and frees him for the rhythm and movement of life by joining him to the great universal stream in which we all have our being.<sup>119</sup>

Writing went some of the way towards fulfilling the assertions of DeSalvo and Miller, but not the whole way. Writing also failed in the subtle evocations available to, say, abstract art. Writing had a strength that was also a potential weakness: the ability to articulate an agenda. In some cases this become antithetical healing. The ambiguities and confusions prevalent when trauma, and illnesses commonly labelled as *mental*, are present.<sup>120</sup> In that period I chronicled two stories related by others—in *Table of Tears*, and the art college tutor's experience in *Art-Full Knowing*.<sup>121</sup> The—partly faux—levity of *Shafted* and *Art-Full Knowing*, along with the illustrations by S of *Shafted* and *Table of Tears*, moved my work, and to an extent my recovery.

I was writing of the situations of others; they were illustrated; I was seeing the funny side. Yet still my own recovery eluded me: I would relapse into not dealing with matters. I continued to be partly fragmented and blocked: my executive functioning inconsistent at best. Within this inconsistent fog of disrupted narratives, I was finding glimmers of healing narratives too.

DeSalvo stresses the importance of reporting the positive: *Because negative events seem more accessible when we're in emotional pain than do positive events and pleasant memories, it is especially important for us to report the positive aspects of our existence.*<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> DeSalvo, L. 2000; 45-46.

<sup>119</sup> Miller, H. quoted in DeSalvo, L. 2000; 46.

<sup>120</sup> I don't subscribe to the notion that *mental illness* is purely mental. I believe that the term *mental illness* to be shorthand for a malaise(s) that, like trauma, has dimensions of the spiritual, soulful and physical, and are far from being fully understood by conventional (Western) medicine. I will expand on this in the chapter on trauma and illness. In order to nod towards that label I use this shorthand instead: [mental] illness. [Mental] illness is as mysterious as it is stigmatised.

<sup>121</sup> Appendix 1: *Poems*.

<sup>122</sup> DeSalvo, L. 2000; 59.

DeSalvo also enumerates a number of qualities of the healing narrative:

A healing narrative links feelings to events.

A healing narrative is a balanced narrative. It uses negative words to describe emotions and feelings in moderation; but it uses positive words, too.

A healing narrative reveals the insights we've achieved from our painful experiences.

*A healing narrative tells a complete, complex, coherent story.*<sup>123</sup>

With my poetic-lyrical inquiry I found healing for myself. But writing poetry on its own was not entirely up to the challenge of meeting the—sometimes conflicting—needs of healing and reportage and mystery. As my writings moved towards more positive ground and as I started healing, and with the benefit of hindsight, my communications with S became more and more difficult. This manifested itself in conversations between us on a spectrum: strained; surreal; confusing; bizarre; antagonistic; impossible. Showing up in my poems in the summer of 2015. During that time too I went to Norway for a few days on a Jolly with Craig and Annemiek and their families. I had arrived in Norway dispirited and exhausted. We walked in the mountains for four days, then came back to Ashridge for a further three. Where the writing had seemingly failed in its healing work, the walking in the mountains, and the Ashridge workshop, hit the spot. During the workshop we were exposed to rituals by Kathy—*The Radical Gaze*—and in one of these rituals I experienced a deep soul connection with another participant. I became traumatised by this, and lost my voice.

Upon my return home I wrote *Then I lost my voice*. Two poems—*Loving is an art; Then I lost my voice...*—from this period explore the themes of love and loss.<sup>124</sup> The situations referred to in the above poems were re-traumatising for me: it took me some months to assimilate what was going on; to understand the levels of anxiety and perturbation caused.

By the end of November 2015 I had started to become ill (depressed) myself. During this period I co-led a workshop at Ashridge, along with two colleagues we ran a workshop on *'Writing the soul'*. The design based on my method when teaching photography: exploring personal narratives of the *impossible* to write about. The outcome was 22 'glimpses' small excerpts of writing that may lend greater insights into complex, confusing, unprocessed, emergent situations.<sup>125</sup>

As this was playing out in my life, it had an effect on the practice of a number of participants, and I started to draw some threads from this experimental writing practice that may find utility in the arenas of personal and organisational development.

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<sup>123</sup> DeSalvo, L. 2000; 59-61 *emphasis mine*.

<sup>124</sup> Appendix 1: *Poems*.

<sup>125</sup> Appendix 3: *Workshop Glimpses*.



In *Flawed but Willing*, Kurshed Dehnugara, expresses it thus:

It struck me that, as a new phase comes into life, there are subtle signs of its emergence. The complexity scientists call them 'weak signals'. I prefer the term 'subtle' as it focuses the mind a little more on the kind of thing we are looking for. It encourages us to tune into our ways of tracking, noticing and *apprehending* the less obvious. I imagine that, as organisations sit at the edge between one dominant system and the new one that is trying to emerge, our capacity to notice the subtle is a key part of building the channel that will strengthen us. <sup>126</sup>

This *noticing* must be something prevalent in the medical and healing professions too: My '*noticing*' of strange and uncharacteristic modes of communications by S was what prompted our visit to the doctor; a noticing of '*[mental] illness*'.<sup>127</sup> Noticing is a key skill: of educators; of healers; within sick organisations; within relationships and situations of love and attraction. It is a key skill of the writer/artist/eco-shaman too. The *Writing the soul* workshop confirmed what I had long suspected: that the artful accessing of personal narratives is transferable between media; that such practice and noticing is 'teachable'; that the practice is useful in organisational and healing contexts.

From the context of my confusion and trauma, I started to discover and re-discover a common ground where re-connecting and healing may occur. Revisiting the *Glimpses* from that workshop, I identify a practice of value. I have chosen one example:

**G19:**

The elderly black gentleman  
calmly reaches across the legs of the  
corpse to extract the chosen pack of meat from  
the fridge. Unconcerned. Death in the fridge,  
death propped up against it. Life goes on...

He looks ready to be our next client. No  
disrespect in his actions, just a quiet  
acceptance that death is part of life.  
Maybe he knows his time is not far off!

Wheezy cough. Smoker, his  
fingers are yellow.

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<sup>126</sup> Dehnugara, K. 2014; 136 *emphasis mine*.

<sup>127</sup> I am uncomfortable with this shorthand term: with the identification of a person with an illness, and, not least, that given I have come to believe that the illness is at least in part 'ours'; we both live with it: there are resonances with 'my' PTSD: any healing being—at least in part—mutual.

The *Glimpses* from the *Writing the soul* workshop at Ashridge indicated buried traumas: the need for healing. Some participants found that their practice shifted after that workshop. I started working with Glimpses in my own life: excerpts of writing from poems, allied with images. I found myself doing this in order to start to try and figure out what was going on. Poetry, or meta analysis, was not enough, deeper insights were needed. Experimentation—with the combination of images and text—started to work for me. Differently from that expressed in *Leviathan Songs*. It had a more tender dimension to it; a more curious one too.

In November 2015, I was exhausted; becoming depressed: feeling ill in much the same manner that I had been prior to the July trip to Norway and Ashridge. The weather was dark and rainy for weeks: I stopped walking, and photographing. Both of which I now know stave of [mental] illness within me. Writing stalled too.

Then, Craig invited me to go to Qatar after Christmas: a gift from the gods. I flew out to Qatar on New Years Eve 2015. Sitting on Craig's roof in the morning sunshine, my depression abated. I started thinking with more clarity. I felt more connected to home and S. I resolved to begin renovations of our home Archers Ford on my own. I started writing again. I had learned lessons; the need for self care: in order to care for the another; in order to write. Louise DeSalvo points to this need:

The process of writing can be healing only if we learn how to examine and express our feelings in our work without dwelling upon them while we are away from the work, for that might forestall our progress. Or, *more dangerously, it might lead us to over-identifying with our work so that we relive our traumas or ruminate about our losses and dissatisfactions rather than represent them on the page.*<sup>128</sup>

And:

[...] if we are to use writing as a way of healing our emotional pain, we must learn that the life we're presently living is (or can be) different from the one we're describing. *For we are not merely the selves we describe on paper.* <sup>129</sup>

Louise DeSalvo goes on to say that: *'I've come to understand that the most healing way of approaching the writing process is to focus upon the potential and possibilities for growth rather than its problems and pitfalls.'*

After my sojourn in Qatar, [writing] *process as a healing experience* started to inform my practice.<sup>130</sup> I wrote *Doha dreams*, an interlinking the various writings of my inquiry between July and November 2015. <sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> DeSalvo, L. 2000; 106 *emphasis mine*.

<sup>129</sup> DeSalvo, L. 2000; 106 *emphasis mine*.

<sup>130</sup> DeSalvo, L. 2000; 109.

<sup>131</sup> Appendix 2: *Experimental writings*.



Untitled. Qatar, 2016.

Louise DeSalvo's process of healing narrative is anticipated by Arthur Frank divides healing narratives into categories: *Restitution stories*; *Chaos stories*; *Quest stories*:

Restitution stories attempt to outdistance mortality by rendering illness transitory. Chaos stories are sucked into the undertow of illness and disasters that attend it. Quest stories meet suffering head on; they accept illness and seek to *use* it. *Illness is the occasion of a journey that becomes a quest*. What is quested for may never become wholly clear, but the quest is defined by the ill persons belief that something is to be gained by the experience.

The quest narrative affords the ill person a voice as teller of her own story, because only in quest stories does the *teller* have a story to tell.<sup>132</sup>

In *Doha Dreams* I found myself reflecting on the dilemmas and my own questions about the *utility* of my narratives: *What is the impact of these truths? / Some people seem to find them affecting, sometimes they manage to communicate, or to help this progenitor to understand something. / It makes me feel less alone and useless. / Others claim that my truths help them too, as well as being challenging, and in that way less helpful to them. Apparently. / I wonder what these enchantments catalyse, really? And whether they are of any use beyond the aesthetic, the beautiful?*

The *Quest* voice is my truer voice, though there are resonant frequencies of the *Chaos* and *Restitution* voices in there too. Arthur Frank introduces further taxonomies, *facets*, within that of the *Quest* narrative: those of *memoir*, *manifesto* and *automythology*.<sup>133</sup> Arthur Frank also posits *Illness as Journey*, that: *The quest narrative certainly goes back as far as John Donne, who recast his critical illness, probably typhus, into a spiritual journey*.<sup>134</sup> <sup>135</sup> This was becoming increasingly resonant for me, as I wrote my way into 2016.

Returning from Doha and Ashridge, everything shifted. Consequentially, so did my practice. Suddenly just writing was not enough. I needed to be back on the dark side: I needed to be using visual images. By Easter 2016 I realised that I was starting to become ill again. S was too. I re-created my practice: into one of ritual; of mindful encounters with nature; of image making; of connectedness to the other-than-human; of journey and travelogue.

This shift was in order to revise sense-making (something wasn't adding up), and trying still to help S while keeping my own demons at bay: *Quest stories meet suffering head on; they accept illness and seek to use it*. My writing shifted too: into the form of a daily account—field notes—of my shifting practice. Within these notes, salient questions started to emerge... mainly around narcissism, dysfunction, toxicity, and what was causing illness: *[mine / hers / ours...]*

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<sup>132</sup> Frank, A. 2013; 115 *emphasis mine*.

<sup>133</sup> Frank, A. 2013; 119.

<sup>134</sup> Frank, A. 2013; 116.

<sup>135</sup> John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959). Quoted in Frank, A. 2013; 116.

I was (barely) keeping my own head out of the toxic waters of [mental] illness—whilst trying to make sense of the situation. The writing of my shifting practice was a distinct help: without this, without ADOC, I would have gone under. At this point, and for some months, I was on the edge of being sucked back into the fractals of the chaos narrative. As Arthur Frank puts it: *The voice of the teller has been lost as a result of the chaos, and this loss is what perpetuates the chaos.*<sup>136</sup> I had a distinct sense that the person to whom I now refer as *Direct-Debit Debbie*, and others, were hoping that this was so: that I would go under, or quit.

This (assumed) ambition was misplaced, and displaced; subsumed by further, deeper, narratives: *Yosser's tale; The Alder Altar; The Daily Flowers; The Bled Travelogue; The Trees; Imago.*<sup>137</sup> On reflection—and with reference to Frank's interpretation of Joseph Campbell's work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*—Easter 2016 was the *departure*: the first threshold was crossed.<sup>138</sup> The ensuing rituals that I undertook were of the nature of *initiations*, thus rendering some coherence to experiences:

In illness initiations, unlike tribal ones, only at the end of the initiation does the teller conceptualise what was going on as an initiation.

Campbell calls initiation “the road of trials,” easily identified in any illness story as the various sufferings this involves, not only physical but also emotional and social. This road leads through other stages, such as temptation and atonement, until the ending or “apotheosis.” The quest narrative tells self-consciously of being transformed; undergoing transformation is a significant dimension of the storyteller's responsibility. The end of the journey brings what Campbell calls a “boon.” Quest stories of illness imply that the teller has been given something by the experience, usually some insight that has been passed on to others.<sup>139</sup>

First person action inquiry is not for the faint hearted. Telling the stories of my journey through this space has been healing for me, to a degree. Yet I wonder about the usefulness to fellow travellers? I look for threads: of things that made me ill; that cause illness in others; and, I look for resonant stories of and for others too. In the telling of the stories up until Easter 2016, I was working one beat removed from the rhythm of the chaos. I started working with ritual: with *The Alder Altar*; with Yosser's story; then I worked with *Daily Flowers*.<sup>140</sup>

All of this work involved kinds of writing: writing from (within) the chaos; writing as sense making; writing as healing (maybe); writing as magical journey. (And, afterwards, in post-production and post-rationalisation: *writing-for-the-academy*.)

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<sup>136</sup> Frank, A. 2013; 115.

<sup>137</sup> See Part III: Atelier.

<sup>138</sup> Frank, A. 2013; 117.

<sup>139</sup> Frank, A. 2013; 118.

<sup>140</sup> *The Daily Flowers* were images made on my iphone sent out initially as part of the *Alder Altar* project, then subsequently as images. They were accompanied by contextualising text, and stories of Yosser, these stories in particular, were very popular with recipients.

What had started out purely as a writing practice, based, in Arthur Frank's terms, within *memoir & manifesto* —the telling of: *the illness story with telling other events in the writers life*; and the stories where: *the truth that has been learned is prophetic; often carrying demands for social action*; became something more—the parts became greater than the sum.<sup>141</sup> Becoming, encompassing, more than *automythology* too:

Automythology turns the specific illness into a paradigm of universal conflicts and concerns. The body of the storyteller becomes a pivot point between microcosm and macrocosm and human potential —“freedom” for Cousins and “destiny” for Sacks—depends on whether the lessons of the storyteller has learned can be accepted and practiced by others.<sup>142</sup>

At the start of this chapter I proposed: *Within the sense-making of linear explication, lies a sense making of a different kind: the sense-making of the magical journey; the apprehending, unlocking, and reworking of repetitious patterns. There lies a question too: Is there an identifiable practice and aesthetic that we might term: Self-Authorship?* Writing this chapter was a raw experience. In *Art as Medicine*, Sean McNiff states: *‘Negative and disturbing images are vital stimulants for healing as the toxin is the antitoxin.’*<sup>143</sup> I have identified a number of qualities germane to this inquiry due to my exposure to dysfunction toxins and illnesses: personal, familial, organisational. In writing—experimentally, for the academy—I began to reveal layers: of experiencing; of method; aesthetic dimensions of *self-authorship*.<sup>144</sup>

Accessing aesthetic dimensions may be taught, *enhanced*, within others. Practices—experimental in nature —where change may become embodied: self-authorship; re-connecting, revealing, unearthing; unfolding of Imago. Those dimensions of our being that we are meant to be and to express. Via practice of the Resonant or Returned gaze.<sup>145</sup> By which I mean the state where meaning is not *‘finished meaning’*, where, when gazing at a flower (or a picture of a flower), what Bortoft terms *‘subect-object separation’* dissolves:

The alternative here is to reverse the direction of attention, which is naturally drawn to the end product, by stepping back ‘upstream’ into the *event* of understanding. The effect of this is that meaning emerges in the *happening* of understanding, instead of being present already as a finished object *before* it is understood by the reader. If we can shift our attention upstream in this way, we find ourselves prior to the separation of meaning from understanding and hence before the separation into subject and object. This brings us to the phenomenology of the event of understanding.<sup>146</sup>

I explore these matters further in the next chapter: *On healing: liminal mind*.

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<sup>141</sup> Frank, A. 2013; 119-120.

<sup>142</sup> Frank, A. 2013; 126.

<sup>143</sup> McNiff, S.1992; 3.

<sup>144</sup> Later to be developed into the concept and practice of Imago and Imago Unfolding..

<sup>145</sup> Later developed into *The Imaginal Gaze*; relates to Imago and Imago Unfolding. The practice unfolds in Part III Atelier; the theory in Part IV Gaze.

<sup>146</sup> Bortoft, H. 2012; 94-95 emphases in original.

## Chapter 3

***On healing:*** liminal mind

Live as though everything is rigged in your favour.

Rumi



Winter-flowering Cherry. Kinsham, 2017.



In the time of winter flowering cherry of 2017 I went for a walk that took me along the valley of the Lugg. I was feeling myself again—becoming who I am—for the first time in weeks, it seemed. Then I was arrested; by a winter flowering cherry. Another example of the aesthetics of healing?

The '*Who am I?*' question I pose at the beginning of my poem *boxes two* delineates part of the territory of trauma. It describes part of the territory of [mental] illness too: both territories where sense of self, and boundaries of the self, may become blurred or fragmented. Part of my identity when working on *The Leviathan*—at the point of my flagging workplace bullying—was that of one who would not stand by and witness, or be subject to, bullying. I assumed (naively), that others would be similarly disposed and motivated: not least those whose job it was to be so. I was wrong.

I was wrong in my assumptions: that the boundaries and processes intricately and expensively drawn by the organisation would be adhered to; that I would be resilient enough to not become ill as a consequence of failures in this regard; that justice would prevail; that the stated purpose of the organisation was aligned with its actual purpose; that others would stand up and be counted; that the legal system would provide protection; that I was doing the right thing, therefore safe. In my being *wrong*, and yet feeling in the right, I exposed myself to dissonances. I had myself become porous: permeable to organisational, and—as it happens—familial toxins. It was the beginning of a long struggle with my sense of self. Does part of the solution—to the healing of trauma, [mental] illness; to becoming whole—lay within the re-drawing, or even dissolution, of boundary? In *No Boundary*, Ken Wilber expresses this crisis of identity thus:

All answers to that question, “Who am I?,” stem precisely from this basic procedure of drawing a boundary line between self and not-self. [...]

*As we have seen, the most radical re-mapping or shifting of the boundary line occurs in the experiences of the supreme identity, for here the person expands her self-identity boundary to include the entire universe. We might even say that she loses the boundary line altogether, for when we identified with the “one harmonious whole” there is no longer any outside or inside, so nowhere to draw the line.*<sup>147</sup>

The thesis of *No Boundary* thus renders one potentially vulnerable: identity with the *entire universe* has its downside. The modus operandi of narcissists and bullies seems to be to insinuate themselves into one's life; then, maybe subtly at first, to undermine. Trauma and illness caused by exposure to organisational, and familial, bullying and narcissism would seem to have an easy cure: create boundaries; move out. Yet this is not always possible, or one may move, or be pushed, too late. Depending upon the state of play, the questions shift:

*How to become inured to further oppression and manipulation?*

*How to help a loved one with this?*

*How to preserve health and sanity?*

*How to heal, or help to heal?*

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<sup>147</sup> Wilber, K. 2001; 4-5 emphasis mine.

Other questions occur too:

*Could any healing method also be used prophylactically?*

*Is self-protection and self-healing transferable to others?*

*What is the role of any no boundary dynamic?*

*In caring for a loved one who is being bullied, what are the conditions for healing?*

*What will help both the carer and the cared for?*

The life situation—the inquiry space—that I found myself in seemed to be calling for something more healing rather than revealing: than *toxin is the antitoxin*; than the possibly re-traumatizing. Requiring a shift in practice: from writing, to working with visual images. This was part happenstance: due to being immersed in such chaos that writing of it would be the cause of anger and hurt; because working with pictures is my natural forte; and, because of my inexplicable sense was that was what was needed. In *Art as Medicine*, Shaun McNiff refers to the *daimon* as: *an archetypal agent, creation itself, that speaks through us*.<sup>148</sup> It seemed to me now that in my choosing, or being chosen by, the *daimon* of artful healing; my own sense of self-authorship, was resurfacing. My Imagos, unearthed, now unfolded. Connections—between what had happened to me; the effects of the exposure to bullying; the emergent experimental writing practice; the effects on [mental] health; my former art-teaching practice—converged: At a point of practice based on healing, working with the soul. I found myself re-walking a path that I had walked before. This time with more awareness of what I was doing. This path had been walked by others. Shaun McNiff states:

Mental health and therapeutic services have attracted artists who desire to commit their lives to the care of soul. In our era of suffering, soul finds itself in the clinic, and from history we find that revolutionary and spiritual transformations occur when soul exists *in extremis*. Pathology and wounds open us to the life of the soul.<sup>149</sup>

And:

The conventional mind does not know how to see expressions of the chthonic and irrational soul as natural. “Health” is considered to be a faithful representation of “reality” that also happens to fit the perceptual bias of the viewer. As a result of these conditions I immediately took on the role of protector of the images that emerged from outside that reality. I provided a safe and affirming place for their emergence and preservation. It was a *tremenos*, a sacred precinct, where soul paintings covered the walls and welcomed those yet to come.<sup>150</sup>

In my practices—teaching on *The Leviathan*; writing poetry; experimental and soul writing with others; my iPhoneography; maybe even biking and flying—I was connecting to, and creating, sacred spaces and adventurers: providing myself with an *Atelier*, with *tremenos*: spaces where permission is granted to do that *‘stuff without purpose or attachment to outcome’* so beloved of the soul.

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<sup>148</sup> McNiff, S. 1992; 10.

<sup>149</sup> McNiff, S. 1992; 11.

<sup>150</sup> McNiff, S. 1992; 11-12.

The recognition came at the turning point when, in extremis myself, I created a ritual—photographing flowers. Triggered, I believe, by the illness of another, and encounters with *referred narcissism* (my term) or what Alan Rappoport terms *Co-Narcissism*.<sup>151</sup> <sup>152</sup> Writing the chapter on writing as healing, I found to be a re-opening of wounded-ness: within the space of writing I had an encounter with my own mortality.<sup>153</sup> Shaun McNiff reveals [the surface of] the problem:

Today's mental health field is to me as bizarre as a chapter out of *Gulliver's Travels*. Unnatural chemicals, replacing the electrodes and injections of the previous generation, are being introduced into our bodies, just as rivers and waterways were spoiled by the narrow technological thinking of prior generations. *Problems of the soul are being treated mechanically and without regard for people's uniqueness.*<sup>154</sup>

The mechanical, soul-denying, approach has characterised my experiences over the past few years: Doctors are pre-disposed to reach for the prescription pad and to dole out chemicals; the illness is deeper seated and systemic—often, usually—reaching back into childhood traumas being triggered by present day stresses. Need for a more integrated, holistic, approach is indicated. Art-based healing or therapies not having been offered, via my inquiry I invent, exploring, such approaches. Shaun McNiff points to the broad and integrated as the way forward:

The domain of art and artists is far broader than the borders of a picture. Art, by its nature, *includes everything imaginable*, and this is why I have always been proud to be associated with the integration of art and healing. The two need each other. Art, like the healing process, not only includes all of life but certainly the specific elements of gesture, body movement, imagery, sound, words, and enactment. *These elements complement each other and cannot be separated in either art or life. Dividing therapies of art, music, dance, drama and poetry into specialised professions adds to already fractious atmosphere of the mental health field.*<sup>155</sup>

I noted in earlier writings: *What if the 'illness' of another were instead a malady to be addressed in a different way, or not addressed at all? What of the role of such a malady of the soul, of soul-separation (my perception)? What if I were wrong: how can I 'know' in this confusing situation?*

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<sup>151</sup> Rappoport, A. 2005.

<sup>152</sup> On 14.3.17 I wrote the last lines above. On 17.4.17 I experienced a forced landing in a light aircraft, of which I was the pilot and sole occupant. Now, on 20.4.17, I resume writing again.

<sup>153</sup> I was involved in a plane crash after the engine failed. I was the pilot and sole occupant. (By comparison to other trauma, facing mortality: facing annihilation for a minute or so; facing complete disruption of business, have been relatively easy. I continue to write—about the healing powers of connecting: to the beautiful; to the natural world; to other worlds; to Archers Ford; to ADOC buddies; to other loved ones; to Yosser. I'm finding dealing with the admin surrounding the crash relatively easy. There has been too, I think—within exposure to the above potential annihilation—a perspectival, and inner shift. It is a shift of attention, and energy: on the day I left to fly, I left early—in case graced with a visit by the Gopher from the Toxic Lawyer. I was almost wishing that he would call. I write now about artful healing from the perspective lent by this event. I struggle to start. The accident has left me bruised, and I get tired more easily.)

<sup>154</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 168-169 emphasis mine.

<sup>155</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 169 emphases mine.

Levine writes of distinguishing Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), with the designation of *'Injury'* rather than *'Disorder'*. In his view a disorder may be managed, an injury healed.<sup>156</sup> From within I can know that both of these perspectives have merit: *Injury* is most resonant, and has an implied physicality to it; *Disorder* is the outcome of the injury, and does need to be managed.<sup>157</sup> I am given to wonder what would happen if an illness such as depression and anxiety were to be similarly re-described, or re-imagined: Might there at least be a de-stigmatising of the [mental] illness to a more holistic, and helpful, genus of malady? Might the healing of embarking upon a *'magical journey'* be allowed to occur?<sup>158</sup> During the *Alder Altar project* it had become clear to me that resonances and reverberations were at play; could my *'magical journeys'* lead to wider healing?<sup>159</sup> Looking backwards—towards those magical days at the altar, and becoming guided by Yosser—I had noted in my field journal:

Today was just the same. In at around 05.45, Yosser climbs onto me, lays on my shoulder, purring. I reflected on yesterday's email dialogue with Kathleen, on: dissonance; consonance; resonance; transmission / amplification of trauma... reverberation. Yosser's purrs were reverberating through me; transmitting their own calming. S appreciates this, yet is not able to be in the house where this is available. Because I'm here? Why? Today again Yosser made it clear that it was a shit day for taking photos, due to both our mood, and the light—which was grey and flat.

He was right of course, especially about light. He usually is. So we went for another walk: the sounds of spring reverberating. I pondered the stillness, the silence, of my flower pictures:

*The poet personifies the flowers by projecting his own feelings on them. Silence is the actuality of the flowers and the driving of the petals is aimless and motionless. However by the poet's brush the silence of the flowers and the poet's subjective feeling of unwillingness to share his grief.*<sup>160</sup>

Yet this wildness is not silent. The stream burbles and sings as do the birds, as do me and Y, inwardly. The pictures are sounds of blobs of colour. This witness reverberates, tamed, by them. They heal, in their own way—a visual sound bath: artful synaesthesia.

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<sup>156</sup> Levine, P. 2010; 34.

<sup>157</sup> I have a number of acquired phobias from my Leviathan experience: opening post; sometimes logging on to email; an aversion to HR, and to lawyers. I manage these in varying ways. Similarly I have a strong reaction to encounters with narcissists and sociopaths; I now go out of my way to avoid these types.

<sup>158</sup> Characterisation of my writings by S on 28 December 2016 in iMessage exchange.

<sup>159</sup> See Part III: Atelier.

<sup>160</sup> Chang, Chung-yuan 2011; 179.

We were starting to become at one with new senses, of the flowers, of each other, after nearly a month making photos in the stream. The pictures resonate. Reverberate. I wondered if they were doing so for others? Within the noise, the reverberations of the pictures, there is tranquility. Could this be transmitted? Even if *unseen*? We were, after a month, I felt, drifting into a current in the stream that we might call *quantum inquiry: an inquiry of scintillas of stimuli, of signals of the otherworldly rising above the background radiation of everyday, worldly, noise*. Was the quantum-dimension becoming manifest in this new space? I felt it, could sense it sometimes: how could it show up, even tangentially? I thought of attunement to breathing to purring, of assonance:

*The reverberation of breath is merely a manifestation; its aim is to reveal the reality of things. In using the technique of ink-wash and the splashing ink the artist may indulge in mere shading of ink and fail to fulfil his greater purpose.*

Greater purpose: the greater good of all. The next steps? Where would these lead? In revealing the true nature of things, there is depth:

*Although the reverberation of the breath may convey to us impressions of strength, beauty and elegance, these are merely manifestations of reality, but not reality itself. The highest achievement of the artist lies a step further, i.e. not in the mere revelation of strength or beauty or elegance. It is the painting of creative innocence. These paintings do not make any claim to beauty, power, elegance. Instead they are totally simple, childlike in their innocence. This absolute simplicity makes us realise that the artist's mind was in the state of nonbeing when he painted the picture.<sup>161</sup>*

Creative innocence; beyond manifestations; absolute simplicity; a state of non-being: The state that envelops me and Yosser while out walking. Occasionally now, I am able to attune to this state when Y leaves me to take my pictures in the stream—while he attends to other matters, of a cat nature.<sup>162</sup>

In trying to heal another, I had moved along a path towards becoming healer, of healing within. In creating a magical journey, or series of journeys, I had, apparently, failed to help the person whom I wanted to help: instead, hitting resonances with others; within myself. These notions: *gaze; resonance; reverberation*—the means of divining wounds and wounded-ness; of conferring healing of trauma—became central to the inquiry. In my inquiry into blessing—into healing by non-obvious, non linear, approaches to confusing uncertain and stressful situation—inquiry, and injury, became method. Namely, in the first instance: the creation of a ritual of making visual work, at dawn each day for 40 days. Following from that work was a practice of photographing flowers (*Daily Flowers*), sending them out to a growing group of interested parties.

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<sup>161</sup> Chang, Chung-yuan 2011; 221 .

<sup>162</sup> *Alder Altar* Field Journal: Day 25. Thursday 21st April 2016: Yosser; water; earth. Edited for clarification.

At the end of the summer 2016 I went to Bled in Slovenia on my motorbike in order to attend the AoMo conference—*Empowering the Intangible*.<sup>163</sup> During my return journey I found myself able to properly reflect on both my circumstances, and my responses to them. The responses, roughly, were: *The Alder Altar Inquiry*—including my relationship with Yosser; *The Daily Flowers*; *The Bled Travelogue*.<sup>164</sup> Of these, the *Bled Travelogue* lends the best overview of emergent notice(ing) method and praxis; the *Daily Flowers* sometimes cross-cuts into these; and the *Alder Altar* was really the opening up of spontaneous, non-linear responses: to adversity, illnesses, trauma, crises. Day 21 of the *Alder Altar* project seems, in retrospect, to have been the apotheosis of this transition: from trauma, to healing. It was also the day when I made most photographs, and when I found the process—along with the ensuing motorbike ride—positively de-traumatising.<sup>165</sup>

Carlo Strenger points to what he calls *sense of authorship*—that is: *the existential experience of having created a life that expresses a person's sense of individuality*.<sup>166</sup> Dealing with my own re-wired mind-body had been testing. Dealing with the emergence—maybe even transference—of trauma within a loved one had proven to be exhausting; re-traumatising. The *Alder Altar* project, the *Daily Flowers*, the *Bled Travelogue*—the air crash—had all proven prophylaxes: in the most testing of circumstances, trauma receded.

The essence of freedom for Epicurus is the ability to pare life down to essentials. This process takes a particularly interesting form when creation becomes the centre of a refocused life—reflecting both the acceptance that time is limited and the desire to leave behind works that will survive the creator.<sup>167 168</sup>

Rituals: rising at dawn for 40 days and making photographs (assisted by Yosser the cat) at a makeshift altar; creating and sending out the Daily Flowers; the Bled trip; the writings; now surviving a plane crash; all of these had a deeply aesthetic quality, a healing beauty: a quality of lasting, everlasting. Mike pointed out, during a Skype call on Easter Monday, that this *harmonised helpfulness* was an interesting phenomenon.<sup>169</sup>

That realisation came via a tweet: *Live as though everything is rigged in your favour*. An interesting phenomenon of healing was emerging: that under duress, and exposure to trauma / illness, there is present an *angel of the wound*. Concomitant with this, there is the (potentially a less helpful) shadow phenomenon: a pattern of re-entering the trauma space.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Arts of Management and Organisations. See: <https://artofmanagement.org>

<sup>164</sup> See Chapter 11 *Peregrini*: travelogues.

<sup>165</sup> *The Alder Altar: an inquiry into benediction* Field journal. Day 21. Sunday 17th April 2016: Landscape; light.

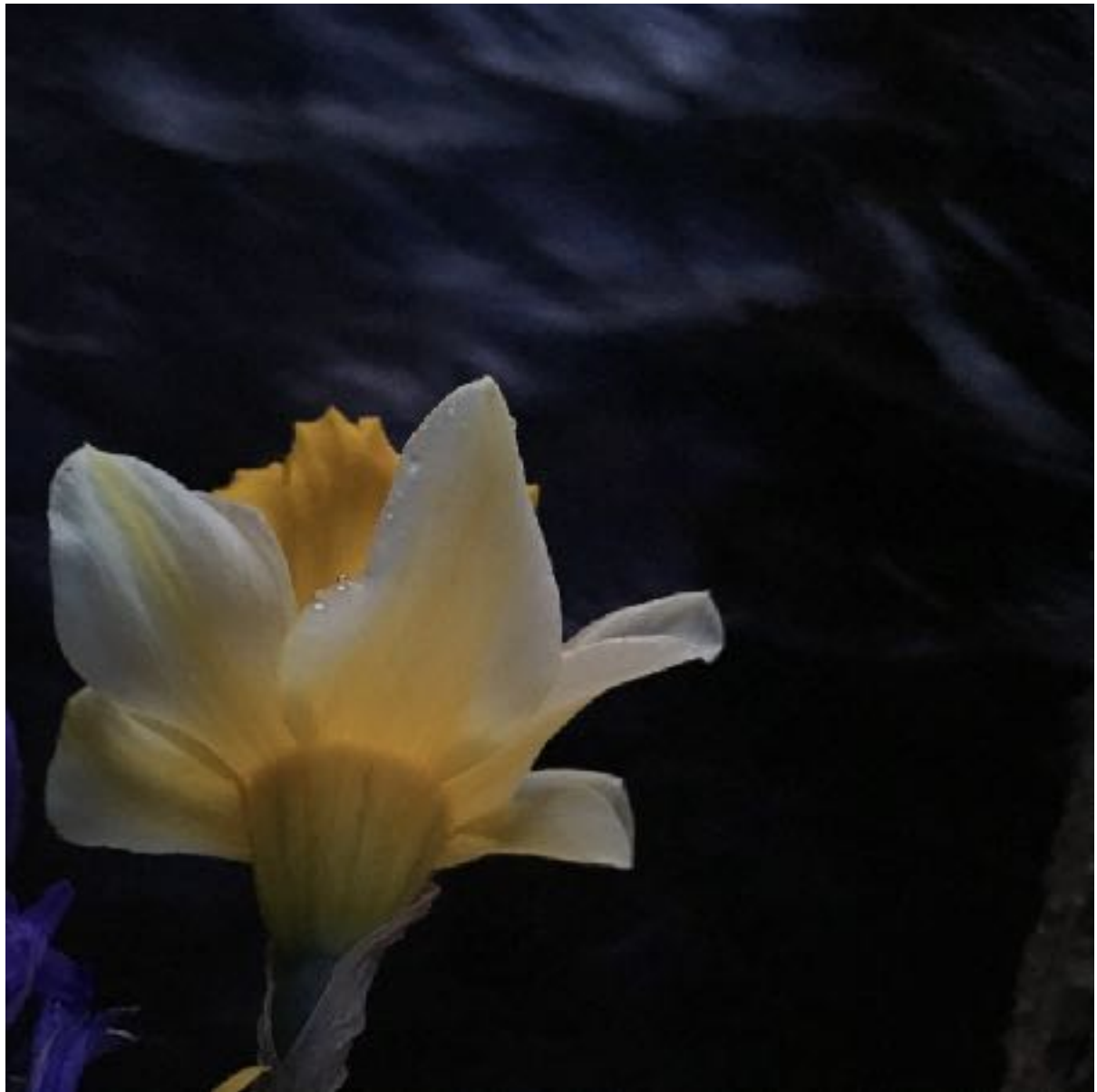
<sup>166</sup> Strenger, C. 2011; 108.

<sup>167</sup> Strenger, C. 2011; 109.

<sup>168</sup> Becker, E. 1973; (chap. 1).

<sup>169</sup> Mike Stanford, ADOC 4 participant.

<sup>170</sup> O'Donohue, J. 1997; 223-226; and: McNiff, S. 1995; 184-194.



Untitled. Lingen 2016. <sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> *The Alder Altar: an inquiry into benediction* Field journal. Day 21. Sunday 17th April 2016: Landscape; light.

I wrote a poem that spoke to the situation. S made an image in Papers 53.<sup>172</sup> Both display a different artful-knowing eloquence: playing—with negative energies and toxicity—just to see what the effects might be.<sup>173</sup> For me the writing of the poem *Direct Debit Debbie: a love song* was a start to this process. The precursor was the Bled road-trip and travelogue.<sup>174</sup> Bortoft states that the desire for resolved ‘*finished meaning*’ is to ‘*find ourselves unavoidably in the grip of the subject-object separation*’.<sup>175</sup> I was finding my emerging practice: the aesthetics of healing wounded-ness, trauma and toxicity; that *unfinished meaning* has a power of its own. *Is this the power of the visionary; the prophet; the healer?* This phenomenal shift emerged in method in a WhatsApp interchange with Mike:

*You might trigger discomfort. And unconscious fears. In people who overly rely on their belief in a tidy world. In that sense you are a prophet.*  
*Some people are hugely uncomfortable around prophets—of the way the world really is.*

[WhatsApp message from Mike Stanford 22.04.17]<sup>176</sup>

Is this the shifting aesthetic—of the healer; of the *Border-lander*—a portal through the liminal space of trauma, towards wholeness? Could this be a part of what it is to be on a *magical journey*? And as a troubadour on such a journey, to be doing good for others? Is this why I find resistance to my own *magical journey*: encounters with healing as discomfiting, not least to others? In an earlier WhatsApp interchange with Mike, he remarked on my poem, *Direct Debit Debbie: A love song*:

Mike:

*Powerful writing Paul. What happened as you wrote it?*

Me:

*I felt empowered—a kind of healing.*

*I read it out to someone yesterday—same kind of effect; growth in confidence; calmer; able to see the situation with more clarity, and oddly, more empathy for S.*

Mike:

*That’s interesting data! So writing about it helps you detach, be curious rather than reactive, gives you a sense of agency?*

Me:

*That’s so well put Mike. I call it venting my spleen. But your take is so much more quotable...*

[WhatsApp message from Mike Stanford 4.4.17]

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<sup>172</sup> Papers 53 is a digital imaging and illustration program for iPad.

<sup>173</sup> Stanley, P. 2016.

<sup>174</sup> See Chapter 11 *Peregrini*: travelogues

<sup>175</sup> Bortoft, H. 2012; 94.

<sup>176</sup> Mike Stanford, ADOC 4 participant & co-inquirer.



*Perhaps to pursue a magical journey is to pursue unfinished meaning? Are the pursuits in the poem a magical journey in their own way? Is this also a portal of trauma, via otherworldliness, towards greater integration and healing?*<sup>177</sup> Bernstein proposes: *'There is little doubt that had her Borderland ways been received with skepticism or clinically labelled (pathologised)—a possible traumatic experience in itself—her life would have been qualitatively different as a woman, a wife and a mother.'*<sup>178</sup>

**Direct-Debit Debbie (from Tenbury Wells) part 1: A love song**

You came to me in springtime  
when there was flowering  
of Daffodils, Forsythia, Tulips  
and Bluebells.

Saying to me: you needed help  
(it was clear you were unwell)  
'You've come to the right place'  
I said (because money has a smell)  
'I'm Direct-Debit Debbie, (from Tenbury Wells)'

You told me a story,  
of your chap: one from hell;  
A waster; a scoundrel; a loser  
And, oh well; your folks didn't like him;  
Your cat wouldn't tell.

I said (because money has a smell)  
'I'll sort it, strike fear in him,  
boot him out, have him gone:  
I'm Direct-Debit Debbie:  
he's not the one.'

'Don't bother with counselling  
of therapy, or other kinds of help;  
don't both talking to him, or the cat,  
at least not till he's gone to hell...'  
'Oh, and if you could give me your bank details  
it would be just as well:  
not for nothing am I called  
Direct-Debit Debbie, (of Tenbury Wells)'

[From Direct-Debit Debbie (from Tenbury Wells): a love song 29.3.17]

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<sup>177</sup> The concept of trauma as a portal to healing was introduced to me by Mike Stanford, and is I believe to be a chapter in his thesis.

<sup>178</sup> Bernstein, J. 2005; 95.

Mike's comments—the experiences as sketched out in the poem *Direct-Debit Debbie: A love song*—speak to a clash of cultural expectations. *Borderland-ness*, is under threat from the Debbies of this world. There is little subtlety, or possibility in the legal system for connecting, or re-connecting. Writing the poem *Direct-Debit Debbie* was finding the *angel of the wound*.<sup>179</sup> The poem describes the dynamics of a relationship that is undergoing some kind of transformation (via trauma); it also describes a system which is adversarial, binary. There is no space, or time, for exploring complexity, or deep healing, in either system. They accelerate the breaking of the already unwell, forcing 'resolution', rather than being curious as to what maybe trying to emerge, if nurtured. Conventional models of inquiry are useless.

In both worlds—legal; counselling—*Borderlanders* have no place. *Borderlander's* needs—for something magical; for healing—remain unmet. Where a timely resolution is required, it is often easier—in closed system terms—to force resolution; rather than to explore with curiosity more generative, emergent, healing, pathways. Uncertainties attending to complexity do not pre-figure in these worlds: paradigms intended to resolve, preclude resolution, increase conflict. Where, and how, may a healing pathway emerge from such apparent chaos? Mike's question gives a clue: *So writing about it helps you detach, be curious rather than reactive, gives you a sense of agency?* As does my response: *I felt empowered—a kind of healing. I read it out to someone yesterday—same kind of effect; growth in confidence; calmer; able to see the situation with more clarity, and oddly, more empathy [...]*<sup>180</sup>

The work had provided a ground of pre-traumatic growth, or inoculation. The writing, and performing, of *Direct Debit Debbie: A love song*, was a means of converting this pre-trauma—via a portal of wounded-ness—into discovery. Discoveries of *The Angel of the Wound*; of a magical journey; of self-authorship; of discernment of the patterns of an ecology of intimacy. Craig calls this form pattern recognition *Deep Magic*, Mike, I think, calls it *The Sacred Wound*. I call it the *Unfolding of Imagos*. If my poem, *Direct Debit Debbie: A love song*, lends insight to one facet of relational dysfunction, then S's picture *Yosser to the Rescue* is its mirror. They look at what the soul/s are up to. As Shaun McNiff expresses it: *'It might be hard for some to accept, but even images of perversion function as angelic messengers and guides into the soul's terrain.'*<sup>181</sup>

And:

By contrast, the methods of archetypal psychology look with curiosity at what the soul is doing in perverse activity. What need is the soul expressing? Compassion replaces correction. The ethical act becomes one of proper placement and moral differentiation. *The cure lies within the heart of the toxin.*<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> McNiff, S. 1995; 184-194.

<sup>180</sup> WhatsApp message from Mike Stanford 22.04.17.

<sup>181</sup> McNiff, S. 1995; 179.

<sup>182</sup> McNiff, S. 1995; 178 *emphasis mine*.



Yosser to the Rescue. 2017.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>183</sup> Digital image by SB.

My sense is that curiosity—around the portal, or angel, of the wound—reveals something of the quality of the *expression, or terrain, of the soul*, and, in turn, be helpful. It is in this direction the inquiry now turns, via enchantment and the enchanted, and questions:

*What does it take in order to access, or release our soul's vision from those prisons and enclosures within which we can tend to confine, or allow to become confined?*

*What is the role of phenomena, the phenomenal and phenomenology in describing, predicting, underwriting, powering these energies?*

Shifts and questions become apparent, hang around in the ether:

*Who wouldn't want to be the wanderer on the magical, even charmed, journey with a black cat called Yosser as his spirit guide, his Anam Cara? <sup>184</sup>*

*Who wouldn't dare?*

I write outdoors when I can, attuned to outdoor spirituality. As are many of the healing practices that I work with or am developing.

I write outdoors as an offering to the gods of the garden too: this is where I want to stay; I want my writing to be a part of the force that saves our home.

I sit outside on the south-east corner of the house just by the Yew tree, on a Sunday afternoon; Yosser comes to the door, and then retires back to the shade.

Everything has a rightness to it.

*What you're telling them is: Their party is a fucking mess.*

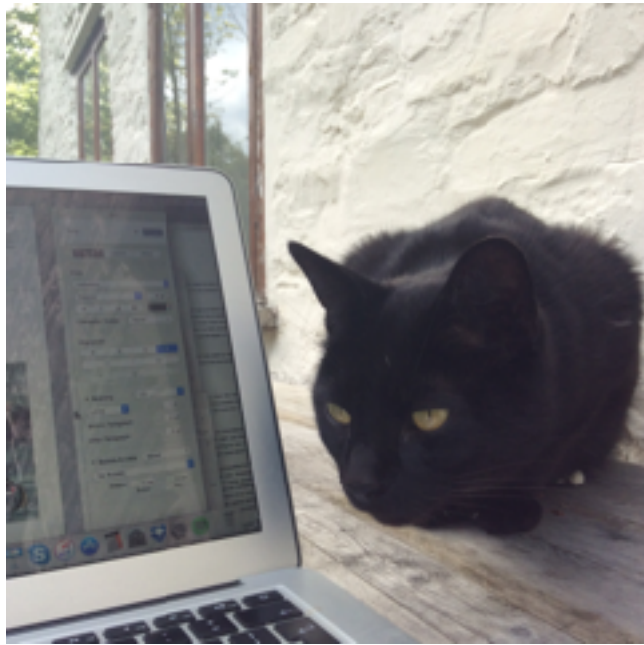
[Mike Stanford Skype call 20.5.17]

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<sup>184</sup> O'Donohue J. 1997.



Untitled. Lingen, 2017.



## Chapter 4

***Realm:*** imagos; patterns; resonances

We should lean against each other more in such a world as strange as this.

Hafiz



Azalea. Lingen, 2017.



## **Imago**

In the time of the Azaleas I come to start writing, to re-commence work on this thesis. I find I'm blocked: not knowing where to start. I start, as is becoming my habit, with an experimental writing piece: *The Trees #9*. This is after all, an inquiry into aesthetics. In my writing of the trees, my fingers seem to discover what it is that this work is about in ways that my conscious mind is unable to directly access. Which should come as no surprise, but it does, continually: *Why?*

Is it to do with an expected linearity of narration: a 'scientific' or quasi-scientific expectation of form; that in some way I will report on, and thus 'prove' (or disprove) the existence of a cogent coherent pattern or body or practice or theosophy that will be of use to others? I am given to wonder whether trees can operate in a helpful ways: as both pattern and metaphor, as a tool for inquiry and meta-inquiry? Trees are deeply aesthetic, sensuous and wise. And patterned. Trees may have just become the Imago for the inquiry; it may be that the inquiry is about the aesthetics of Imago, and their emergence. If patterns therefore become neither linear, or non-linear, but manifest more as Imago—as eco-blueprints for the full development of identity (especially in the face of ego-interruptions,) then the questions crystallise:

*How are the Imago discerned, or apprehended?*

*What role does the sacred play in the divination of Imago?*

*Can the sacred be organised to occur: by ritual; creative acts; the presence of love?*

*What qualities are required to be present at the divination of the sacred?*

*What are the relationships between our Imagos, and self-authorship?*

*What happens when the Imago is disrupted in its expression?*

*Can we find the Imago of the magical journey in any context: including, especially, the toxic?*

*What happens when the Imago is disrupted by [mental] illness?*

And for me:

*Am I a pattern creator, or disrupter, or player with, or all of these?*

*Are there sacred intimations of latent or emergent Imago?*



Untitled (Aquilegia). Lingen, 2017.

beautiful picture ~~

light against dark

dark against light

in

balance

in

opposition

space

in between

where the stones are

~

Glad to read of new way opening up.

And thanks for sending your writing yesterday. I have begun to notice trees more and more. They too have flowers. Yesterday after the storm I was out walking wildside and looking, paying attention, seeing. Last summer in Sweden in the forest, the wisdom of trees. Feeling the touch of trees. As benison.

[Email from AE 6.6.17]<sup>185</sup>

And from Mike:

Themes: connection, between me and the cat, me the cat and our nature, between us and the bad people. How do you connect with the cat? Even more interesting, what happens to you when you try to explain the connection? Does the quality of connection change when you try to explain it?

What are the limitations of narration? Does narrating the enchanted take the enchantment away? Or must it be narrated in a certain way.

Man, I learn every time I read your work. Thank you.

[From email from Mike Stanford 7.6.17]

I read MacFarlane. In *Landmarks*, he opens with the 2nd chapter entitled: *A Counter-Desecration Phrasebook*.<sup>186</sup> Immediately I was drawn to the resonant notion of *counter-desecration*—it felt like a description of my own practice: '[In 1917 the sociologist Max Weber] defined disenchantment as 'the knowledge or belief that...there are no mysterious incalculable forces at play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation... In modernity, mastery usurped mystery.'<sup>187</sup> <sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Response to Daily Flower 2017 #4: Aquilegia. Lingen.

<sup>186</sup> MacFarlane, R. 2016; 15-35.

<sup>187</sup> MacFarlane, R. 2016; 24-25 emphasis mine.

<sup>188</sup> Weber, M. 1946; 139.

Themes and threads from previous chapters began to coalesce: magical journeys and artful inquiry; encounters with the sacred. Convergence becomes apparent: *The Trees* series serve the narratives: as travelogue; as field journal; continuous narrative arc; and as an intimation of Otherworldly forces at play. *The Trees* also serve concepts: enchantment and consecration. The *Direct-Debit Debbie* poems illuminate and narrate forces of disenchantment, erasure, and desecration.<sup>189</sup> The field becomes settled. The axes of transliteration also describe the ground of the inquiry:

*In what way or ways might it be possible to transform negative energies and forces—  
disenchantment, desecration, erasure—into forces and energies of enchantment and  
consecration?*

Within *The Trees* also there is a crossover from the linear to the non-linear narratives: *Debbie* and *The Gopher* are mentioned, but they don't fully inhabit the story. I write principally of consecration. I describe the literal creation of sacred spaces at *The Realm of The Ford*. I relegate desecration and disenchantment to the poems. Playing with beauty is within the *Daily Flowers*, and my blog. 9Making the pictures of the flowers—usually with Yosser in attendance, sometimes with S around too—has proven hugely calming, perhaps healing: in what were otherwise adverse, sometimes traumatic, circumstances.) Writing, both of *The Trees*, and the *Direct-Debit Debbie* poems, similarly rendered healing. (I also managed to persuade S to join in by making flower pictures in Papers 53.)<sup>190</sup> *Seeing-into*, even of threatening and disturbing imagery, is helpful. Creation and curation of sacred spaces in the face of adversity helpful to me, resonant with others. With *seeing-into* comes grounded-ness: a new presence. In *Eternal Echoes*, John O'Donohue speaks to this:

A tree is a perfect presence. It is somehow able to engage and integrate its own dissolution. The tree is wise in knowing how to foster its own loss. It does not become haunted by the loss, or addicted to it. The tree shelters and minds the loss. [...] *The tree is wise in the art of belonging. The tree teaches us how to journey. Too frequently our inner journeys have no depth.*<sup>191</sup>

And:

When we put down roots into the ground, we choose from life's bounty, we need to exercise a tender caution about where the roots should go. *One of the vital criteria of personal integrity is whether you belong to your own life or not.* [...] These inner roots will enable you to later understand the suffering that has visited. *True belonging can integrate the phases of exile.*<sup>192</sup>

When trauma sets in I become a stranger: to those who have known me; to myself. Van Der Kolk avers: '*In technical terms they are experiencing the loss of executive functioning.*'<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> There are 5 Direct-Debit Debbie poems. See Appendix 1: *Poems*.

<sup>190</sup> These images appear at the end of this chapter.

<sup>191</sup> O'Donohue, J. 2000; 212 emphases mine.

<sup>192</sup> O'Donohue, J. 2000; 213 emphases mine.

<sup>193</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 45.

Often, just when I find myself starting to belong—or re-belong—to my life again, along comes another derailment; an opportunity to cast around for the *Angel of the Wound*. John O'Donohue transposes *suffering*, for *trauma*. He proposes that both suffering and trauma have their qualities of blessing. That they are, in their own way, Angels: '*Suffering has its own reasoning. It wants to teach us something. When you stop resisting its dark work, you are open to learning what it wants to show you.*'<sup>194</sup> Joan Halifax observes: [...] *we seek initiation, in order to know directly how the roots of all beings are tied together: how we are related to all things; [and that] all our relations with the phenomenal world become an expression of our extended self, a self with no boundaries.*<sup>195</sup>

My times with Yosser in the garden are healing: a kind of ritual, if an irregular one. These times, and their chronicling, feel like sacred ones. This could be because they are likely to be limited: I sense deeper processes at work. I wonder at the emergence of toxicity? With rootedness, with encounters with the sacred, necessarily in attendance some is some kind of darkness, or threat, or oppression. Are there always obstacles and tests which say: *If you are to carry on in this vein, you need to prove that you're serious?* It seems like it. Is this what it is like to truly encounter the enchanted grounds: *Self-authorship; Unearthing; or Unfolding Imagos?*

### **Pattern**

A shift in an underlying question arises, around the aesthetics of space for Imago emergence: *What is the space where one's place within the ecology of intimacy springs into being? Where the Imago emerges from the chrysalis? How does one discern the phenomena at play, in ways that are helpful? What is helpful in affecting outcome? Is attachment to outcome, attunement to outcome, a viable posture?*

Working with the aesthetics of *The Trees* series, and with the *Daily Flowers*, was a help. Feeling powerless, or helpless, these artful, creative—apparently pointless—acts, soothe, help. Not least with the apprehending of underlying patterns and phenomena at play, off screen, off page. Chords are struck with others too:

I am really sorry to hear that you have new problems with a lawyer. I find very effective the way you expose your feelings about the two different worlds. On a practical note, given how big role Yosser plays in your life and writings, and the way you write, you might consider raising funds through crowd sourcing that would also help to make your creative results available to a larger audience - I am sure that many people would be interested, including me.

[Email from Viktoria Dalko 12.6.17]

Relations with the phenomenal world, with sense experience, are critical to the emergence of the *Imago of Self-authorship*. As Bortoft states:

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<sup>194</sup> O'Donohue, J. 2000; 225.

<sup>195</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 137-138.

[Goethe] does this by active looking and he practice of exact sensorial imagination. It is through this activation of the sensory that we come to encounter the phenomenon in a dynamic way, so that we begin to *experience the phenomenon as coming-into-being*, whereas relying on the intellectual mind only brings us into contact with the phenomenon as it has already become.<sup>196</sup>

Playing, with *sensorial imagination*, with the aesthetics of the ground of inquiry, being the best—probably only—means of apprehending, and relating to a wider audience. Within the (re)traumatising of recent events lay deeper wisdoms, and perceptions, and relatedness: The Imago may be disrupted by, or find its emergence in, trauma and [mental] illness. In that sense my earlier rhetorical questions both indicate that the process of the emergence of the Imago of Self-authorship is necessarily both traumatic, and beautiful:

*What happens when the imago is disrupted by [mental] illness?*

*Am I a pattern creator, or disrupter, of player with, or all of these?*

With the birth, or rebirth, of the Soul—which is what seems to happen when recovering from trauma, or [mental] illness; in finding our true imprint—other imprints become revealed: as damaged; diseased; traumatised; deceased. Sloughing defunct identities—dead and dying selves—allows our souls to come to back to life.<sup>197</sup> We become discovered, re-discovered. In emerging from dark to light, we are unearthed, we un-fold. This is phenomenal. The philosophical ground is Phenomenology, and the work of its foremost proponent in the arena of perception, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The primary questions for me being:

*How to reliably access these phenomenal fields, in a way that becomes useful, useable, demonstrable, practice?*

*How to relate this practice?*

There may be an addictive quality to wounded-ness: toxins have a quality of the ecstatic; a quality of healing too, upon exposure in moderate quantities. Discernment of both the toxic and the enchanted is, at least at the margins, a phenomenal one. Yosser is an excellent divining rod in this regard: he knows when S is coming; he knows where invisible nests are from a distance of over 50 yards; he knows when there is a squirrel out of sight and round the corner outside when he is relaxing on the sofa; he knows when I am upset, or need a lay in, or need space, or his help / attendance in the garden, or while writing.

He knows too when I am just plain exhausted from dealing with life, and especially the fall out from S's illness. Yosser is the ultimate discerner: of patterns; of disruptions in patterns. Yosser can even initiate disruptions all by himself: if I have been writing for too long; if I am photographing early in the morning before stroking and feeding him; for squirrels and rabbits without a well developed sense of self-preservation. In the quality of his presence and discernment, Yosser acts as an interlocutor between me and the trees.

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<sup>196</sup> Bortoft, H. 2012; 87 emphasis mine.

<sup>197</sup> Wilber, K. 2000; 774-779.

The patterns of enchantments available at the Ford—my non-human doppelganger excepted—are various, infinite. I started creating sacred spaces—mini-ateliers—in order to look at these enchantments further: the window sill on the landing looking north (a kind of quasi Alder Altar, which like the original Altar, is where Yosser seems drawn to intervene); the space of the old driveway down to the stream and the original ford; the stump of the Spruce that I felled at Easter; the original Alder Altar; the thinking space on the old log above the stream; the Crazy Wisdom tree, a hundred yards downstream. These are all spaces from, or within which, patterns may appear or unfold: pattern discernment; pattern disruption; moments of active gaze; enchantments.

They are more than spaces of enchantment, also: spaces of grounding, of ritual (sometimes); of unearthing imago; of healing and becoming whole. They are sacred spaces; spaces of connection and connectedness. As anti-toxins go, they don't come a whole lot better than these spaces, and the enhanced quality of attention that they invite. If enchantment, the magical, are at least in part about a quality of attention and discernment, and if we may invite such qualities along on our journey, questions occur:

*How do we do this? Why isn't such practice common?*

*Why do such practices need to be attended by negative energies: by danger; trauma; toxicity; wounded-ness; illness and [mental] illness?*

*Is there a necessary liminal edge in these phenomena, that, if lacking, precludes entry into the realms of the enchanted, the magical the sacred?*

*Is the Imago-logic in attendance a kind of power both subtended from, and ulterior to, the powers of Ego-logic and of Eco-logic?*

*If the state of the Ego-logical is activity, and the Eco-logical is that of connected being, then what state does Imago-logic indicate?*

Enhanced awareness and pattern-play is what it looks like. But we are not talking about surface phenomena here: these phenomena of the *Imago-logical* are truly ulterior. Residing beyond the present, they may be said to be magical, figments of enchantment.

The state of the Imago-logical is divination, ulterior. A state that shows up aesthetically; given favourable conditions, circumstances, attention, awareness. *Imago-logic* displays at least some of the characteristics of a Theosophy: It seems that the territory of Self-authorship, of *Imago-logic*, is boundless; is phenomenal.

## Theosophy

That time of solitude at the *Alder Altar* was a precious time of forging access points to the sacred. *The Realm of the Ford* became a thin place for me: a place of seeing; into; through; beyond: of discerning patterns and disruptions of patterns. This was the opening to the light allowed by those days in and around the stream: playing; with sunshine, flowers, a cat called Yosser. A time of banishing fearfulness, of trauma-recovery; of recognition: of resonances; of patterns of [mental] illnesses; a realm of divination. Suddenly slipping on this ice, my orientation shifted, irrevocably. As a *method*, it was accidental: *How can you plan to find something that you don't know is there?* I bounded, unwittingly, into my own Un-method, my *Chaos-ology*. Joan Halifax describes such experiences: *'The process of initiation can seem like a "sacred catastrophe", a holy failure that extinguishes our alienation, our loneliness, and reveals our true nature, our love. This is why we seek initiation: to heal old wounds by reentering them in order to turn our suffering into compassion.'*<sup>198</sup>

*Encounters*: Joan Halifax goes on to describe the phases of initiation in terms of *Severance*, *Threshold* and *Return*. The *Severance* phase corresponds to my Entry-point: *Encounters*. It is an encounter, often brutal; with disruption, with the chaotic; with the unexpected, the unknown and uncertain. It is a place of shifting grounds and meaning: a betrayal of being, where we think we may never regain our orientation again. It feels—and is—like an illness; like an encounter with mortality: a space from which there may be no return; through which any meaningful transition seems an impossibility. Though the start of a sacred adventure, magical journey, this space feels anything but magical or sacred.

In the *Encounters* phase, the sensing is shocking; brutal; unexpected and overwhelming. We are on the back foot: physically, emotionally, sensually, spiritually. Like being punched on the nose, or in the stomach at the beginning of a fight: the trick is to maintain some semblance of balance and equilibrium; to breathe; to connect and listen to the *heartbeat of the world*. We need, above all, enough carryover of our selves to transit the portal into the next space; a transition which—at least initially—is in essence perceptual: A matter of aesthetics.<sup>199</sup>

The *Encounters* space is a threshold space: at this juncture trauma and toxicity may become embodied; metastasising from brain to mind to body and beyond. Or may be commuted: interacting with the more than human world via aesthetics, the malaise may be transformed. As may its bearer. The *Encounters* space is one where our longings and belongingness shift: sometimes, often, permanently. Although the shifts are, at least initially, ones of attention and perception—deeper movements are being indicated. The perceptions are surface ripples of deeper groundswells. This is the space of erasure; of desecration; of disenchantment: the space where comfort zones are suddenly, traumatically, exceeded. Often there is no return from, but the need—often reluctantly—to journey through. It is a space of loss: of innocence; love; another; health; identity; of (sense of) self. Yet within these separations lays beauty. The *Encounters* space is a deeply sensual and aesthetic one: falling off a bike; slipping on ice; crashing a plane. These *Encounters* are often *eco-theological* in essence.

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<sup>198</sup> Halifax, J. 1993;15 (I go on to explore the notion of 'apparent adversity as 'sacred adventure').

<sup>199</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 15-20.





Peony. Lingen, 2017. <sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Digital image by SB.

*Openings*: If the *Encounters* phase is like the onset of an unwanted and uninvited illness, the *Openings* phase is that sense one has of relaxing into the delirium of the fever: Of enjoying the images that float by us, into us, through us. It corresponds to a part of what Joan Halifax terms *Threshold* (here I diverge, as my sense of *Threshold* has itself two phases: the passive—*Opening* to perception; the active—*Playing* with patterns.) The *Openings* phase is cartographic: representational, metaphorical and poetic. It discerns a space and describes it, often poetically. The phase is a way of apprehending the space that it describes. It is not the space itself. It is a place of allusion and illusion; of the imaginal: where early re-patterning may begin to reemerge from the previously chaotic *Encounters*. It is where we need to be, and to be able to linger, in order to make sense again: of our world; of our selves. It is a space of incipient recovery, of convalescence and re-orientation. It is also a thin place; and it may be helpful to locate ourselves physically in a thin place.

Within the unbelievable truths of openings there becomes a need to trust in the phenomenal: the enchanted; magical: non-local manifestations of the real. It is a phase of re-casting the space of belonging, of home. We are in a stream—sometimes of water; sometimes of light; sometimes both—panning for gold; for manifestations of enchantment. Yosser is in his element in *Openings*: it was what he was designed for, along with chasing rabbits and Jinns. *Openings* is Yosser's Imago: here Yosser becomes my guide, mentor, inspiration and my healer. There is wider and deeper connecting within *Openings*; which may go some way to offsetting the *severance* and loss of the *Encounters* phase. Although a *threshold* space, it is also a space of coming to belonging: for me this was manifest in my sense of belonging with, and to, Yosser.

*Openings* is the space where the magical dimensions of the journey reveal themselves: helpers emerge from the hedgerows; the birds sing in harmony at dawn; the light, always changing. Openings reveal new truths to us.

We become enchanted.



Peony. Lingen, 2017.

*Playings*: My response to the topography of this phase can only be aesthetic: it is enchantment, manifest.

I can delineate, to an extent, the ground and give (some) reasoning behind the pointless experimentation of the territory: rising before dawn and making pictures of flowers in a makeshift Altar for forty days changes you. It changes the way you are located in the world. The apparent irrelevance of which shows up for what it is: illusory.

This topography is phenomenological, thus the illusory becomes momentarily holographic: then it disappears. *Playings* is a phase where one may strategise—insofar as strategising is ever possible, or appropriate, with regard to the magical: Populated by Magi, Shamen and Dervishes. And Jinns. In this space other realities become derivative: it is a space of unpredictable outcomes. It is a space of Artefact generation: of stories; of pictures; of myths; of tales; of rituals and rites and the creation of sacred spaces. It is a space of congregation: of consecration; of healing; and of re-enchantment: it is a space that requires careful curation.

*Emergence*: The qualities of inquiry in this realm are of seeing: of creating strategies for seeing; of working with apparent pointlessness; of the aesthetics of the curated sacred space. It is the ground of *letting the phenomena play*.<sup>201</sup>

It is a kind of worship: it begs questions around the point, or otherwise, of prayer. It is a regaining of power, from within the margins of oppression and apparent powerlessness. This is the ground of around the Crazy Wisdom. It is in essence primordial. The occupation of this space is a privilege, though it may seem to be an unwelcome one at the time.

It is a ground of alchemy; of a renewed sense of enchantment; of magical journeying an adventure.

It is a ground of the shared wisdoms: where trees and cats and streams and light and Jinns and the ghosts of Gophers gather in the gloaming at peace; a ground of universal connectedness and consecration. The desecrators and their spirits dare not cross the stream.

It is the ground where Dogmatix howls at the injustice of injury to an uprooted tree. And Obelix fixes it, by re-planting.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Trungpa, C. 2007; 47-61.

<sup>202</sup> Gosciny, R., Uderzo, A. 1967.



Untitled. Lingen, 2017. <sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Digital image by SB.



Untitled. Lingen, 2017. <sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Digital image by SB.

## Threads

Sometimes Yosser tells me

sometimes I see it in his inquiring look;  
or hear it in his voices  
which are both distinctive and various

he also tells me with his bodying  
and the way he requires affection  
the ways he gives affection too

the ways he listens to me  
even when, especially when,  
I ignore him, or do not attend to him

the ways that he knows  
that I need attending to  
and he does so, appropriately

though it may seem strange  
it really is no different to inter-human  
communication

(save that all the frenzied  
crappy storied ego-stuff  
is nowhere to be seen, or heard)

so, if only in that respect,

easier,

more honest

better

[From email to AE 19.6.17]

The theory, like the inquiry, is layered. I was asked in an email—with some scepticism—*how I know what Yosser knows?* My answer (above) , a required effectiveness of gaze. The gaze is affective too:

it seems  
~ as always ~  
that paying attention  
is a key  
  
with such richness of reward

[From email from AE 19.6.17]

The theoretical and literary antecedents of this inquiry seem to lay in three realms: of phenomenology; of aesthetics; of theology, or *eco-theology*. Upon these broad bases sit psychologies and spiritualities: of trauma; [mental] illness; healing. The phenomenological, the aesthetic and the eco-theological all have transcendent dimensions. One linking field is that of attention, or gaze. In *Sight and Sensibility*, Laura Sewall explores the dynamics of attention.<sup>205</sup> Attention on one level maybe passive: something that happens *to us*; that is non-participatory; is unskilled; is passive. Attention may also be active: possessive, attached, focussed; preclusive. It may be suspensive: '*detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object.*'<sup>206</sup> Attention may be phenomenological: aesthetic, sensual, perceptive. And be inquiry into deeper truths: attention may become gaze. Within these various qualities of attention—and its reciprocal concomitant, the gaze—lies the central thesis of the inquiry: that turning attention to unearthing the Imago is a matter of aesthetics; that this attending is healing of identity, invoking phenomena that we might otherwise know, or describe, as *magical*.

Curation of the conditions allows accession to the realm of the magical; seems to be the simplest means—of accessing, relating to, conveying—qualities of numinosity. These curations are phenomenal in quality: aesthetic; healing; often magical, or enchanted. Within other-than-human worlds lie invisibles and layered realities. Elements of the enchanted, magical, journey have a hallucinatory, sometimes nightmarish, quality to them (not all magic is obviously benign). If the magical is phenomenal, and the apprehending of it phenomenological, we may discern that hallucinations, dreams and nightmares are part of the territory.

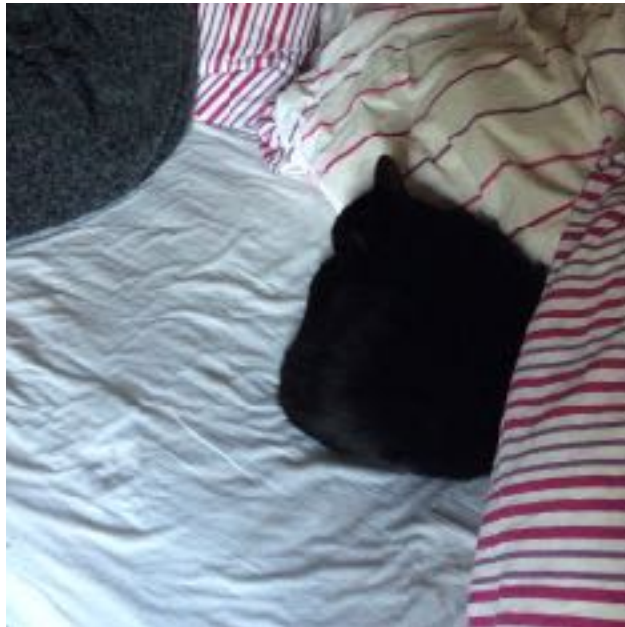
We 'realise' the magical in imagery within the mind. This is sometimes, often, painful at first to the uninitiated; invoking fear. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks of this realisation of the magical-real axis: '*Hallucination disintegrates the real before our eyes and substitutes for the real a quasi-reality, and in those two ways the hallucinatory phenomenon carries us back to the pre-logical foundations of our knowledge and confirms what we have just said about the thing and the world.*'

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<sup>205</sup> Sewall, L. 1999; 96-106.

<sup>206</sup> Sewall, L. 1999; 97.





## Part II: Frame

Or did you sleepwalk into the morning,  
bending your dreams to another's purpose,  
listening to the news, half hoping for a cataclysm,  
anything to make the day more real.

William Ayot, from *Email from the Soul: A Challenge*

## Chapter 5

***Invisible skeins:*** aesthetics; narratives; seeing-into

Mere curiosity adds wings to every step.

Goethe



Untitled (after sunrise). Whitchurch 2018.

[Revet ii. *Inter-narratives*]

The experiences outlined and alluded to in *Part I View* left me drained confused, tired, often-times unwell; my boundaries had dissolved. Judi Marshall exposes these dilemmas:

Can I inquire 'well' if I am tired, depressed, unwell?... Living life as inquiry is not only a high energy activity. *It takes what form it takes.* I can inquire in some way whatever my situation, or choose not to... Inquiry will somehow be informed by one's state of being, and therefore *one's sensory profile and capacities at that time, in that context.* <sup>207</sup>

And:

Boundaries become especially important. If inquiry means opening up challenging territory in some way and thus threatens my safety, it is appropriate to consider if I need to contain this. *I may focus inquiry on what resources I have, and how to enhance these. How to lead a healthier life encountering all that sits in the way of doing so, could then for example, become an exploration in its own right.*<sup>208</sup>

To live within liminality—of shifting *sensory profile, capacities and exploration*, states of being, and of knowing—is to become frangible. The nature of these explorations and frangibilities forms the basis of the remainder of this inquiry.

I regard this as largely a matter of aesthetics; that is not to say appearances, more a matter of the deep aesthetics and narratives that attend seeing into, systemically, rather than seeing of, partially. The coming parts of this inquiry now describe and dissect my processes of [*leading*] *a healthier life encountering all that sits in the way of doing so.*

What changed, mainly, was ways of working: in real time with the *deep-narratives* (phenomenology) of visual images and experimental writings. What then came about was a becoming, of a different kind, a different quality: aesthetic progressions beyond the egoic. The imaginal had a healing and a regenerative quality to it. No longer was anger (though still present) an energy directed at others: it became a diverted flow; a possibility for re-framing and re-direction.

Non-linear ways of working and responding to toxicity, destruction and desecration became sacred process; became consecration. The knowing gathered as shifting perceptions: writings and images, relationships with the other-than-human, and otherworldly. Agency, such as it was, devolved from communion; paradoxically, from the strength of being '*outsidered*'. Though impossible to direct, negotiate, or *lead*, change overtly in this period, playing with the interplay of the aesthetics of the emerging situation(s); playing with, and into, these aesthetics proved a powerful, radical even, form of practice: arising from covert practices and rituals. On sharing, this practice shifts: to being overt; powerful.

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<sup>207</sup> Marshall J. 2016; 68 emphasis mine.

<sup>208</sup> Marshall J. 2016; 68 emphasis mine.

Paradoxically, retreating to the half-remembered world of my former home, The Court, and Rectory Wood, helped me to see these shifts: first person inquiry again leading the way in to deeper ways of knowing.<sup>209</sup> Judy Marshall points to '*propitious circumstances*' and '*being is action too*', noting that:

Living this way implies then accepting a looseness of boundaries, congruent with systemic thinking, and not seeking control. So life can seem out of control much of the time, and I notice how much my efforts are therefore sometimes directed at *creating temporary enough order to keep going on*. [...] *Inquiry includes, for me, experiments in being, although the term action research may mask the importance of this.*<sup>210</sup>

In situations of not knowing what to do I sought differing ways of being. Closer looking and observations, closer connections with Yosser and the environs of Archers Ford: writing and picture making showed up as connecting patterns of artful inquiry. Processes involved dissolution of ego; submission to *not knowing* and uncertainty; curiosity; detachment from outcome; self-care; shifts in ways of making and connecting.

As a practice, or series of practices, it was experimental; situation specific; not necessarily replicable; non-linear, systemic. Revisiting Marshall now, it is as though there was an invisible collusion with her *notations of inquiry*.<sup>211</sup> She goes on to point out:

At the other extreme, inquiry may initially appear messy and fragmented, with a lot going on but little discernible pattern. The inquirer can then review what is happening and shape it a little more, to extend their disciplines. Any terms that might be applied to the forms the inquiry takes, like 'clearly focussed' or 'sprawling', are not inherently good or bad, but can be reviewed for their appropriateness to the issues being explored, for relevant quality processes, for how they consolidate or extend current skill patterns.<sup>212</sup>

The *method* of inquiry falls more under the banner of '*sprawling*' than '*focussed*'. Judy Marshall terms the discovery of emergent practices as '*finding resonant phrasing*'; that such practices are not necessarily about *making major interventions for change in a situation*; that: '*often inquiry is about the micro-practices of behaviour... This does not mean that micro inquiry is unambitious. Systemic change can be influenced by small shifts in behaviour.*'<sup>213</sup>

Aesthetics—seeing, attending, noticing, discernment—become increasingly important within the evolving micro-practices of this inquiry. *Aesthetics* is not just visual practice; it is a felt, sensed, one too. As the inquiry moved out of the first (mainly experimental writing) phase, these connections—to the visual *visible*; the otherworldly *invisibles*—became increasingly significant.

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<sup>209</sup> A place where I lived and worked in the 1990's, to which I returned with Yosser to live in January 2018.

<sup>210</sup> Marshall, J. 2016; 44-45 emphases mine.

<sup>211</sup> Marshall, J. 2016; 41-47.

<sup>212</sup> Marshall, J. 2016; 48-49.

<sup>213</sup> Marshall, J. 2016; 49 emphasis mine.

The idea—of visibles, invisibles, absence, combining to make, or re-make, a whole—started to emerge. This became the basis of what I came to term *The Imaginal Gaze*; by: *combining attention, discipline and emergent form*.<sup>214</sup> As my inquiry progressed, practice, micro-practice, became woven; ingrained, encoded. These *Reverts* therefore are a process of un-weaving, decoding. Inquiry progression became an investigation: of aesthetics and aesthetic parameters; attention to environment; social dynamics; visual and aural clues; the ecology of intimacy; attention to illnesses. And how these manifest: to the dynamics of movement of and around the apparently stilled flowers; to light and movement and time; reciprocity; patterns and dissolution of patterns, the possibilities of re-patterning; movements towards a holism of aesthetics, and being.

*How does one see an organisation? How does one see a family? How to see an illness? How does one see a cat? How does the cat see? How does one see a tree, a flower, a reverberation; how do they see (reciprocate) in the same context? What senses, or amalgam of senses, are involved? Much of this is seeing (sensing) connections. How may this seeing be relayed, or inquired into?*

Judy Marshall's notions of '*discipline and emergent form*' prove helpful, though not the entire solution. It becomes necessary too to liquidate the elements from time to time, to re-assimilate, re-form them. Writing about and into the process in a 'disciplined' manner is a part of of this liquidation and re-assimilation. Thus, in itself, *re-iteration becomes aesthetic practice*. There is a dissimilation of time too; this shows up mainly in the photographs. With the photography came a different, spontaneous, iteration of knowing: shifting—apparently inadvertently—and '*sprawled*' into '*focus*'.

On the second page of the first *Revet* (Chapter 1), there is a photograph of a thistle. It was made after dawn on the summer solstice in 2016. I had been up early, painting a room. A friend was staying in the next room. The light drew me outside, with a cup of tea in hand. I went to the stream, and sat down, on what had been *The Alder Altar*. The space had shifted, so had I. The field by the altar now covered in a scrub of nettles and thistles. After sitting there for a few minutes, this nettle came and grabbed me, in a visceral way; coalescing in the backlight of the sun rising over the scrub. It just so happened that I had my iPhone in my pocket.

I took some photos, without really thinking about it. And then went about my day. Later I discovered this picture of a nettle on my phone; as though it had been planted there by some exterior force or being. I became aware of being unaware; aware of being unaware of being aware, even. In my unconscious, or subconscious, apprehending of a nettle—made visible and transmissible by means of an iPhone—I discovered method. *Or had method percolated my way of being in the world?* In my apprehending of the nettle, had I stumbled on some kind of apprehending meaning? It seemed that the nettle also apprehended me: there was reciprocity; resonance present. Whatever my relationship with the nettle was, I contend that it was beyond observation; while encapsulating that quality too. I was not just seeing a nettle. I was seeing, and seeing into, a system. And it (the nettle-system), was seeing—maybe even seeing into—me.

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<sup>214</sup> Marshall, J. 2016; 51 emphasis mine.

Allan Kaplan states that: *We are looking to develop an intimacy that discloses the world.*<sup>215</sup> I have referred to an ecology of intimacy—a way of seeing wholes, in unsaid but imagined situations—that helps to understand the invisible dynamics of love, and putative love. In my inquiry shift into image-making, the poetics of observation become the poetics of *intimate disclosure of the world*. Which in turn—to adapt Judy Marshall’s term—become the poetics of ‘*experiments in being*’. In turn, this may become the poetics of becoming, of un-folding: In holding a visual-spiritual space for the nettle-system, it holds a space for my (our) own becoming: by reverberation, resonance and reciprocity.

*Does this mean that in apprehending the nettle that I’m apprehending meaning? That in imagining the system-nettle that I apprehend a system? What, if any, are the implications of these observations: for us as practitioners; for us as beings? If we cannot, or will not, see into the nettle-system, what are the pathologies?*

Kaplan avers that all *organisms* (families, organisations and societies) are in a state of becoming:

Our world is not yet fully formed. It is in the process of becoming, and we are creating as we go, not only through how we intervene, but through the way we apprehend the meaning which is emerging. If we are to take responsibility, we must be careful, and observant; *it becomes a matter of necessity to pay attention, at all times, not just to particulars but to patterns and connections and configurations*, because these constitute the invisible wholes, the meaning, the emerging life and world which is our future. *We live in intangible fields and vast formative processes which pattern and shape our very existence.*<sup>216</sup>

Relating to the nettle, to the nettle-system, differently, reciprocally, I become, we become, more whole. This is a matter of preparedness, observation, attention, awareness, aesthetics. And luck. There is a quality of immanence to such practice; of quasi-holiness; sanctification. Such practices are peripheral, difficult to encapsulate, certainly to ‘sell’. The peripheral nature of such practices, and ways of being, is my fascination.

*How then, will apprehending a nettle—nettle-system—shift the balance of power from the centre to the periphery? How does this practice empower me, as inquirer, interlocutor, practitioner? How does, or might, it help others? What is the validity and value in—gazing at, into, through and beyond—those intangible fields and formative processes that attend a nettle-system? Annie Dillard observes:*

I cannot cause light; the most I can do is try and put myself in the path of its beam. It is possible, in deep space, to sail on solar wind. Light, be it a particle or wave, has a force: you rig a giant sail and go. The secret of seeing is to sail on solar wind. *Hone and spread your spirit till you yourself are a sail, whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff.*<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Kaplan, A. 2002; 32 emphases mine.

<sup>216</sup> Kaplan, A. 2002; 31-32 emphases mine.

<sup>217</sup> Dillard, A. 1976; 41-42 emphases mine.



It is the intersection—of particles, of waves, of elements of the other-than-human world—that allows apprehending of the other-than-visible fields of perception. Nettle plus light plus participant-observer becomes nettle-system; speaks to us. *intangible fields* become, for a while, tangible; we become the nettle; the nettle becomes alive within us, part of a deepening narrative process: dialogues with the intangible; the other-than human; the other. *What then, if there is no 'nettle', no apparent subject?*

Consider the image—*Untitled (after sunrise) Whitchurch 2018*—at the beginning of this chapter. Subject, as such, is deleted from the equation. From the caption we have a location, and a time. We are otherwise disorientated. There is no nettle-system, or equivalent. Yet there is a sense of presence: there is a cartography attending the image; if only a vague, mysterious one. This may be disconcerting. The *no-nettleness* raises questions; we want to know more. The intangible fields themselves become the subject; we feel a loss, cheated; intangibility on its own is not enough. Or is it? There is no nettle (subject) in the system, but there is a system (light, shade, colour, maybe wetness).

Enough clues to evoke a response: *How is, or does this become, practice; act to help us understand deeper narratives and modes of cognition? Indeed, is this question the practice? In what ways is this discovery, this revelation of the intangible-systemic, an intimate disclosure the world? If the nature of reality is layered—as it seems to be—then is layered cognition perhaps a means of decoding: seeing into the translucent layers of the external, intersecting with our reciprocally translucent, or opaque, apprehending and understanding?* It seems my practice is to disrupt the cataracts with which we reduce our seeing—of, into, beyond—in order to clarify this opacity, by attending: to the (apparently) tangential; *un-seen*; dialogues with the more-than-human and other-worldly. Kaplan writes of *imminent imbalances*:

Development practitioners have to learn to read such social situations so that inconsistencies, contradictions, *imminent imbalances*, are revealed in good time, that organisms are helped to balance and draw energy from their own dynamics; and to read their own dynamics in future, in order to adjust themselves.<sup>218</sup>

Extending this thinking: *What if we supplant imminent with immanent? If we are trying to interlocute—to understand, invisible, intangible, numinous forces and phenomena—tensions of out-of-balance immanence are what comes into play; maybe even for a while by being visible in their becoming?* The photographs at either end of this chapter, and my poem—*Buried Light*—at the end, speak to this phenomena: of making, and understanding, on the edge of reliably relatable experience; cognition of the dynamics and energies of the periphery: of *provisional knowing*.<sup>219</sup>

It is in working with inter-narratives, this provisionality of knowing, that I endeavour to realise, to render, the granularity of intangibles: to preface the shift into phenomena and phenomenology, predicated by *Part II: Frame*: the qualities associated with the invisible and intangible.

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<sup>218</sup> Kaplan, A. 2002; 74 emphases mine.

<sup>219</sup> Marshall J. in Reason P. & Bradbury H. Eds. 2008; 693.

## Buried light

I had an image  
as we gathered  
tonight,  
in a liminal space  
of the burial of light.

In the past  
I have buried  
love  
and bad thoughts  
in a liminal space,  
perhaps more than I ought.

Invoking the light  
can be hard,  
a risk:  
    but burying it no  
    answer - to your love,  
    with a fist.

I had an image  
This morning  
of you in the  
dawn:  
    as we buried the light  
    last night  
    on the lawn.

You buried light  
too, not staying bright;  
helping me  
(though, not as  
much as  
you might).

[From Buried Light. Ashridge 16.06.15]



Untitled (after sunset). Rectory Wood, Long Mynd, 2018.

## Chapter 6

### **Unearthing Imagos:** *origins of practice*

The being governed by a purpose or other final cause is the very essence of the psychological phenomenon. To say that the future does not influence the present is an untenable doctrine.

Charles Peirce, from *Philosophical Writings*.



Untitled. Church Stretton, 2018.

### The Path-way In:

Within the Realm of human consciousness there is an archipelago of inner-beings: the Imagos. These beings are both imaginary, and very real. When the Imaginary Being is supported, nurtured, recovered, unearthed, there becomes a powerful transition. It becomes real. A core part of the soul pupates; releasing in its *potentia* both the possibility of future generations, and beauty; a key element in this process is aesthetic.<sup>220</sup> When the Imaginary Being is thwarted, abused, repressed, this is traumatic. There is a cogent aesthetic to this trauma, too. (I was revisiting the seat of and precursor to my practice: making photographs in response to trauma back in the 1990's. See following monochrome images.)

My quest becomes to illustrate the possibility of re-connecting to these aspects of being, aesthetically. The story: After submission of a chapter to supervisor and group for appraisal, three things happened that paused the writing, eventually sending it in a direction that would test both theory and practice; I started flying again; I re-qualified as a Heavy Goods Vehicle driver; and the *Direct-Debit Debbie* situation hotted up.

Of these the second—lorry driving—had the most impact at the time: image-making shifted significantly; I had little time or energy for writing. I was photographing off the cuff, in pauses whilst driving. I started consciously easing back into the aesthetics of the inquiry towards the end of November 2017: by extending *The Trees* series and interleaving photographs; by a series of conversations with Mike Stanford; by making pictures while trucking. This helped me clarify my ideas around The Imago. The following notes sketch out my emerging theory around Imago work: my task in this chapter being to align my ideas with both what has gone before, and what I have noticed in my practice. I start by reflecting on the inquiry story so far, and by outlining my ideas. I resolved to read the first three chapters; my progression viva paper (*Dervish: Tales of magical journeys, an inquiry*); the *Bled travelogue*. Checking for five things:

Consonance (emergent practice)

Coherence (writings)

Evidence (emergent theory)

Trajectory (inquiry)

Inconsistencies (nullifications)

I start with assimilation of the qualities and commonalities of the emergent practices (i.e those that have come into being post the October 2015 participant led workshop, *Writing the Soul*). Conceiving, and executing, this workshop had led back into the, for me familiar, ground of unearthing and teaching creativity. Rooted in my teaching of creativity at a university for 16 years, the idea was based on the a simple concept:

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<sup>220</sup> I write my way into this phase, in order to understand. Contextual referencing appears later in this, and subsequent, chapters.

to write about something *impossible* to write about. Necessarily this also has its roots in writing about the *invisible*: matters and qualities that are *impossible* to approach, are, or have often become, *invisible*.

I came to contemplate the nature and qualities of the Imago. It struck me that in my previous teaching role, and in the *Writing the Soul* workshops—at Ashridge, and then Bled—I had been dealing with the Imago, or more often, its plural, Imagos. Also with the *invisible*: the soul; the otherworldly; enchantment; erasure.

I was also—reluctantly—becoming drawn into the *Direct-Debit Debbie* psycho-drama. For a while inquiry and life became inseparable. As did reality and fiction. There was a lot of alternating: between knowing and *not-knowing*; between the imaginary and the real; between noticing and being blind-sided. In this period I honed my pattern recognition skills. Partly as a means of deciphering, decoding and sense-making of events; partly to aid my *Disrupter Imago*.<sup>221</sup>

I realised that pattern recognition had itself become pattern; a core part of *method*. In that sense this skill was the interface: between the linear and non-linear; between local and non-local realities; between inquiry and life. Re-awakened, and honed, primordial skill had become a key life skill in the realms of dysfunction and toxicity of the now. In becoming more aware I became more (rationally, post-rationally) conscious; of deployment of non-linear and non-local methods; of the power of bewitching: of re-creating with enchantments, the other-worldly.

I then hit a life pause, due to illness (flu) and a decline in the need for my truck driving. I could write, and read. I fell upon *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* by Ken Wilber. Encountering this version of Wilber helped me to firm up my own ideas: partly in response to his; partly in confusion (at the bits I don't understand); partly in disagreement (rare). In the introduction Ken Wilber cautions against reading the notes upon first reading. I ignored this; my first, so far greatest insight into the relevance of his theories to my own comes in the notes:

This also points up a fact that all psychological growth theorists (especially the humanistic and transpersonal ones) psychologists have known for a long time: most neurosis is not primarily due to a past conditioning per se, but to a *future omega prevented from emerging*. [...] If the past conditionings didn't have a preferred pattern (omega), they couldn't have been aborted in the first place.<sup>222</sup>

Reading Wilber helped to bring matter into focus: both inquiry; and life.

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<sup>221</sup> I write more of my Imagos later.

<sup>222</sup> Wilber, K. 2000; 565 emphasis mine.



Untitled 1. Rectory Wood, Long Mynd, 1996.





Y tree 1. Rectory Wood, Long Mynd, 1996.



Untitled 2. Rectory Wood, Long Mynd, 1996.



Untitled 3. Rectory Wood, Long Mynd, 1996.



Y tree 2. Rectory Wood, Long Mynd, 1996.



Y tree 3. Rectory Wood, Long Mynd, 1996.



Untitled. Long Mynd, 1996.



Untitled 2. Long Mynd, 1996.



Untitled 3. Long Mynd, 1996.



Imagos proved handy while dealing with the *Direct-Debit Debbie* phenomenon. In many ways they could be said to have anticipated it. Practice evolved in a situation where I had no voice: my actions in the Photo-Ritual became both *agentic* and *communal*; became healing. Dan McAdams writes of personal myth:

We attempt, with our story, to make a compelling *aesthetic statement*. A personal myth is an act of imagination that is a *patterned integration* of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future. As both author and reader, we come to *appreciate our own myth for its beauty and its psychosocial truth*.<sup>223</sup>

My exploration of Imago unearthing certainly adheres to the McAdams patterned integration. Yet I find that it becomes more than that, in ambition, if not yet realisation. MacAdams goes on to cite the psychologist Jerome Bruner's two ways that human beings understand the world:

[In the] paradigmatic mode of thought, where 'we seek to comprehend our experience in terms of tightly reasoned analyses, logical proof, and empirical observation. In the second, "narrative mode" of thought, we are concerned with human wants, need and goals. This is the mode of stories, wherein we deal with "the vicissitudes of human intention" organised in time.<sup>224 225</sup>

This definition of our understanding as humans has its limitations. For now it serves the purpose to begin to dissect the emergent method, if not the theosophy, of practice. MacAdams goes on:

For all of its power and precision, however, the paradigmatic mode is a strangely humbler form of thought than story making. It is not able to make much sense of human desire, goals and social conduct. Human efforts are often ambiguous, and resistant to paradigmatic methods to understand them.<sup>226 227</sup>

There seems to be—an often unrealised—consciousness: a curator and executor of Imagos (defined by, or defining, personal myth: iterations being cyclical).<sup>228</sup> *The Disrupter* is also a harmoniser: the preference being for harmony and peace between the Imagos. When thwarted in endeavours towards harmony, *The Disrupter* works with other Imagos to restore balance; to keep the Imagos in good fettle. (Yosser is also helpful in this regard. He pays attention to, and modifies, my behaviours: he helps me with seeing; has an uncanny knack of knowing when I've done enough writing for the day.) The coming into being—the manifestation, the unearthing, the recovery, of Imago—is an act of mirroring, and projection of imprint. What is within mirrored in outside world perceptually, aesthetically..

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<sup>223</sup> McAdams, D. 1993; 12 emphases mine.

<sup>224</sup> McAdams, D. 1993; 29.

<sup>225</sup> Bruner, J. 1990.

<sup>226</sup> McAdams, D. 1993; 29.

<sup>227</sup> In both the de-coding, and response to, the *Direct-Debit Debbie* debacle, the story mode was vital.

<sup>228</sup> Though differing in definition, these aspect of consciousness are interlinked; differing syntactically, *Executor* and *Curator* are used interchangeably, according to context.

The path towards this state, this manifestation is one of—often recursive—narratives, myths rituals and vision. Narratives and myths however, are not the just manifested Imagos, but shadows of the Imagos too; projected on the wall of the cave by firelight. The process is primal, and primordial; the cave a *camera obscura* of the soul. With the practices and phenomena—ritual; narrative; myth; the *Imaginal Gaze*—it becomes possible to access phenomenal spaces: Otherworldly; Sacred; Enchanted. Where Imagos become unearthed, unfolded, recovered, reconnected.

On a more earthly plane, the easiest, simplest way of beginning to access the reality of the Imago and the *Imaginal Gaze* is via narratives: personal; invisible; impossible; visual. Aesthetic dimensions susceptible to ritual, the sacred. Shift becomes more than from the *paradigmatic mode, story making mode*; more than shifts in modes of thought. Becoming shifts of consciousness, an acuity of being: Imago-unfolding. The shifts are not the story. Dan McAdams sets out the story making mode under three headings: *Narrative Tone; Mythic Forms; Imagery and Myth*.<sup>229</sup> *Narrative Tone* is split between the optimistic and the pessimistic: the pessimistic relating to insecure attachment; the optimistic to secure attachment. Both relate to '*[Hope as] the enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes*.'<sup>230</sup>

There is a relationship between personal narratives and the mythical and magical: '*Narrative tone speaks to the author's underlying faith in the possibilities of human intention and behaviour. [...] This belief is prerational, prelogical*.'<sup>231</sup>

McAdams points to the fact that as a whole we tend to see the world through a lens of positive illusion (especially the more optimistic of us); that these illusions are unwarranted; also that they are useful. Our personal narratives may be said to be a form of agency; voice becoming outcome. He then draws from this the idea of personal myth, one that is: *in all its details like no other story in the world. The different forms of our story may take are many. But they may not be limitless. And that these myths have: four very general forms—comedy, romance, tragedy and irony*.<sup>232</sup>

Focus on personal narrative is a useful framing and access point for the sense-making attendant to Imago-work. Yet by definition narrative and myth are largely linear in structure: suggestive of pathway and determination. An invitation to Imago-unearthing is more complex, nuanced: in apprehending; in process; in intentionality; in being. Murray Stein avers that: *The self is not something we select; we are selected by it*.<sup>233</sup> To narrate may be enchanting; to become self—to unearth Imago—is to *become* enchanted. Narration frames aesthetics-in-action: becomes incantation. These incantations form the concourse where the Imagos pupate: where our self selects us.

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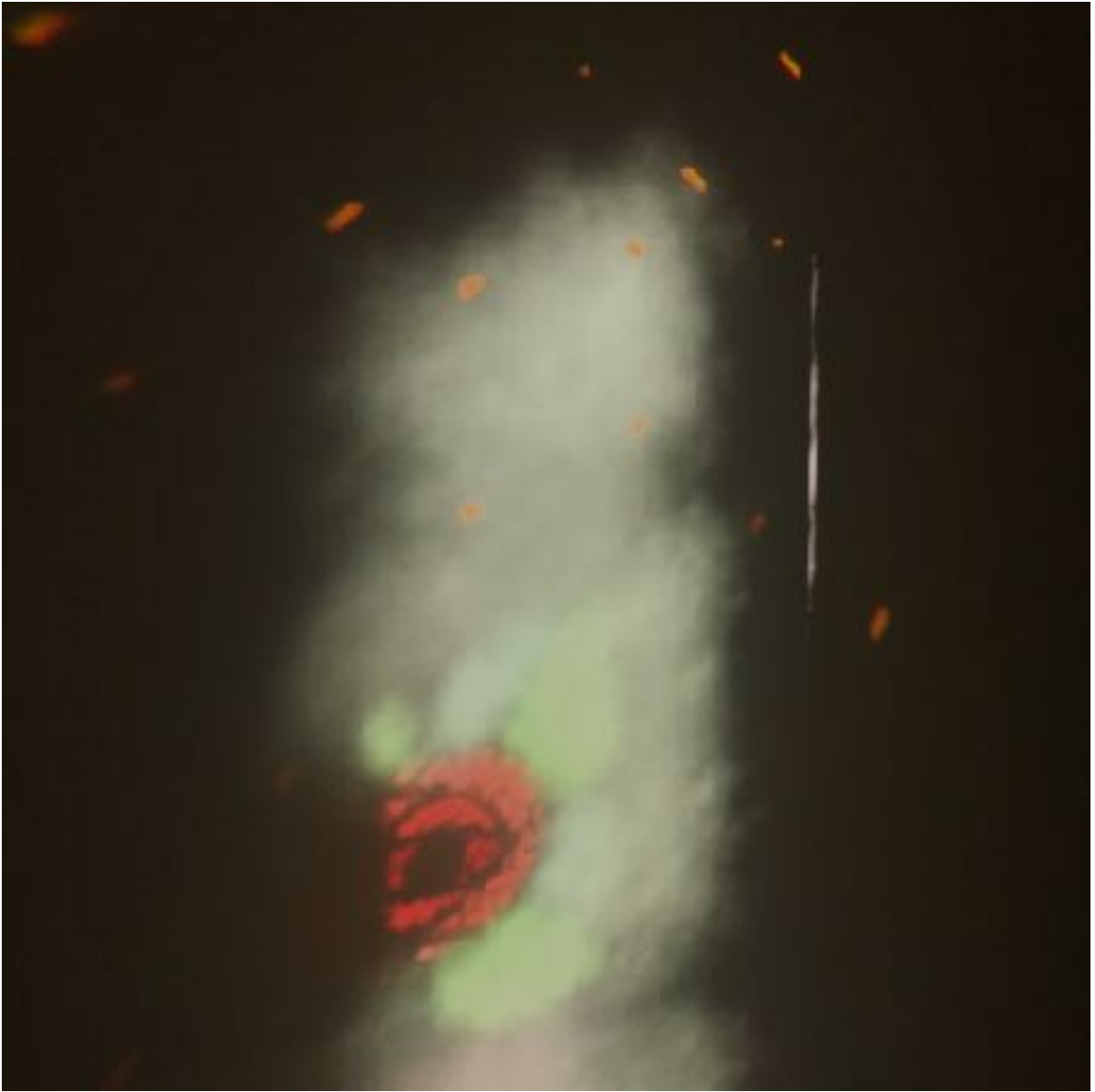
<sup>229</sup> McAdams, D. 1993; 47-55.

<sup>230</sup> Erikson, E. in McAdams D. 1993; 47.

<sup>231</sup> McAdams, D. 1993; 48.

<sup>232</sup> McAdams, D. 1993; 50.

<sup>233</sup> Stein, M. 1998; 9.



Untitled. Church Stretton, 2018.

## The Field:

Working with stories and incantations of enchantment forms the heart of the field of the *Imaginal Gaze*: of working with Imagos within a field described and delineated by the term *aesthetic*.<sup>234</sup> This is practice of the Magi: of porosity; acts of magic. In an earlier paper (on liminality) I noted: In *Complexity and Organizational Reality*, by Ralph Stacey writes:

Furthermore, people did not experience a clear boundary between mind and world. [...] Therefore, at the time we are talking about, people experienced their world as *enchanted* and themselves as *porous individuals* very much *immersed* in the enchanted world. <sup>235</sup>

The sense of threat offered by the enchanted world is also underlined: '*...the sense of risk and fear in the enchanted world created enormous pressure on people to embrace orthodoxy and condemn diversity and difference as heresy which had to be punished and stamped out.*' [...] Thus enchantment, and its opposite—erasure—are related to oppression; and to resistance.. A number of questions are raised for me to ponder:

*What separates the 'meaning in things' from superstition?*

*To what extent are encounters with the spiritual or sacred useful in an action inquiry into organisational change?*

*To what extent are these useful in action inquiry into personal change or life-shifting?*

*Is my artful practice—poetry; writing; flying; walking; biking; image-making— of any use here?*

*Is this practice, a) usefully replicable, and b) useful, or impactful, for others?*

*Does this suggest the role of exemplar? How might his work?*

*Might a template be formed around this area of practice?*

*What separates this from mere self-indulgence and solipsism?* <sup>236 237</sup>

The *game* moves into *my* field—invocations and evocations of the sacred—acts of magic. Discernment, whilst initially perceptual, becomes participatory. Within the context of inquiring into Imago, the questions had shifted:

*What is the role of the sacred in the revelation of Imago?*

*How are encounters with non-ordinary realities healing, helpful, to us?*

*How are my multiple Imagos, and practices, helpful?*

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<sup>234</sup> I will return to the definition of this. For now I use it in the broad Greek root of the term: perceptible things; to perceive.

<sup>235</sup> Stacey, R. 2010; 97.

<sup>236</sup> Edited for idiom and length.

<sup>237</sup> Nabokov, V. 1972;7 in MacFarlane, R. 2016; 278. [...] Nabokov, in his novel *Transparent Things*, reflects on the temporal vertigo that can come from the contemplation of the earth's substance. 'When we concentrate on a material object, whatever the situation, the very act of attention may lead to our involuntary sinking into the history of that object, such that we become 'not of the now.'

## Chapter 7

***Studium i:*** context; critique

Better place a disciple under the control of a cat than under his own control.<sup>238</sup>

Sheikh Abu al-Hasan Saliba

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<sup>238</sup> Shah, I. 2015(1); 419



Untitled. Norway, 2015.

## Context:

*In July 2015 I went to Norway, on a jolly.<sup>239</sup> From the Norway jolly I went straight into the ADOC4 workshop. There, during a ritual convened by Kathy (The Radical Gaze) I had what I term a soul collision with another participant. This traumatised me to the point where I lost my voice. I wrote some poems about the experience. They came out as love poems. I read out one poem, 'Buried Light', on the final afternoon of the workshop.*

*Also whilst at that workshop, a black cat—that had been hanging around our garden, living off rabbits—moved into our home. On a call to S I christened him Yosser; after Yosser Hughes from the 80's TV serial Boys From The Black Stuff.*

*I returned home from Norway and Ashridge feeling completely derailed. Shortly afterwards, during a conversation with S—where I felt I was being de-voiced and also re-voiced—I apprehended that something was amiss; I suggested that I take S to the doctors, where she was diagnosed with biological depression and anxiety.*

*I wrote my way through this period, inquiring into love and intimacy.<sup>240</sup> In October 2015 I co-lead a participant led workshop at Ashridge, with my particular angle being 'Writing the Soul'. We worked with a process based on my experience of teaching photography: an exploration of Personal Narratives. It seemed to work well.<sup>241</sup>*

*My practice moved from poetry and experimental writing, to a combination of photographs and writing. I called these artefacts Glimpses, and at the end of the October 2015 workshop I gave each participant one based on my poem 'Reaching'.<sup>242</sup> In November 2015 I had run out of steam. The weather had been awful for weeks, S's health was deteriorating, dragging me down too. Because of the weather I couldn't fly, thus earn money. Then S got flu; Craig invited me to Qatar; I became ill with flu too.*

*I was drained, exhausted. I had no idea what my doctorate was about, or who, or what, it might be for. In early December 2016, Craig invited me to Qatar. Exhausted, depleted, drained, dispirited, I flew to Qatar on New Year's Eve 2015. In Qatar, slowly, things started to change.*

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<sup>239</sup> 'Jolly' is a term, possibly borrowed from Wodehouse, that our supervision group use to describe excursions, usually into one of our countries of domicile, to convene and have fun. Sometimes a bit of inquiry happens too.

<sup>240</sup> See Stanley 2016(1).

<sup>241</sup> Appendix 3: *Workshop glimpses*.

<sup>242</sup> Appendix 1: *Poems*.



Yosser. Lingen, March 2016.



## Critique:

Questions that arise: This *Stodium* is a critical framing, and partly narrative sense making, of the works of the three chapters in this Part, including this one. It anticipates some theoretical constructs relevant to and arising from the works. It is both an enclosure (defining theoretical boundaries) and an opening (predicting areas for further exploration and experimentation). In this *Stodium* I delve into this contradictory space: to establish a platform that is phenomenological in philosophical terms; grounded in the basic disciplines that attend artistic, narrative inquiry. To resolve the inchoate—the apparent contradiction between a phenomenological philosophical, theoretical stance—and a more practical, tangible proposition helpful in the world: adult development; healing trauma and [mental] illnesses; identity recovery or unearthing. To simplify: in *Atelier* I apprehend phenomena and phenomenal patterns (e.g. oppression; illnesses); I play with those patterns with experimental artful interventions; I see what, if any helpful patterns emerge; then I play with these and report on them.

Reading into the embodied nature of both trauma and seeing, and my experience of playing with the aesthetics of the bike trip as a pseudo Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprogramming (EMDR), confirmed to me that there was emerging within these acts—*looking; seeing; gazing*—embodied healing: reconnecting; re-wiring: of mind; of identity. The visceral sensation-al aesthetics—of the bike trip through the alps to and from Bled; of those 40 mornings at *The Alder Altar*—had a part to play. Readings—Bortoft and Van der Kolk during the Bled trip, and McNiff around and subsequent to my progression viva some six months later—ent weight to this intuition. This was the start of my inquiry delving into the nature of the gaze; and thus the magical; identity and Imagos; the distinction between therapy and healing. Shaun McNiff acknowledges the (apparent) contradiction involved in what he terms *embracing the soul's debased expression*: 'I become more interested in acknowledging and feeling the condition than in 'fixing' it. [...] **I have learned to view art's pathological manifestations as "angels of the wound" who open us to the life of soul.**'<sup>243</sup> Echoing Beiser's paradoxical theory of change: that dwelling with (gazing into), a condition or set of circumstances (*symptoms*), will engender a becoming; self-transformation..<sup>244</sup>

Questions arise:

*How have my own levels of efficacy and functioning been affected?*

*Has my putative accessing of non-ordinary realities shifted—from the experimental and curious playfulness with phenomena—to a Practice that will stand up to scrutiny,?*

*What is the effectiveness: in terms of agency, communion, replicability and transmission (utility to others)?*

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<sup>243</sup> McNiff, S. 1992; 26 *emphasis mine*.

<sup>244</sup> See: Beiser A. The paradoxical theory of change [Online]. <http://www.gestalt.org/arnie.htm>

## Space | Place | Interlocutions

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard convenes many of the metaphysical aspects and tangents to the physical that I have encountered, and attempted to share, discuss, and critique in this work.<sup>245</sup> One core theme of the backstory to this inquiry has been the de-homing of me and Yosser. My non-linear ripostes to this unfathomable situation have been formative of the core practices (repeated linear solutions having been unsuccessful). Gaston Bachelard meditates on the house, or home (not property), as nest: If we go deeper into daydreams of nests, we soon encounter a paradox of sensibility. [...] *The answer to this paradox is simple: when we dream, we are phenomenologists without realising it.*<sup>246 247</sup> And that:

The nest, quite as much as the oneiric house, and the oneiric house quite as much as the nest—if we ourselves are at the origin of our dreams—knows nothing of the hostility of the world. [...] In all its germinal form, therefore, all of life is well-being. *Being starts with well-being.*<sup>248</sup>

Manifestation, of this *precariousness*, called upon me and Yosser to act in ways that were more of the nature of conduits for non-ordinary, non-linear power. Rather than to act from the more conventional, linear (quasi-legal, quasi-just) power base. By entering into the phenomenal world—via the portal of *The Alder Altar*—we were able to evoke and provoke shifts into our (now familiar) phenomenal territory: to regain some phenomenal, if precarious, advantage in our situation. In other words, we emerged: come out as ourselves. This emergence has been an imaginal, if not magical, omega point transition.

We made discoveries: of selves; of Imagos; of method: *The Imaginal Gaze*. Our power is a power of *Aesthetics*: of the sensing; of the interlocution; of the re-iteration: of ordinary and non-ordinary realities; a journey inward, towards a different mix, or re-mix of being: regeneration of identity, and an un-earthing of Imago. This power of sensing and play—with phenomena, with patterns—more of an act of prestidigitation than magician-ship: conjuring, quasi-magical; alchemy. Seated in the phenomenal magical enchanted world.

The provocations, incantations and invitations issued by *Direct-Debit Debbie* were acts of cunning, of conjuring, black magic: My answers incantations, of a different kind.<sup>249</sup> Ripostes—*Jinn: Yosser's tale; Limn: The Tale of Altar* and *The Trees*—became another form of conjuring: arguably crossing the permeable boundary from trickery to paranormality. These interventions, poetic, imaginal, convened access to a deeper knowing of phenomena—particularly those associated with [mental] health—than I could have accessed by linear and conventional forms of contemplation and research. Gaston Bachelard defends “*literary*” *prestidigitation*:

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<sup>245</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014.

<sup>246</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 122 emphasis mine.

<sup>247</sup> *The Magic Bird Box* was my method for dealing with correspondence from *Debbie*: due to her refusal to adhere to the code of family law practice, I consigned all of her toxic correspondence to a bird box in the garden.

<sup>248</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 123 emphasis mine.

<sup>249</sup> Appendix 1 *Poems. The Direct-Debit Debbie Quintet: five poems on the transformation of toxicity* 2017-2018.

The prestidigitator's action amazes and amuses us, while that of the poet sets us to dreaming. I cannot live and relive what is done by the former. But the poet's creation is mine if only I like to daydream. [...] I myself consider literary documents as realities of the imagination, pure products of imagination. *And why should the actions of the imagination not be as real as those of perception?*<sup>250</sup>

My annexation and (mis)appropriation of the toxic energies emanating from *Direct-Debit Debbie's* legalistic double-narratives was both perceptual and imaginal: deconstructing *Direct-Debit Debbie* enabled me to move from a putative position of victim in the drama triangle, to that of *Disrupter*. Initially an act of prestidigitation, this shifted towards a more ethereal, magical, process. And from anger (confusion) towards a more curious, open, and disciplined posture: connection to enchantment and the enchanted; pronounced, and phenomenological in nature, invoked by experimentation with *the ontology of presentiment*.

[...] *The poet has brought us to an extreme situation beyond which we were afraid to venture, a situation that lies between mental disorder and reason, between the living and a woman who is dead. The slightest sound prepares a catastrophe, while mad winds prepare chaos. Murmur and clangor go hand in hand. We are taught the ontology of presentiment. In this tense state of fore-hearing, we are asked to become aware of the slightest indications, and in this cosmos of extremes, things are indications before they are phenomena; the weaker the indication, the greater the significance, since it indicates an origin. Taken as origins, it seems as though all these indications occur and reoccur without the tale coming to an end. Here genius teaches us some quite simple things. The tale ends by taking root in our consciousness and, for this reason, becomes the possession of the phenomenologist.*<sup>251</sup>

In dealing with, in appropriating, the *Debbie-phenomenon*—via experimental, imaginal, practices rituals and disciplines—it became possible for me to appropriate, to *re-possess* the tale, re-colonising space. As well as the space—the *Atelier* where the imaginal works were made—also deployed were varying methods of connecting and making, in order for the imaginal outcome of aesthetic practices to become 'of the world' i.e. transmissible. These methods included: ritual; disciplined making; making in response to trauma; walking out with Yosser; imaginal play; experimental writing and image-making; *transgressive* acts (e.g. *The Magic Bird-box*). A paradox emerged: within non-linear re-alignment, *method* kept being mentioned.

In my practice viva paper I resiled from the terms *method* and *methodology*, preferring instead *chaos* and *chaos-ology*. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the space in which phenomenology, occurs, operates, is one where this quality of being inchoate and unfinished, functions as a strength:

The *unfinished nature* of phenomenology and the *inchoate style* in which it proceeds are not the sign of failure: they were inevitable because phenomenology's task was to reveal the *mystery of the world* and the *mystery of reason*. If phenomenology was a movement prior to having been a doctrine or system, this is neither accidental nor a deception.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 176-177 emphasis mine.

<sup>251</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 193 emphases mine.

<sup>252</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012; 22 emphasis mine.

Turning towards the phenomenal was not, for some reason, my first line of response when dealing with oppression and [mental] illnesses. It was the last tried; being the first that had an effect, or worked in any way. All linear, all legal, and most ‘healing’ (analytical psychological) interventions failed, some spectacularly so. The legal is beyond the remit here. I touch briefly on the psychological connection to what I would term *depth phenomenology*, or *phenomenological activism*: phenomenology that has made it from the page, the lecture hall, or seminar room; being brought into play in real-world situations.<sup>253</sup>

This may be regarded by some as transgressive. At the heart of this connection lie the commonalities of psychology and phenomenology. One of which is that some [mental] illnesses, and thus their apprehending and any remedy, are imaginal: ‘*that physical existence is merely an inference, since we know of matter only in so far as we perceive psychic images transmitted by the senses*’, according to Carl Jung in *Psychology and Religion*, who writes: *If a man imagined that I was his arch enemy and killed me, I should be dead on account of mere imagination. Imaginations do exist and they may be just as real and just as obnoxious or dangerous as physical conditions.*<sup>254</sup> Strictures—those we place upon ourselves; those strictures which we allow others to place upon us—are imaginal. Which raises questions:

*If the reconnection attendant to healing is more a matter of phenomenology, than it is of psychologising (though the latter has utility in defining, or helping to define, patterns), is it better at an early stage to appreciate this and to shift into the appropriate realm?*

*If true, how do we know this? Why place faith in a more ethereal, and, according to some, pseudo-magical, practices, than in psychological ones?*

According to James Hillman:

In other words, making should mean putting events through an imaginal process. Whether this be art, alchemy, mythical speculation, the pathologizing of depression, or the free run of fantasy through the corrals of psychic space, this process requires *imaginative work*. None of the humanistic solutions face up to this requirement. [...] Love can be seen as neither the goal nor the way, but as one of the many means of putting our inhumanity through a complicated imaginal process.<sup>255</sup>

The ‘*complicated imaginal process*’ of this phase of work commenced with *The Alder Altar* work on Easter Monday 2016,. The critic and commentator task is, therefore, foregrounding and ongoing contextualisation of practice: unapologetically (philosophically) *Imaginal-Phenomenological*; (practically) *Imaginal-Artful*.

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<sup>253</sup> Later to become *Action-Phenomenology* (my term for what I discovered), see Parts V. Light & VI: SpaceTime

<sup>254</sup> Jung, C. 1938; 11.

<sup>255</sup> Hillman, J. 1992; 189.

Practice on a spectrum of the *Magical* at one end, grounded in a theory of inquiry that sits on the edges of Phenomenology and the Transcendental.

Thus, we could not begin without psychology and we could not begin with psychology alone. Experience anticipates a philosophy and philosophy is but an elucidated experience. But now that the phenomenal field has been sufficiently circumscribed, let us enter into this ambiguous domain and secure there our first steps with the psychologist until the psychologists's self-critique carries us, by way of second order reflection, to the phenomenon of the phenomenon, and definitively converts the phenomenal field into the transcendental field.<sup>256</sup>

The heart of my process is imaginal: creating an *atelier*; generating patterns; recognising and capturing images; transmission; reception; feedback; repeat. Playing with gaze, some technique; experimentation on the edges of what is possible with the chosen medium; being surprised by what emerges, describes the practice of *Imaginal Gaze*: To be *surprised*, is to be *successful*. Bachelard writes of: '*phenomenological documents for a phenomenology of the verb to "emerge," and that [phenomenological verbs] are more phenomenological in that they correspond to invented types of emergence.*'<sup>257</sup>

In that sense, I see my experimental works—visual and written—as byproducts of process; their function as *phenomenological documents* being subservient to *phenomenological process*. As James Hillman puts it:

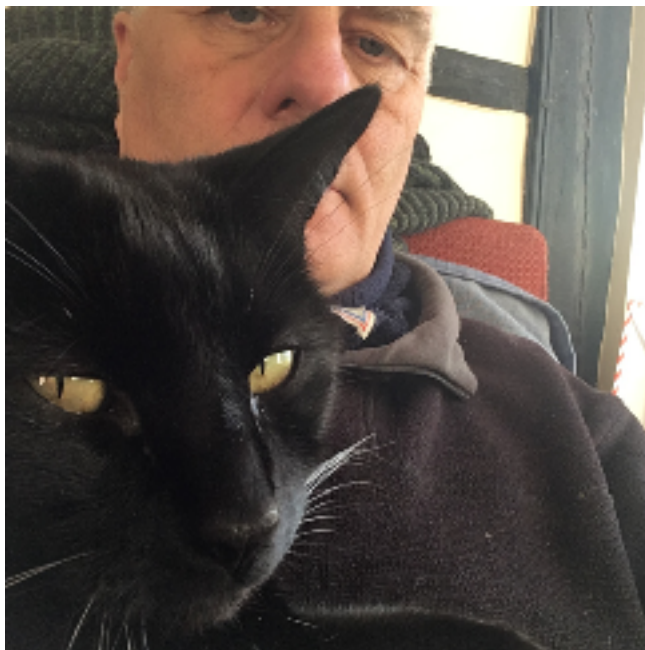
But the moment we realize body also as subtle body—a *fantasy system of complexes, symptoms, tastes, influences and relations, zones of delight, pathologized images, trapped insights*—then *body and soul lose their borders*, neither more literal or metaphorical than the other. *Remember: the enemy is the literal, and the literal is not the concrete flesh but negligence of the vision that concrete flesh is a magnificent citadel of metaphors.*<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012; 92.

<sup>257</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 129.

<sup>258</sup> Hillman, J. 1992; 174 emphasis mine.



## Part III Atelier

[method i: *phenomena*]

The power of a theory is exactly proportional to the diversity of situations it can explain.

Elinor Ostrom



Untitled. Lingen, 2016.



## Chapter 8

***Immanent disclosures:*** The phenomenal atelier

A physicist is just an atom's way of looking at itself.

Niels Bohr



Untitled. Nr Telford, 2018.

[Revet iii. *Transitional inquiry*]

In the early spring of 2016, I created an Atelier: an altar on an Alder log across a stream. I worked in this Atelier for 40 days over 43, roughly between the pagan days of Oestre and Beltane. I was joined in my endeavours by Yosser, a stray black cat. Working in the Atelier, Yosser either assisting or leading; helping me to see differently: a quality of seeing—extending into being—with me to this day.

Works in Part III *Atelier* are variously examples of development of practice; personal story; evocations of deeper ways of seeing and being: a new mode of inquiry for me. Researching further the nearest I have been able to find are the works of William Ayot and Sean McNiff. Other arenas of practice—first person action research; narrative inquiry; artful inquiry—while relevant to a degree—do not seem to deal in any depth with phenomena, and phenomenology. (Ayot's ritual(s) had particular resonance/relevance for my own practice, but as noted above, in terms of action inquiry, Ayot's work is a notable exception; in terms of action inquiry 'non-standard' practice.)

This *practice of the Atelier* came to me out of a conversation with Kathy Skerritt; at a time of illnesses for me and a loved one, which I denote as [mental]—for reasons discussed earlier. Such malady can lead to an apparent, or actual, loss of identity. My experiences in the Atelier have led me to believe that [mental] illnesses are, or often show up as, phenomena: that healing—similarly phenomenal—may be accessed by practices as evoked and described by my works in the Atelier.

My Atelier, my, studio, my workshop for inquiry, now travels with me. It is my practice. I work through and with the peripheries of process and practice in an endeavour to find the boundaries and thus new paradigms: of making; of inquiry. Journeys described in Part III *Atelier* delineate areas of practice: with the transitional and peripheral as denominators. The journeys gave rise to development of cognition. Which became new practice; moving towards new paradigm of inquiry. Working on, and with, the peripheral is not new for me: I have always been drawn to the edge of the possible, especially in terms of image-making. In *Atelier*, I describe, and allude to, shifts; in states of becoming, states of metamorphoses: in attention; apprehending; practice; cognition; seeing.

These shifts arose for me in a period of what Allan Kaplan terms *deep authenticity*: a time of finding, and of deepening, affinities. A time when I was under pressure to be anything other than authentic.<sup>259</sup> A time of assimilating, and re-assimilating the power of the transitional, the peripheral, and peripheries:

'Power is a developmental phenomenon. [...] While the periphery holds the potential of the future, a waxing power to be attained through exercising the freedom to move, which is denied those at the centre. Real power lies in the process of development, of becoming.'<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Kaplan, A. 2002; 65.

<sup>260</sup> Kaplan, A. 2002; 99-100.

What appears initially as dislocation and fragmentation becomes re-orientation. Frangible layers of life giving way to more nuanced layered ways of seeing and operating: uncovering, renewing: unfolding pathways of cognition: re-becoming; recovering identity. The characteristics of the practices of the *Atelier*—often counter-intuitive; non-linear; aesthetic; reliant on ritual and deep-narrative work; peripheral: in technique; space-creation; the minds of others—are borderline, and of the borderlands. *Standard model action-inquiry* breaks down.<sup>261</sup> The ways of phenomena are non-binary, non-polar: they connect; are matters of honing discernment:

We have to be able to see for ourselves, right through to the spirit which animates and which is so 'invisible'; we must be able to find our own truth, or the truth inherent in a situation, to penetrate through to the narrative thread—else we are condemned to work in the dark, with no real means to discriminate, in a cold lifeless world of profound anonymity, where we have no more significance (and probably far less) than the dot in '.com'.<sup>262</sup>

Later Kaplan writes: '*Learning to discern is something other than learning a new skill, it is of a different order. It is learning to be someone other. Someone who pays attention.*'<sup>263</sup> The journeys in Part III *Atelier*, are pathways into expanded, extended, ways of paying attention: journey outward becomes, over time, a journey inward. Study of a subject (flowers) becomes the study of no-subject: spaces became non-spaces, became abstractions; different kind of attention leading to a different kind of becoming. Viewers—initially invited into the picture, invited to love the flower(s)—become, at least partially, excluded: Undercurrents of narrative—a cat story, a travelogue—set to one side.

Which raises the tripartite question: *What is the journey for; Where is it going; How?*

On entering *The Atelier* we land in a *mysterium* that I break down into four dimensions:

*mysterium tremendum* (mystery that repels)  
*mysterium fascinosum* (mystery that attracts)  
*mysterium transeuntum* (the mystery of the transitional)  
*mysterium periphericum* (the mystery of the periphery)

In the arena of *mysterium tremendum* my poems of *The Leviathan* and *Direct-Debit Debbie* emerged, via a combination of morbid fascination and illnesses.

In the arena of *mysterium fascinosum* my visual images emerged, initially via flower photographs.

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<sup>261</sup> Bernstein, J. 2005.

<sup>262</sup> Kaplan A. 2002; 170.

<sup>263</sup> Kaplan A. 2002; 174.

In the *ground of tension*—the ground between repulsion (awe) and attraction (fascination)—the *magic* occurs: *mysterium transeuntum*; the mystery of the transitional. The space that allows or nurtures growth, regeneration, renewal, change, omega point transition.<sup>264</sup> It is the ground where *tropisms* are recognised, encouraged.<sup>265</sup>

In the ground of *looseness of cognition*—the edge, the periphery—the *magical* is seen: the *mysterium periphericum*; mystery of the periphery. The space that allows fuller observations of, and participation in, other grounds: the morbid; pathological; enchanted; fascinating; repulsive; attractive.

If we take each of these layers (mysteries) in turn, it gives us a line, a leading light, to follow further into the inquiry. (These *mysteria* become important organising principles for the remainder of the inquiry.)

### ***Mysterium tremendum***

Loss, fear of loss, is a great inhibitor: in the processes of change and becoming; in love. Loss of mind, or of identity, of health—or fear of loss of these—is similarly inhibiting, intimidating. As is witnessing such loss. We land in *The Atelier* via a story, the story of a cat, Yosser (a representative of the more-than-human-world, among other things). Yosser acts as an envoy, an interface: between me, the more-than-human-world, and the other-worldly. He, via me, (and, briefly, Bente van Alphen) invites us to suspend, if not upend, our disbelief.<sup>266</sup> We receive invitations: onto a plane of fiction; into a translucent layer of reality. We have to believe in things—phenomena—that we can't directly *see*, or *touch*, or *feel*. But that we may, possibly indirectly, apprehend. To believe in Yosser—or to at least suspend disbelief in him and his story—is the first step in allowing the inquiry to speak: to find its voice. In *Fields of Play*, Laurel Richardson writes: *[...] the ability to understand another's biography goes beyond sharing an interactionally, presently shared, world: Narrative makes possible the understanding of people who are not present. Narrative creates the possibility of history beyond the personal.*<sup>267</sup>

This creation—of the *possibility of a history beyond the personal*—helps us into *Jinn: Yosser's Tale*. The story of working with Yosser—emergent in *The Alder Altar* project—has dimensions of the communal, and communion. Yosser taught me about discernment: seeing of; seeing into; seeing through.

It is Yosser, still, who helps me: on the difficult days, when illness threatens to come knocking again; in bringing life back to *The Ford*, whenever we go there. This invites us to inquire as to what is reasonable, or rational, to believe in this context.

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<sup>264</sup> Wilber K. 2000.

<sup>265</sup> Sarraute, N. 1963, in Marshall J. 2016; 81-86.

<sup>266</sup> Bente van Alphen is an ADOC participant who is undertaking research into inter-species communication.

<sup>267</sup> Richardson, L. 1997; 31 *emphasis mine*.

Not a new dilemma for researchers:

But the fact that social science research does not meet the logic of inquiry model research does not mean that the research is irrational. The problem is not with social science, but with the inappropriate narrowing of the meaning of “rational.” There is another possibility. *We could simply appropriate for the social sciences another common-sense meaning of rational: sane and reasonable.* <sup>268</sup>

Inviting questions:

Is my storying, relating of mine and Yosser’s shared narrative *sane and reasonable*?

How does this shared narrative relate to *Awe (mysterium tremendum)*?

What problem, if any, might there be with *insane* and *unreasonable*?

Raising the matter of writing conventions, especially where writing of contentious, difficult to prove (or disprove) areas of cognition, perception and practice. Laurel Richardson raises these points:

[Darwin] suppressed how he did his work and why he wrote as he did because he knew these aberrations would impugn his credibility. *He chose to report on his work within the methodological conventions important to his colleagues.* The protective coloration of scientific conventions disguised Darwin’s heretical ideas and contributed to the survival of his thesis. <sup>269</sup>

And:

All the social sciences have prescribed writing formats—none of them neutral, all of them value constituting. *How* we are expected to write affect what we can write about. The referencing system in sociology (and in most of the other social sciences) discourages the use of footnotes, a place for secondary arguments, novel conjectures, and related ideas. Incorporated into the text, albeit in parentheses, are the publication dates for citations as though this information counts the most. Knowledge is constituted as “focused”, “problem” (hypothesis) centred, “linear,” straightforward. Other thoughts are “extraneous”. <sup>270</sup>

Interesting to note is the convention of a hierarchy of understanding, notable in much academic writing, and predicated on *knowing*. In this chapter I explore the facet of ontology that is about *understanding*, which may, to a degree, preclude knowing, per se; as explored variously by Laurel Richardson and Stephen Banks.<sup>271</sup>

Moving into the realm of writing as a way of understanding—maybe even *knowing*—there is a shift in power relationships. As Laurel Richardson avers: *‘How one writes one’s theory is not simply a theoretical matter. The theoretical inscribes a social order, power relationships, and the subjective state of the theorist.* <sup>272</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Richardson, L. 1997; 41 emphasis mine.

<sup>269</sup> Richardson, L. 1997; 42 emphasis mine.

<sup>270</sup> Richardson, L. 1997; 42-43.

<sup>271</sup> See: Richardson, L Ref Banks, S. 1997;155.

<sup>272</sup> Richardson L. 1997; 49.

The works under discussion are helpful in our understanding of these three issues within the context of this thesis. My intent also is not to passively observe the unfolding of events and relationships: more to absorb, re-pattern, and re-issue them. This work is not a sociological evocation, account, or analysis of events: the intention is to be far more transgressive—of academic, aesthetic, and other, mores—than that. The writings of Richardson, Kaplan, and Banks are helpful datums from which to measure arcs of departure from standard action inquiry. I write of fatal banalities: my photographs shift from pictures of flowers, to pictures of almost nothing. Stephen Banks writes of conventional sociological and psychological method:

As encoded in the language used to discuss methods, then, research is understood as an autonomous procedure in a quest of conclusive discovery about self-presenting natural data that is related in an omniscient, transparent, text.[...] The text calls no attention to itself, even while it tries to appear as an automatic and faithful reproduction of an a priori reality. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* specifically discourages any literary writing as it “might confuse or disturb readers of scientific prose” (American Psychological Association [APA], p 32).<sup>273</sup>

And:

From Barthes to Eco, the question of authorial reality, power and legitimacy has depended on whether the text is thought to be able to mirror another, legitimate, reality or is the creation of an entirely new one.[...] *Authors exercise consequential agency and intentionality in creating texts.*<sup>274</sup>

In *Atelier*, and in my experimental writings and image making that appear elsewhere in this dissertation, my intention is variously to *mirror other realities* (legitimate, illegitimate); and to *create entirely new ones*. In pushing away, or not engaging fully with, conventions of sociological academic discourse, my purpose—to explore and reveal aesthetics and identity—might assume, or gain, a rawer energy: verisimilitude. Some of this is happenstance, some ritualised; some, though less so, intentional: stemming from happenstance and ritual. Works are largely—if not always—situational, spontaneous, made out of a curiosity: *What might happen if I make these works, in this situation?*

Other—sometimes external—influences, exigencies, and forces come into play: the advent of a stray cat called Yosser; the situation and character behind *The Direct-Debit Debbie Quintet*; responses to *The Daily Flowers*; the advent of the *Alder Altar*; the situational *psychogeographies* of the *Imago* photographs and *The Trees* writings. I can only wonder at this practice, these practices, these narratives, and be curious as to the ending. Oftentimes it feels more like *channelling* an energy, or energies, than *creating* something: as though writing an account of something pre-ordained; as much conduit as creator.

*The Atelier* provides a crucible in which these elements and energies congeal: precursors to renewal and becoming. *The Atelier* is not abstract, and it is more than arbitrary: it is a seat of practice; and it acts as a charm, a spell, a countervailing energy to toxicity, illness, and oppression.

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<sup>273</sup> Banks, S. in J. Knowles & A. Cole, Eds., 2008; 158. emphasis in original.

<sup>274</sup> Banks, S. in J. Knowles & A. Cole, Eds., 2008; 158. emphasis mine.

Stephen Banks writes:

If two of the main purposes of social science research include instructing others about social life and sharing understandings [...] Instead Smith was interested in the persons themselves, as defined by the peculiarities of their lived experience. He chose to privilege the voices of his participants and let the story write itself.” He accounted for himself in this way:

As I sat down a month or so after my morning with Food Truck in the donut shop, I did not have a clear picture in my mind about what the resulting text about him would end up being. I wanted it to be what Neal Stephenson calls a *nam-shrub*, a Sumerian word that he says is “a speech with a magical force”... capable of infecting those who hear it with a virus that will affect how they see and understand the world.<sup>275 276</sup>

*The Atelier* proved the most definite leap into and beyond the world of the magical speech of the *nam-shrub*. Working with Yosser, the ritual of the *Alder Altar*, and with the *Daily Flowers* was to foray—often literally—into other worlds: of experience; apprehending; fascination. This work exceeded the more commonly understood practices of social-scientific, business-educational, practice.

Absorbing this way of working, like doing it, is, to a degree, an act to faith: a call to spiritual, sacred, adventure. As the varied practices develop, they often become abstract; less grounded in the story: what was; what happened (or not); what might have been: instead becoming openings to new and other worlds. My work in *Atelier* becomes a form of experimental, experiential, knowing: I write; perform ritual; make images; bounce the resultant gobbets around various circles of the willingly curious. I see what happens. It is an experiment: in living; inquiry; ways of knowing or understanding.

Part of that process has been a longstanding fascination on my part around what happens at the edge of process: what occurs just at the point that (artistic, creative) process breaks down; i.e stops making sense, or becomes technically unfeasible?

Experimental practices—ritual, writing, image-making—are rich with the fluid possibilities of understanding offered by the abstract, the apparently pointless, the barely discernible. With abstraction comes the possibilities offered by sense-making on the part of the viewer/reader/audience: readings become non-specific (and non-linear); so does outcome. This becomes also an experiment: in becoming in a space of uncertainty; in the emergence or unfolding, of Imago and Imagos. While ego is held in recess.

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<sup>275</sup> Banks, S. in J. Knowles & A. Cole, Eds., 2008; 160.

<sup>276</sup> Smith, P. 1999; 248.



### ***Mysterium fascinosum***

The work of *The Atelier* progressed, and mutated; an assemblage, a bricolage, of forms and genres evolved and merged. Phenomena became part of the fascination: a ritual (*The Alder Altar*), became a cat-story about connections to the other-than-human and other worldly (*Jinn: Yosser's tale*), became an Atelier of beautiful flowers (*Daily Flowers, Imago*) becomes a healing journey (*Bled: a travelogue*). This process held me in fascination; each turn seemingly presenting itself as though pre-ordained.

My fascination was with, or via, the deepening gaze of connectedness: to place; to Yosser; to journey. This deepening had been preceded by the trauma of illness and separation from a loved one; surfacing during the self-imposed ritual of the Alder Altar, as the Atelier of the world emerged around me. This sacred, spiritual, reciprocity manifested itself in the images that emerged via my iPhone and the Alder log over the stream. Noticing and rituals went on for some months before I really started to recognise that they may be of some import, and relate to action inquiry, maybe even organisational change.

It was upon my return from Bled—assimilating the writings of Van der Kolk and Bortoft—that I began to appreciate the relevance of what were apparently random, even self-indulgent, practices. My illness and recovery and the illness of a loved one, became in that period, the precursor for something bigger: an annotation that we have a right to do our work, our jobs, without them making us ill. *The Atelier* was the antidote, the offsetting force for good. It still is. The Atelier was a log, initially: the root of that French word is 'a splinter of wood' in a carpenter's workshop. My splinter—the Alder log—was a big one, yet it seemed too to draw, or be a conduit for, a particular kind of energy; first noticed by Yosser, not me. A conduit for the deep 'seeing into' as elucidated in my poem *Buried Light*.<sup>277</sup> Martin Buber writes of:

[the] three spheres in which the world of relation arises:

The first: life with nature [...]

The second: life with men [...]

The third: life with spiritual beings.<sup>278</sup>

He writes of a contemplating a tree:

I can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers and externalise it. Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.

But it can also happen, *if will and grace are joined*, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into relation, and that the tree ceases to be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me.[...] Rather is everything, pique and movement, species and instance, law and number included and inseparably fused. [...] One should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: relation is reciprocity.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Appendix 1: *Poems*

<sup>278</sup> Buber M 1996; 56-57.

<sup>279</sup> Buber M 1996; 58 emphasis mine.

Contemplation, *deep-seeing*, became my fascination during the spring of 2016. It has stayed with me: my inner Atelier awakened. A tree becomes not about *Tree-ness*, but about relation; a quality of regard for the Tree. To regard the Tree (or other object of contemplation), is to admit it into the Atelier: We invite trees and flowers into our (inner) art-rooms—Ateliers—and dance with them: images and imagery are traces of the dance. We attune to the spirits—of the stream: *naiad*; of the mountains: *oread*; of the trees and woods: *dryad*; of the saltwater and oceans: *nereid*—and in our attuning and playing become both healed and healer.

Direct encounter—with *otherness*, and other-worldliness—calms our inner beings: allows Imagos to recover, unfold, flourish. Being in the Atelier—either physically, or in combination with frame of mind—is to induce a bearing witness: a quality of beholding that is reciprocal, and healing. In the holding of awareness of a flower something shifts within us—probably within the flower too—given shared consciousness. Zohar states: '*Just one of the many interesting implications of thinking about consciousness in terms of a Fröhlich system is that it lends support to the view that some rudimentary consciousness may well be a property of all living systems.*'<sup>280</sup>

*The Atelier* serves as a test tube, or petri dish, in which phenomena can emerge, form, or be observed—if fleetingly—and lend us some form to work with, experientially. It is a place where the primal may surface and do its thing: a place of retreat and expansion; of contemplation and direct, unmediated, experiencing; of openness; maybe woundedness; ritual; consecration; sacred presence; discipline; a space of evolution. A space for new languages and ways of being to emerge. Buber states:

Any real understanding of these phenomena is compromised by all attempts to reduce them to narrower spheres and can be promoted only when in contemplating and discussing them we recall their cosmic-metacosmic origin. We must remember the reach beyond that undifferentiated, not yet formed, rival world from which the corporeal individual that was born into the world merged completely, but not yet bodily.<sup>281</sup>

And:

[The *anxiety of becoming* state of] the mystery is known only to the animal, which alone can open it up to us—for this state can only be opened up and not revealed. The language in which this is accomplished is what it says: anxiety—the stirring of the creature between the *realms of plantlike and security and spiritual risk*. This language is the stammering of nature under the initial grasp of spirit, before language yields to spirit's cosmic risk which we call man. But no speech will ever repeat what a stammer is able to communicate.<sup>282</sup>

The *Mysterium Fascinosum* of the Atelier is as a space of *plantlike security, spiritual risk, and stammering*.

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<sup>280</sup> Zohar, D 1991; 68 emphasis in original.

<sup>281</sup> Buber M 1996; 79.

<sup>282</sup> Buber M 1996; 144-145.

## Chapter 9

***Jinn***: Yosser's tale  
[Scintilla: words]

Jinn: a fraternity of spirits created by God from smokeless fire and mentioned in the Qur'an, who, Muslims believe, inhabit the earth along with humans. Unlike us, they can change their form, and supposedly appear at dusk and sunrise especially in the form of cats. <sup>283</sup>

Tahir Shah, from *In Arabian Nights: a caravan of Moroccan dreams*

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<sup>283</sup> Shah, T 2009; 383.



Untitled (Yosser and me: day 25 of the *Alder Altar* project). Lingen, 2016.



Untitled (Yosser on day 40 of the *Alder Altar* project). Lingen, 2016.

## Prologue

*When I found Yosser nibbling on the squirrel, I decided to relieve him of it.*

*For some reason I put it onto the old bird table, which Yosser can't access. (Usually with his rabbits I throw them over, or into, the stream.)*

*During the night - of the evening that Yosser had apprehended the squirrel - I awoke with a start: There was a presence in the house, moving around, making a little noise.*

*It wasn't Yosser, as he had been let out earlier; and had no way back in, as the door to the old boiler room was closed.*

*This was the second time in just over a week that this had happened. Both times Yosser was out of the house.*

*Was it a squirrel? I don't think so: since the trimming of the Yew tree they have no access to the loft now. A Jinn, maybe, mmm..?*

*The next morning when I awoke, and looking out of the bedroom window, saw that the old bird table was empty.*

*The dead squirrel had gone.*

## Yosser



I meditate. I envision energy from above streaming into me. I ground myself and imagine energy from the earth streaming in through the roots that grow from my feet deep into the earth.

I look at Yosser's picture and ask him again if he wants to 'chat'.

Yosser feels like an introvert - he is not coming at me easily, he is checking me out. In my mind's eye I see him staring in the distance. It looks like he is thinking.

Bente: 'what do you think of the Alder Altar process with Paul?'

Yosser answers come slowly, and he is directing them to Paul:

Y: Slow it down

Y: Look, no really look

Y: You are doing it too fast

Y: Take your time

Y: You are missing it

Bente: what is 'it' Yosser?

Y: Sense

Bente: sense of what?

Y: A sense of being. In the moment.

Bente: what does it feel like?

Y: You are light. And you can see.

Bente: what brings you to the altar?

Y: Magic. That's why I come.

Y: But it is only a representation.

Y: If he really looks he can see it everywhere. Then he doesn't need an altar.

Y: I sometimes kick it (the altar). By accident. But with purpose (Bente: I get a feeling of a little mischief ;-).

Then there is a silence for a while. But it feels there is still connection. So I wait. I then feel a shift in energy. Yosser is now directing towards me:

Y: I miss her. I miss her smell. The way she petted my head. Between my ears. I would respond by bunting my head against her legs. Where did she go? Is she coming back? Is that why the altar is there to make her come back? Can you ask Paul?

Bente: I am sorry to hear Yosser, I am not sure but will ask Paul to explain.

Y: And tell him I don't like the cat food he bought. It is too salty.

Bente: I will tell him, is there anything else you would like to say?

Y: Paul and I are mates. But we like our own space. I like it here. I have a good life. (the feeling that came with these words was very warm and deep, much more affectionate than the words may seem to express ;-).

Bente: thank you Yosser! Take care. You are very wise.

Yosser looks in the distance again.

Bente  
Amsterdam 27<sup>th</sup> April 2016



*In the moment, Yosser's coming into the sacred space feels like a benediction - when a creature feels safe enough to engage an altered landscape... something has shifted in more than the physical aspects of the place...*

[From email from Kathy Skerritt 3.04.16]

I had begun to pay a different kind of attention to Yosser. Some of my initial mentions of him now make me cringe a little, and feel humble. Taking notice of Yosser, learning how to listen to him, to see him, to follow him led to a perceptual shift for me. It also shifted me from a space of grief and anger and confusion, to one of being more accepting, more curious; a shift that persists to this day. My experiences with Yosser are at the same time both unfathomable, and—beyond the occasional noted apparent coincidence—of questionable value in terms of ‘organisational change’. I queried it in terms of emergent practice too: what kind of practice might be emerging from working my way into these arising questions in greater depth?

There does seem to be a valuable field of inquiry in terms of how we ‘see’ the invisible; and the ways in which we might approach ‘facts’ in highly ambiguous and contentious situations. Then maybe—by shifts of imagination and context—this role of seeing the invisible as exemplified by a relationship with a cat, may also prove to have value and validity in terms of inquiry. As Henri Bortoft notes:

The failure to notice the dimension of mind which is intrinsic to observation leads most directly to the most popular mis-understanding of scientific knowledge, namely, naive empiricism—which could also be called “factism”. This is the view that there are “facts,” which are independent of any ideational element and to which we have “direct access” by sense perception.<sup>284</sup>

My biggest shift in this regard is noted in my *Alder Altar* field journal of Saturday 16th April 2016. On this day I allowed Yosser to take me for a walk, or maybe I allowed myself to follow him.

An account of the walk follows, and is axiomatic to the shift in my inquiry into a different kind of paying attention: that of paying attention to the more than human world with use of all ‘regular’ senses; plus those of imagination and curiosity.

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<sup>284</sup> Bortoft, H. 1996;144.

**The Alder Altar: an inquiry into benediction**

Day 19/20. Saturday 16th April 2016: Yosser; water; ice; S



*Yosser had been in an odd space the previous day, I had taken him out for a walk early evening, but he was distracted by some Yosser-world influence, rabbit or vole maybe, early on. He went and squatted in a hedge.*

*Could it be that we were overdoing this inquiry thing? I had flaked earlier. Y had spent Thursday flaked. When I got back, Y was in his hatch. I took some pictures and told him we'd take tomorrow off. I'd expected some kind of whoopee, or a purr, but instead he adopted this odd, thousand yard stare, that sometimes comes over him. Like when he knows something that you (or I) don't.*

*I went out for a beer. Yosser went to sleep on my office chair. He used to do that a lot, and notably had not for some weeks, until the start of the Altar project. Now we have to squabble for it. Or share. Usually either Y wins, or we share. Yesterday, unusually, he lost, and hunched down on a jacket of mine that was on the floor. For the whole day. Maybe that was why he had the hump, and the stare...?*

*Tomorrow would be a different, new day. And a day off.*

*In the early hours I got out of bed and went into the office to get my iPad, I can't remember why. It was about 04.30. Y stirred, I said to go back to sleep, but as I got into bed I heard the pitter-patter of paws on wooden stairs, and then Y started meowing, incessantly, at the door to the old boiler room. He needed access to his hatch. I let him out. Not long afterwards he wanted to come back in. I let him in, and then fell back to sleep.*

*I woke with a start - I'd had a dream and I thought I saw lights reflected on the wall. I got up (we live at the end of a lane, lights in the night not good). I'd imagined, or dreamed it. Y wanted out again, it was now 05.30. I let him out, reminded him we were having a day off, I went back to bed and fell asleep.*

*At 06.01, I was awakened by increasingly loud meow-ling at the door of the old boiler room. I went down and let Y in, but he just wanted to go straight out of the kitchen door again. His meowing had been an alarm call. Only one minute late. Maybe he wasn't losing his touch after all. I put the kettle on and then went out and shot a few frames of the forsythia and the fruit blossom while the kettle boiled. The data tells me the first frame was shot at 06.08. Seven minutes from bed to finger on shutter. Y had disappeared, and didn't respond to calls to the altar.*

*I went back in and made tea, returning with it to the altar in the stream. I didn't shoot any frames there, my heart wasn't in it, really: it was Saturday; it was a day off; it was Y's idea (a joke?) to get me up; and he had pissed off.*

*Then he poled up. I called him to the altar, but he bounded off at high speed, towards the northern boundary; the stream skirts that too. I picked my way through the brash littering the old gateway - prior to the building of the bridge in the mid 70's, the only way in had been along the stream bed. I walked out into the stream, and along towards the field. I had been along here in a 4WD to retrieve wood from the hedge laying several years back, but I had never in these years walked it. Yosser paralleled my track, in the scrub on our northern boundary.*

*I reached the gate to the field in the ford, Y reached the stile. We looked at each other: Y slid through the stile, I somewhat less elegantly climbed the gate. We walked along the edge of the field, headed west. For some reason Y won't normally venture far this way on his own. That's why I liberate rabbits out this way. We kept walking for about 150 yards, we were in tune (I'd had this experience once before with Y, by moonlight). I came up to a gate, where the land fell away through a spinney to the stream. We looked at each other. I climbed the gate, Y slid through. We descended to the stream. Y posed on a tree stump, but moved before I had a good photo. I entered the stream and splashed about a bit. Y tried to zoom up a tree. I climbed back up the bank and took some pictures. We went back down to the stream, me in it, Y remaining on the southern bank.*

*We reached a fallen tree across the stream; this one had many established shoots, several years old; a kind of self-coppicing bridge. I paused, in the stream. Pause. Yosser checked it over carefully, then made his way across.*

*Then Y found a large fallen bough, a kind of cantilever tree bridge. Again, like a rock climber eyeing a new route, he made his way across in stages. He found one of those impossible routes that I've heard the likes of the mountaineer Andy Kirkpatrick relate to the assembled throng. I could see that Y wanted the challenge, by the look in his eye as he stood at the base of the tree. It looked impossible to me.*

*Then he went up a tree, just for fun, because he could. No way would he get across the stream from this one, but he did. We were getting into a rhythm: I'd find a way, Y would find a way to cross, or Y would lead.. I went to an island in the middle of the stream, Y hopped on too. Then realised that he was screwed. Went back. There was a bridge, a proper one. Y didn't trust it. I had to give him more encouragement to get onto that bridge than for any time in the past weeks. He came across, then took the lead, on the south bank now, still heading west.*

*Something had changed in the dynamic between us; I realised that often now Y was reading the lay of the land for both of us: he would find a way to cross the stream when the way ahead was going to be difficult for me.*

*Finally, we neared the place where the field ends and the stream flows out from a spinney bounded by a fence. Y checked out his way across (another fallen bough), then stopped. He looked at me: What did I want to do? Y had worked out that he could cross and follow the stream across the fence and into the spinney. His look said: 'I can do this if you want, but you're fucked aren't you?' Y had become a leader. We had bonded, I had never felt this way with an animal before. We turned and started back along the north bank, it started snowing, in large clumps. We stopped for selfies, Y not used to it, me neither, really. Crossing the stream by the proper bridge, Y again needing encouragement, we made our way back towards Archers Ford. One smallish obstacle ahead, of sheep, had Yosser stopping in our tracks. My yelling 'fuck off, you're scaring my cat' seemed to do the trick.*

*I went into the garden, to the Blackthorn that Yosser took me to on the first walk where he guided me. Yosser went in through his hatch, and wailed a bit, drying himself as best he could until I let him into the house from the old boiler room. We made breakfast. I made a fire, using the first of the seasoned deadwood from the Alder tree that I'd felled on Good Friday.*



Untitled (Me and Yosser). Near Lingen, 2016.



Untitled. Near Lingen, 2016.

The shift noted in that text seems to be from me as (would be) leader, teacher, carer, of Yosser; towards a relationship of equals. We had become a team in a very short time. My awakening had started. The shift noted is, I think, one towards animism, from atomism; from the quantitative towards the qualitative. In noticing such a shift the potential connections to the apprehending of events in organisations starts to become more apparent. Henri Bortoft refers:

We take it for granted that the world of solid bodies is the world, existing as such independently, whereas in fact it is the world that appears in the light of the "solid world" mode of conception. [...] What is seen cannot be separated from the way it is seen: the solid world is the cognitive correlate of the "solid world" mode of conception.<sup>285</sup>

Yosser had helped shift me from a perceptual stuck-ness, not least in terms of my relationship with him. Indeed this change in relationship is invisible to the naked eye. As Bortoft avers:

[...] the change in what is seen comes from a change in the way of seeing. It does not come from the addition of new factual content which previously had not been noticed. The change in what is seen is subtler than this. *The movement of metamorphosis is in a way of seeing*, and a change in the way of seeing *transforms* what is seen without *adding* to the content.

This is how Goethe's discovery of metamorphosis must be understood. It is a transformational discovery, not a factual one.<sup>286</sup>

Learning to listen to, and follow, Yosser I found a deeper, ultimately more useful and appropriate posture: moving from a 'making happen' towards a 'creating a space for happening'. The movement was thus from a linear, western, cause and effect, towards a more eastern, spontaneous, experimental, curious: *'What happens if I do something both creative and completely illogical here?'* On reflection this was a shift from a search for creating a method and methodology, towards a discovery of the phenomena of creating a chaos, and *chaos-ology*. In short, playing with the aesthetics of the creation of havoc and acts of disruption, a non-lateral, often indescribable non-method had emerged.

There is an alchemic quality to my relationship with Yosser, and the subtle changes that have imbued me with enhanced perceptions. The Sufis, the Dervish orders, have a word - *latifa* (subtlety) - that refers to what [has been rendered] *'purity spot'*, *'place of illumination'*, *'centre of reality'*.<sup>287</sup> Working with these subtleties helped me see further into patterns; to work within their inherent subtleties; to identify toxic patterns; to not engage; to disengage, or to distance myself from them. In conception *latifa* is activated within the areas of the Self, the Heart, the Spirit.<sup>288</sup> It is the awareness, or in Sufi terms, the activation, of such modes of perceiving that inform this part of the emerging practice.

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<sup>285</sup> Bortoft, H. 1996; 17.

<sup>286</sup> Bortoft, H. 1996; 282 emphasis in original.

<sup>287</sup> Shah, I. 2015(1); 357.

<sup>288</sup> Shah, I. 2015(1); 358-359.

In my deepening understanding of Yosser, and my changing relationship with him, the enhancement of perceiving has been a key dimension of growth and renewal. Informed, not least, by my observations of Yosser's interactions with the other-worldly; in his interactions with the Jinns of Archers Ford. This brings us to a tendentious realm for an inquirer working within the aegis of the academy: that of the realms of magic, and working within traditions of the magical. What if, instead of being tendentious, *magic* and *the magical* were to become just another paradigm, like say statistics, or even economics? What if *the magical* is simply a non-linear way of apprehending, of knowing, of being?

There is a quality of the primordial in my relationship with Yosser. On reflection this is hardly surprising. This relationship was forged in the circumstances of his prime carer becoming ill, and for a time, incapacitated. It was forged in the circumstances of my responses to this situation: inventing a ritual of blessing; creating a method of healing; the making of many thousands of photographs; the noticing (firstly by others) of Yosser's role in the ritual; my subsequent 'noticing' and 'seeing' Yosser. And the role of this seeing of my own, ongoing rehabilitation. Surely it would be surprising, to say the least, if something magical were not to occur in such a crucible? There seemed to be a correlation between subtleties appearing. Chögyam Trungpa writes:

When you are in contact with this original ground, then you are never confused by the illusions of the past and future. You are able to rest continuously in nowness.

This original state of being can be likened to a primordial, or cosmic, mirror. By *primordial* we mean unconditioned, not caused by circumstances. Something primordial is not a reaction for, or against, any situation.<sup>289</sup>

Though circumstances convened my discovery of *Yosser-as-guide* in the 'now', this connection has a quality of continuous renewal about it: within this renewal lays acceptance and relaxation. Trungpa states: '*Relaxation here refers to relaxing the mind, letting go of the anxiety and concepts and depression that normally bind you.*'<sup>290</sup> If we do this, hierarchies—of thoughts feelings concepts, or being-ness—become redundant: flat, or misshapen spirals. Who is to say that the crazy wisdom of a cat awaking me at dawn to go and take photographs on a makeshift altar is 'lower' in the hierarchy of awareness, than say, the paradigm of a business school doctorate? Could it be that the root of these hierarchies lays in our conception of the way that as beings, we are assembled? The concept of 'mental' illness, for instance, at once erases any notion that the brain, or mind, may be connected to a body; may have a soul; may be connected to the spiritual; to otherworldly dimensions. Merleau-Ponty expresses [part of] this idea:

Here, for the first time, we come across the idea that rather than a mind *and* a body, man is a mind *with* a body, a being who can only get to the truth of things because its body, as it were, embedded in those things.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Trungpa, C. 2007; 104 *emphasis in original*.

<sup>290</sup> Trungpa, C. 2007; 105.

<sup>291</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 2004; 43.



My attempts at assimilation of Yosser's world view, initially clumsy and crass, are still limited. By coincidence (or not) since I adopted a *'writing as ritual'* regime for a paper. Yosser woke me between 07.00 and 07.30. He reminded me hourly to take breaks, and made it clear when the day's work was done. Or that could be my imagination. Or projection. Or a coincidence. What I do *know* is that he knows, and perceives, things that I am unable to. I observe that by observing, becoming more aware of, Yosser's patterns of behaviour, within this re-calibrated attunement he and I grow closer, and I find other ways of perceiving and articulating my relationships: with the world; self; others; the otherworldly. Where there are patterns, and observations of patterns, surely there is the space for a pattern to be disrupted? Merleau-Ponty opens the door to this line of inquiry:

Centred on the animal is what might be called a process of 'giving shape' to the world; the animal moreover has a particular pattern of behaviour. Because it proceeds unsteadily, by trial and error, and has at best a meagre capacity to accumulate knowledge, it displays very clearly the struggle involved in existing in a world into which it has been thrown, a world to which it has no key. In so doing, it reminds us, above all, of our failures and our limitations. It is for all these reasons that the life of animals plays such an important role in the life of primitive peoples, as it does in the reveries of our inner life.<sup>292</sup>

[As I write Yosser hops onto the table outside the window for my hourly break reminder.] Having opened the door, Merleau-Ponty holds short of a fuller inquiry into meaningful dialogue—of communications—with other species. Suggested is a field of inquiry that might be termed the 'permeability' of the dynamics between human and non-human animal. A membrane is suggested too. It is that membrane: one of the interconnectedness with that other field in the more than human world—the field of plant life—that becomes the axis of inquiry during the ritual of the *Alder Altar*. Derrick Jensen writes in *A Language Older than Words*:

We are the relationships we share, we are that process of relating, we are, whether we like it or not, permeable—physically, emotionally, spiritually— to our surroundings. I am the bluebirds and nuthatches that nest here each spring, and they, too, are me. Not metaphorically, but in all physical truth. I am only so beautiful and the character of my relationships, only so rich as I enrich those around me, only so alive as I enliven those I greet.<sup>293</sup>

The interface, the membrane—of the phenomenal field of inter-species understanding—occurs to me as a quality of gaze, as enchantment. Something of my way of seeing Yosser, and my way of seeing (partly) through his eyes, informed the bases of my work of ritual at *The Alder Altar*. Laura Sewell expresses it thus:

If we believe in emanations, if our beliefs include the notion of an ocular fire, then the quality of our gaze—the hunger and intensity of it, the desire of it, the spirit and ease of it, the assumptions that accompany it—is woven into the world.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 2004; 59.

<sup>293</sup> Jensen, D. 2000; 126-127.

<sup>294</sup> Sewell, L..1999; 34.

My ritual image-making work at *The Alder Altar*, is the *weave of the fabric*—the interplay of connectedness—and the potential of this connectedness of active, energetic, seeing, that I look into, and work (play) with. Discovering for myself what Amos Wilder terms—the *theopoetic*—the interface of the poetics of the nature, words, and images—with my iPhone I experimented: working with Yosser; with the *metascopic*; with magic.<sup>295, 296</sup>

As Trungpa writes: *By magic we do not mean unnatural power over the phenomenal world, but rather the discovery of innate or primordial wisdom of the world.* <sup>297</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Wilder, A. (1976).

<sup>296</sup> *Metascopic*: I use this word to refer to the practice of making the apparently invisible, or absent, visible: of apprehending emanations. For example, the apprehending of primordial ways of being, by use of ritual, aesthetic practices.

<sup>297</sup> Trungpa, C. 2007; 108.

**Jinn:** Yosser's tale

[Scintilla: images]

If you want to know what it's like to be a tree, sleep with a cat on your bed and feel it manoeuvring and exploring your curves and hollows for the most comfortable nest.<sup>298</sup>

Roger Deakin, from *Notes from Walnut Tree Farm*

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<sup>298</sup> Deakin, R. 2008; 136.



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 6.4.16.



Untitled (Yosser, sunrise). Lingen, 1.5.16.



Untitled. Lingen, 2017.



Untitled (Yosser), Lingen, 2017.



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2017.

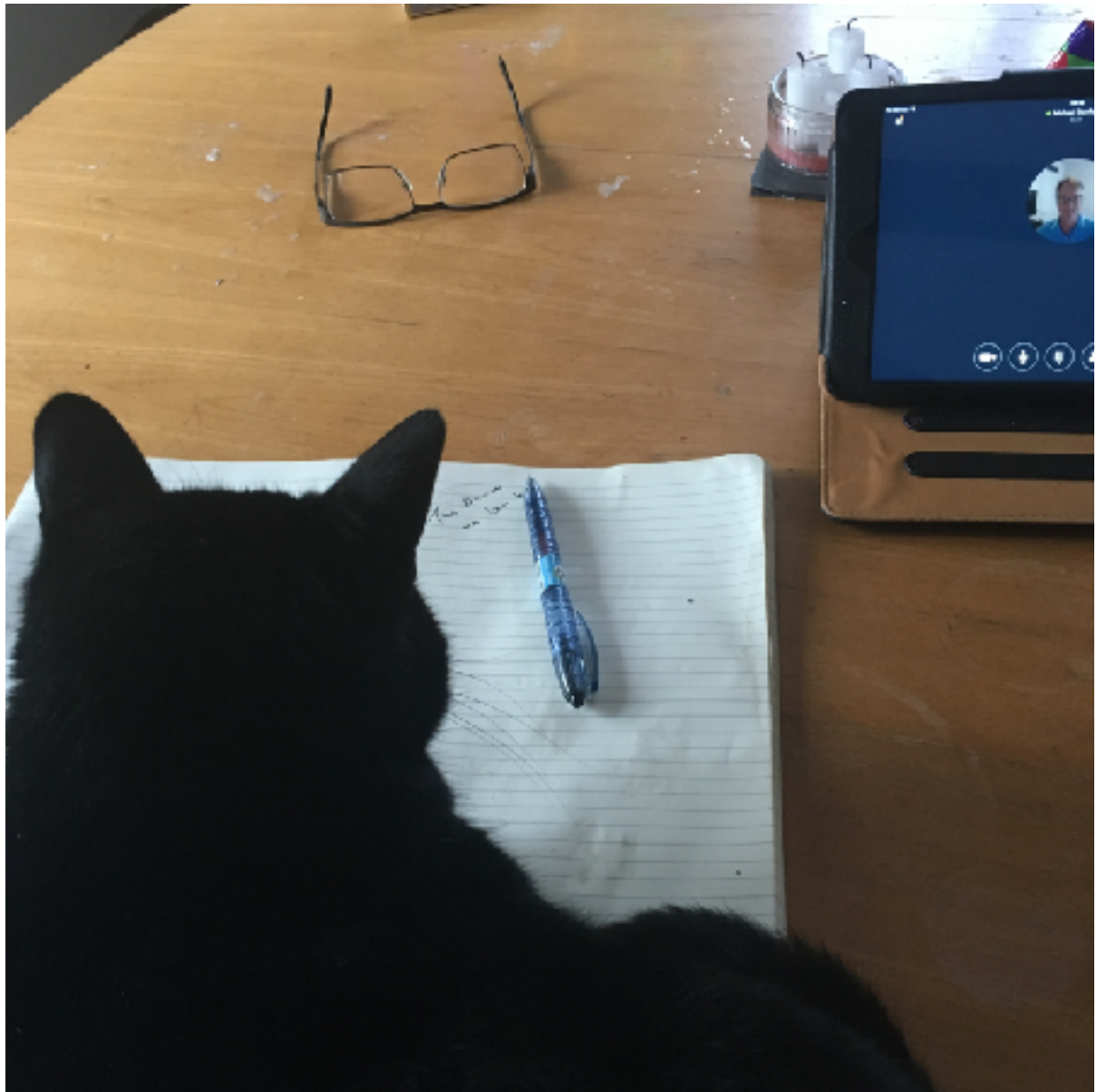




Untitled (Yosser). Crazy Wisdom Tree, Lingen, 2017.



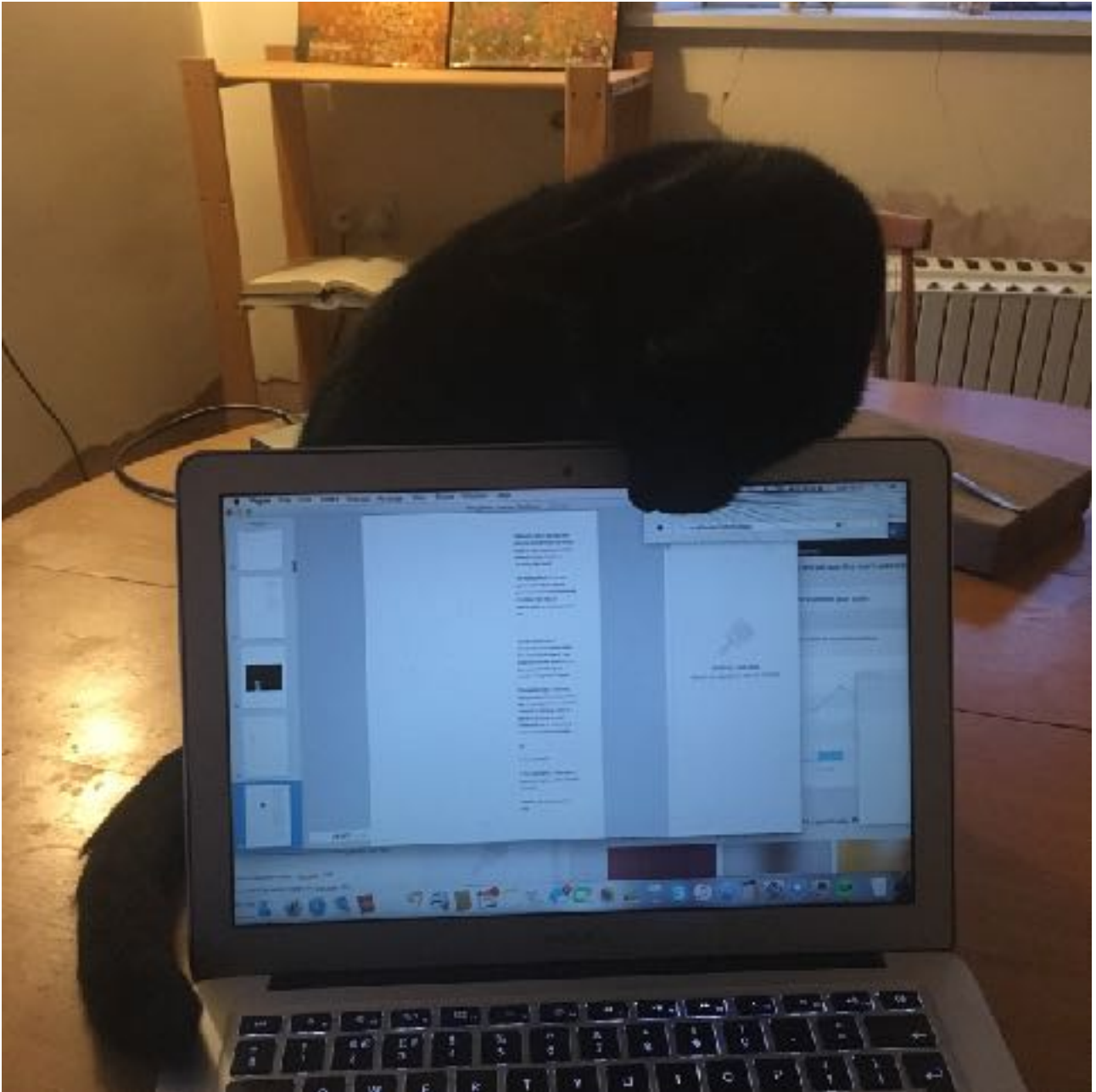
Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2017.



Untitled (Skype with Mike). Lingen, 2017.



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2016.



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2016.



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2016.

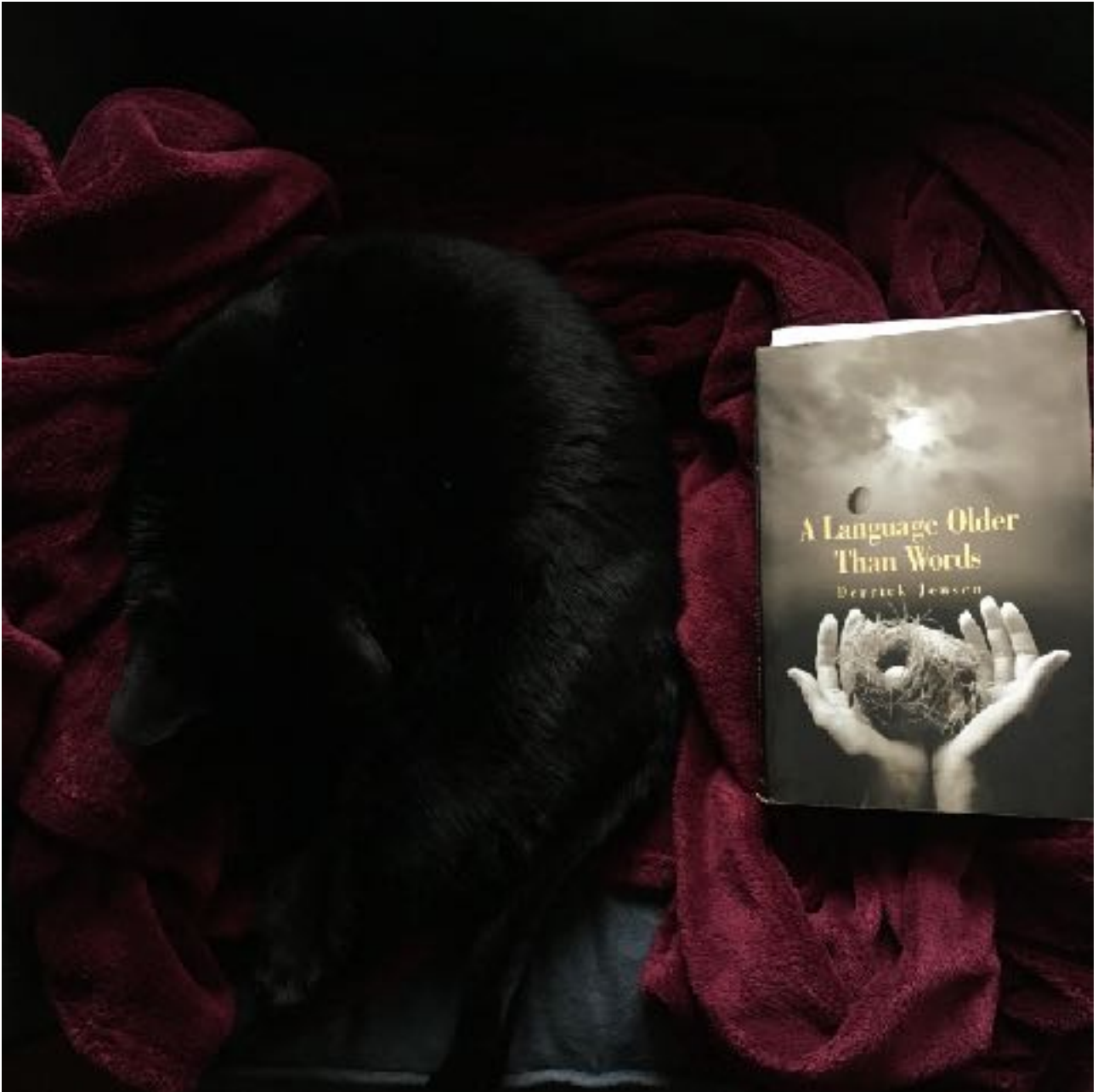


Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2017.



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2017.





Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2016.



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2016.



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2016.



Untitled (Yosser). Lingen, 2017.



## Chapter 10

***Limn:*** Altar

[Scintilla]

Thus isolated caves, wells, mountains, islands and similar places of withdrawal become attractive to the religious seeker who needs something more than a regular place of spiritual practice, who want to forge a deeper connection to the source of his or her beliefs. What may have started as a shaman's place of work, or a mystic's hideaway, become over time a place of communal healing or acknowledged connection.

William Ayot, from *Re-enchanting the Forest: Meaningful Ritual in a Secular World* <sup>299</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Ayot 2015; 69-70.



Untitled. Lingen, 2016.

## Prologue

*I've lost the plot a bit too... which brings me too.... I've gone over to the dark side again - moved from writing back to photos (blame that Kathy Skerritt), looking at inquiry as healing. Can I send you some stuff? Would welcome immediate impressions...*

-

*Yes, please send. You ok?*

-

*[...] I'm working with the patterns of nature in the environs of the stream that runs next to the house as a way of offsetting the worst of the stress (within me) of dealing with this situation, and a means of exploring my claim for quantum inquiry - in this case healing.*

*I'm particularly interested in the practice of mindfulness in the image making process, something I realise I've been doing since 1995. Only I didn't know what mindfulness was then.*

*Last week I felled an Alder tree across the stream; they need cropping and I use the wood for burning. After clearing up there was one large log that I left. Partly as a joke, I left the log as a bridge for Yosser, the cat, to cross the stream (he tends to take a rather perilous route across a fence).*

*Anyway, I had a coaching call with Kathy on Monday about my situation, she suggested making an altar, and doing something in a stream. <sup>300</sup> Perfect. I call the series the Alder Altar. I get up before dawn, and photograph both then, and at dusk. Sometimes other times as well. All done on my iPhone.*

*See what you think. (Some stuff is also on Instagram: @visionanalogue)*

[From email exchange with Katherine Semler, 1.04.16]

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<sup>300</sup> Easter Monday 2016.

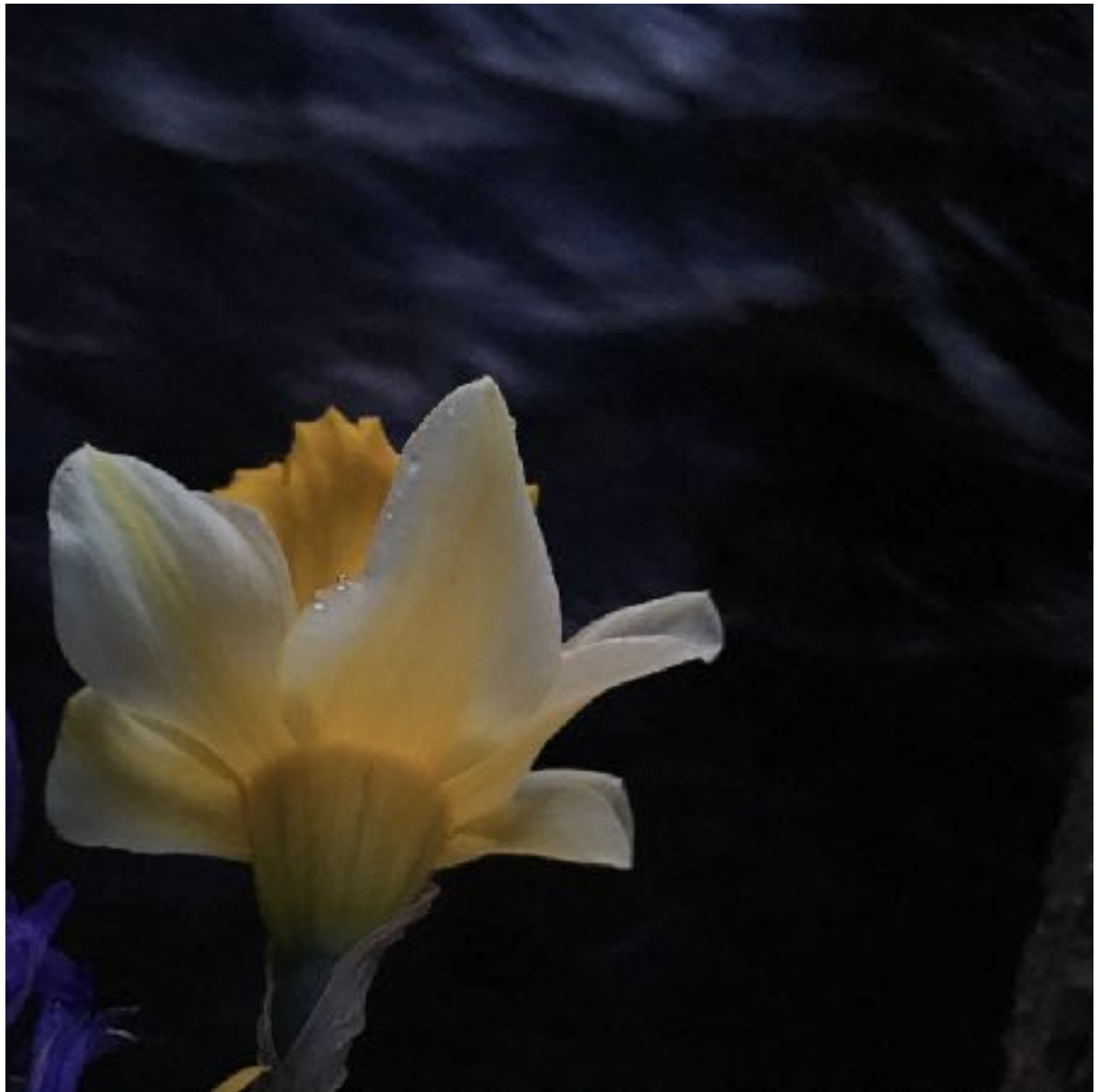














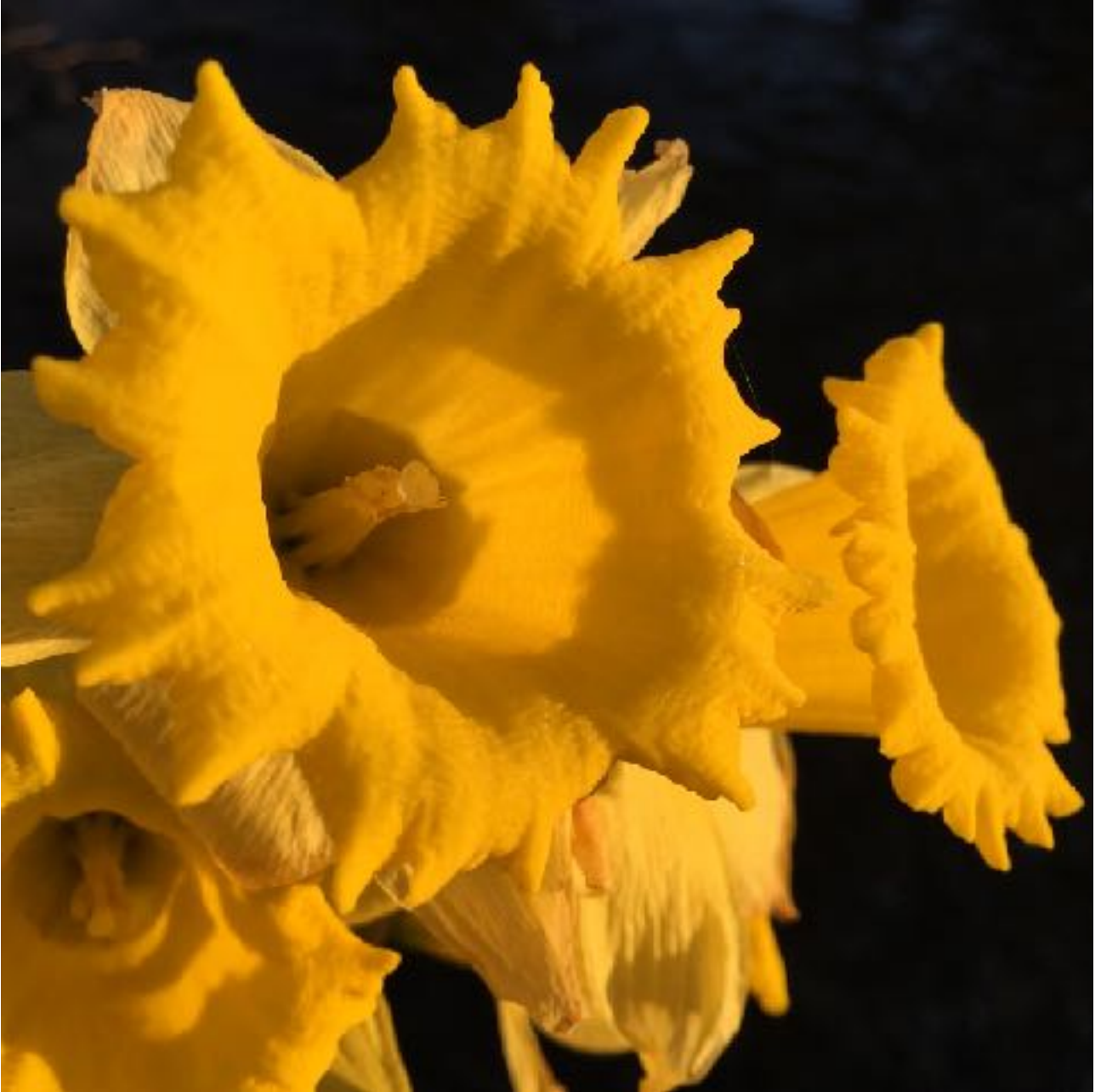






























## Chapter 11

### Peregrini: *Bike*

[Scintilla]<sup>301</sup>

When I closed my eyes I sensed the river streaming through me, and when I opened them again, I found that I was experiencing the river flowing towards me outwardly and through me inwardly at the same time. The more I did this, the more relaxed and free from anxiety I began to feel.

Henri Bortoft, from *Taking Appearance Seriously*.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> See Appendix 4 for fuller text.

<sup>302</sup> Bortoft 2012; 18.



Untitled. Near Le Havre, France, 2016.



Untitled. Timmelsjoch pass, Austria, 2016.



Untitled. Bled, Slovenia, 2016.

## Kranjska Gora, Slovenia: finding meaning

The meaning of the work can only be realised over time (though never finished), not because the 'temporal distance' is needed for us to get the meaning of the work 'into perspective,' but because it is time which brings the new situations and contexts within which the possibility of the work's meaning can come into expression more fully so that the work 'increases in being'.

From Henri Bortoft, *Taking Appearance Seriously*.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Bortoft, H. 2012; 122.



Monday: That morning I left Bled.

By the time I'd got to Jesenice I was back into rhythm of the bike and the bike trip. I'd seen Tanur on leaving. I was at the lights, stopped. She was on the other side, crossing on foot. Unmistakable with pink dreadlocks. I tooted, she didn't notice, or respond. Conference over then, back to the road, and a different movie.

On the road to Kranjska Gora I was definitely in Eastern Europe. On the way from the Austrian border with Slovenia, and into Bled, I hadn't noticed the 'eastern-ness' - now, on the Kranjska Gora road, there was a bleakness to the architecture and street furniture not seen in Bled or Radovljica. There was an emptiness to the roads too. And a 'non-Italian' style of driving, that was relaxing.

The riding and the regular thrum of the flat twin, and the at-one-ness state induced by well over 1000 miles under the wheels in just over a week gave space for rewinding the neurones; for seeking connections: between the ride and my inquiry; between my health and the identified *Toxic Academy (Global) Inc.*

I felt there to be some missing links. Encouraged by the resonances of the Bled conference I intended to deliberate these further, as the mountain roads unwound beneath my wheels, on the way back to Le Harvre; where I did not need to be until Thursday evening (it now being Monday). I figured that me, and the bike, and the spirit of Yosser, and the roads through the Dolomites, may reveal some answers, along with a book or two that I had with me. [...]

### **Cortina**

My maps had got wet. I'd left them out the night before and they were soaking, unusable. At Kranjska Gora, just before the Italian border, I stopped to get some new ones. I figured that both the maps and the fuel would be cheaper. Kranjska Gora is a skiing town. With new dry maps, and topped off with fuel, I left Kranjska Gora—and shortly after, Slovenia—and rolled into Italy. There was an autostrada floating about in the sky above me. I stuck to the highway. After a while I was joined by a British registered bike, we wove through the mountains together. As Monday mornings went, this was a good one. The weather had improved, the roads had dried, and I thought I might hook up with the other biker when he stopped for coffee, though it wasn't to be. I'd passed him. Eventually when I stopped just after mid day, he was nowhere to be seen. Then, just as I'd finished my polenta and sausage meat, they passed. He and his pillion waved. I waved back, but they had gone.

Back on the bike, I came across a cat, sprawling in the road; in the shade, Yosser-like. It was now hot in the sun, and the cat was shade-bathing, not present to the dangers. Being present, on a bike, especially on a long trip, is a pre-requisite. Yet strangely, such presence-ing, facilitates also a special kind of mind-wandering. It is a kind of lucid dreaming, around which insights may start to occur, if encouraged. I'd missed a turn, that was supposed to cut Cortina out altogether. So, for the second time in a week, I rolled into this town, hesitating. Whether to retrace my steps back over the pass to the South west; or to head north —still retracing—but then onto the West, along the same valley that, if followed eastwards, goes back to Slovenia. I got spat out onto a North-ish road.

I stopped for fuel and ice cream, checked the map. north, then west is was. Maybe back to Timmelsjoch, maybe the Brenner, maybe the Stelvio. We'd see. The roads were unfolding like a story: maybe this way, maybe that. And when looked back upon, there is a kind of reverse engineered inevitability: A bit like dealing with trauma then. The land or trauma is a kind of reverse-engineered, storied reality, that becomes more real than the present. The poem *Performance Review*, revisits a story. It was written, in a a pub garden in Llandrindod Wells, after seeing Angela, the psychologist that I work with. It took about 15 mins to write, and came in one hit. Being present in that story, has led me towards this one, with my body keeping the score: re-wired for persecution; ready to fire off at the clop of the post hitting the floor. Safer, by far, to be riding a bike across the alps, and pondering the resonances of mental illnesses, in organisations, and in families. The difference being, that on a bike, in the moment, you can alter your reality. I started to play with the idea of revisiting trauma, while riding. Including the real and present potential trauma of losing my home, and Yosser. Anxiety eluded me, which was interesting. Biking was again, proving to be grounding: *'Visiting the past in therapy should only be done while people are, biologically speaking, firmly rooted in the present, and feeling as calm, safe and grounded as possible.'*<sup>304</sup> This was my state when I wrote *Performance Review*. This was now my state, on my bike, flowing back to wards the Austrian border. Van Der Kolk goes on:

("Grounded" means that you can feel your butt in your chair, see the light coming through the window, feel the tension in your calves, and hear the wind stirring in the tree outside.) Being anchored in the present while revisiting the trauma opens the possibility of knowing that the terrible events belong to the past. For that to happen, the brains watchtower, cook, and timekeeper need to be online. Therapy won't work as long as people keep being pulled back into the past.<sup>305</sup>

The road ended at a confusing roundabout, that wanted to filter me onto an autostrada/ Bahn. It was 4pm I stopped, to look at the map, in a kind of car park affair that looked like it was a service station, but wasn't. I was at the South end of the Brenner pass. It was hot. I took out my soggy camping kit to dry, which it did in about 10 minutes flat. I got myself orientated. I could still head North, towards the Austrian border, and stay off the Autobahn. It looked like I could then head east, towards the Stelvio pass, hanging on to the South side of the Tirol. There is a deep aesthetic quality to a motorbike trip; as there is with oppression, in organisations, in families. Some dots were beginning to join up as I meandered north wards in the shadowed valley, past defences that were put there in the war to keep the allies at bay. (So the Italians were fair weather fiends of the Third Reich then?)

At the head of the valley there was an option to hang a left, before the Brenner proper. Jaufenpass. Ought to run in the general direction of the Stelvio. Let's give it a whirl. Something about the rises on this pass seemed more serious; double bends that you couldn't see all the way around; big contrast between light and shade; penetrating from the glare to the shade was impossible. I wended my way to the top, by now at one with the bike again, wondering about where I might stay.

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<sup>304</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 70.

<sup>305</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 70.

## **Jaufenpass, Süd Tirol, Italy: a day off; reflections on journey**

All happy families are like one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

From *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy



Untitled. Jaufenpass, Italy, 2016.

## Evening

At the top of the pass there was a cafe, and a biker laying supine on a bench, in the lee of the strong northerly wind that was blowing. I paused, took some photos, sat briefly at the benches (this is a ski cafe). Then left. It felt all wrong, too high, too exposed. Lovely view, but not a place to pause.

I descended the south-facing side of the pass, back towards Italy, and the sunshine. A few bends down there was a gasthaus, the Alpen Rose. It had a few bikes parked outside. Still didn't feel right, I felt in need of a proper haven.

Then I passed one set back, maybe 150 yards off the pass. It looked sheltered, faced south. At the next hairpin I trundled into the overshoot, turned around and backtracked, turning right of the pass, halting under a roofed area, a perfect bike shed.

*Parlo Inglese?* I asked a bunch of young folk sat outside; they were all drinking beer, apart from the girl.

'A little', she answered in perfect english.<sup>306</sup> Then I noticed that Katya's companions were all speaking (Austrian) German. I had found a liminal space, I felt that I'd found a little bit of home, in the Italian Tirol too.

'Good'. I had found my space for pause and reflection a day early. There was a sauna next door to my room. It was my mum's eighty-eighth birthday. I called her, I was looking out over the valley that falls away to wards Merano. I was due a day off, my mum agreed, so it must be so.

I pulled some kit inside, laid out all my old maps to dry. The wet Monday morning in Slovenia seemed a different life ago. (Another quality of motorcycle journeys?)

Home. Home from home. Secure base. Refuges for organisational refugees.

The trip was becoming a becoming. A sense-making of the becoming too.

Becoming, in a strange way, more deeply connected to our home in Herefordshire; feeling less estranged from S; becoming taken seriously on the international conference circuit; re-becoming a transcontinental biker; re-becoming a maker of artefacts; re-becoming a teacher: becoming a traveling-healer. Becoming into a different kind of love, and a home-coming to self. In *The Fruitful Darkness*, Joan Halifax expresses it thus:

We go into the darkness, we seek initiation, in order to know directly how the roots of all beings are tied together: how we are related to all things, how this relationship expresses itself in terms of interdependence, and finally how all phenomena abide within one another.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Over the next two days I had several conversations with the girl, whose name was Katya; she rarely stumbled in English, and I recall no mistakes.

<sup>307</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 137.

And:

it is important for us to discover directly this ground of reality, this web of mutuality. The experience of interconnectedness, however one might come to discover it, changes how we perceive the world, and thereby all our relations with the phenomenal world become an expression of our extended self, a self with no boundaries.<sup>308</sup>

So why would a motorbike trip, alone through the alps, and several countries, to eastern Europe, lead to enhanced awareness of self-as-interconnected? Joan Halifax uses the term *nonduality*:

What I mean by nonduality is that we are intimately connected; in fact, we are intimate. We abide in each other. Nonduality may well be a perception and experience that is revealed only to the innocent.<sup>309</sup>

Was there an arising, or re-arising, of innocence that was taking me back to my self on these winding roads up and down mountainsides of the Süd Tirol? I spoke to my mother. It was 5th September, her birthday. She was delighted to hear from me, and encouraged me to stopover another day.

### **Tuesday. Morning**

In the morning I picked up a note from a friend that presumed to know the state of play between me and S, but didn't. It contained advice, which I found irritating, and also way off beam. I phoned S from the balcony as the sun rose on the mountains: *nonduality* in action. I vowed to ignore further notes from that particular source. I told Katya at breakfast that I would like to stay another day.

I took *The Body Keeps the Score* into the spa.

After a sauna, I started to delve: into trauma; into the self; into resonances and neurology and antidotes. Gradually, over the day, the relevance of the bike trip; the poetry-from-trauma in *Performance Review*; the photographs and glimpses of *Alder Altar* and *Daily Flowers*—coalesced into a realisation: I was coming home to what Joan Halifax refers to as: '[a] self that is co-extensive with all phenomena—what has been called by the deep ecologists the ecological self.'<sup>310</sup>

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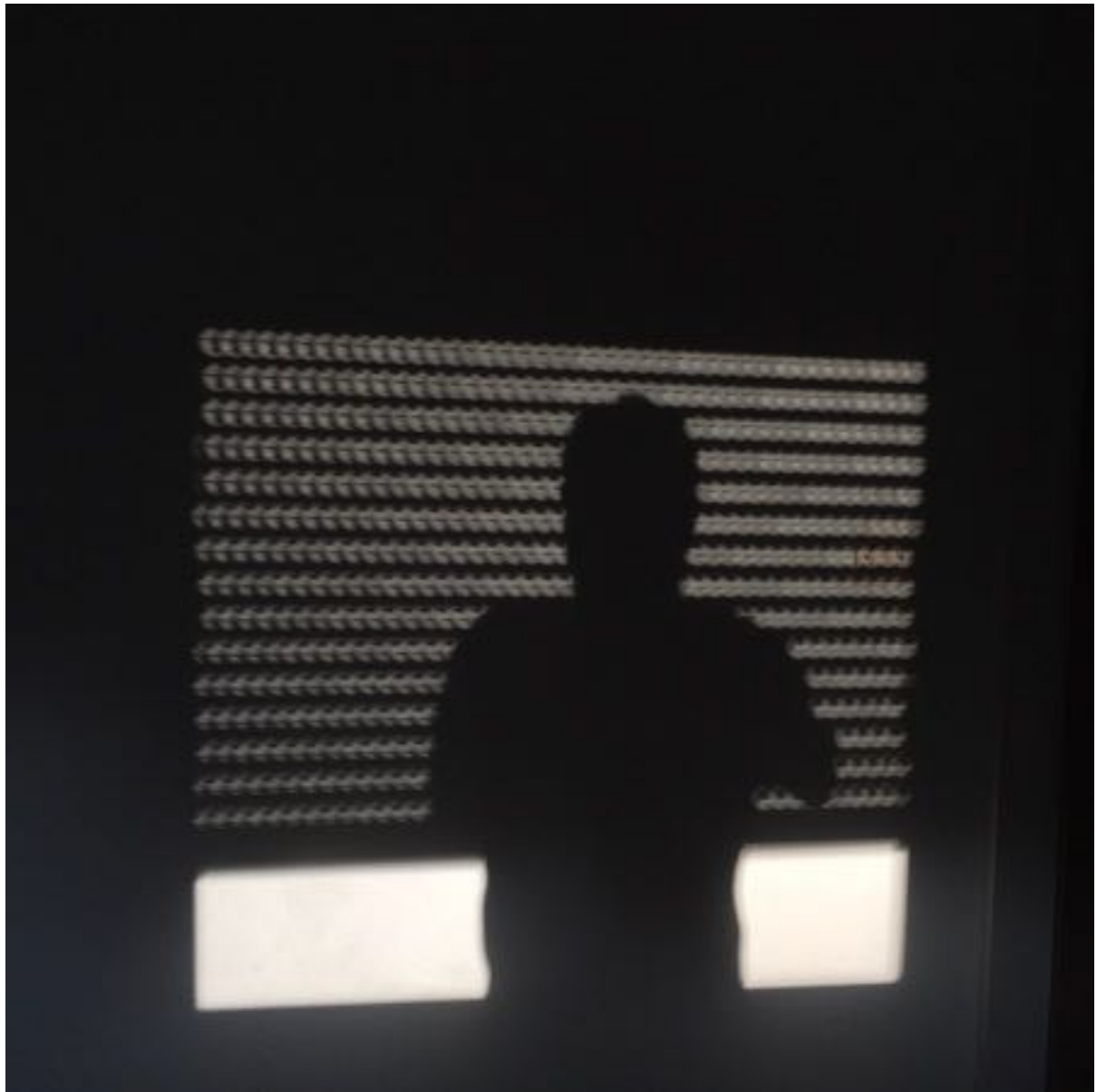
<sup>308</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 138 (see also 152).

<sup>309</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 150.

<sup>310</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 160.



Untitled. Stelvio Pass, Italy 2016.



Untitled. Lure, France 2016.





Untitled. Le Havre, France, 2016.



Untitled (me, Yosser, my bike). Lingen, 2016. <sup>311</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Photo by SB

Everybody has a geography that can be used for change. That is why we travel to far off places. Whether we know it or not, we need to renew ourselves in territories that are fresh and wild. We need to come home through the body of alien lands. For some, these journeys of change are taken intentionally and mindfully. They are pilgrimages, occasions when the Earth heals us directly.

Joan Halifax, from *The Fruitful Darkness*.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Halifax 1993; 51.



Untitled (sunrise) . Nr Witney-onWye, 2017.



Untitled . Nr Shelsley, 2017.



Untitled . Manchester, 2017.



Untitled . Liverpool, 2017.



Untitled. 2017.



### **The Idol**

Someone told Uwais el-Quarni that a certain dervish sat on a tomb, dressed in a shroud and weeping.

Qarni said:

‘Tell him that the method has become an idol; he must transcend the practice, for it is an obstacle.’<sup>313</sup>

Dhun-Nun

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<sup>313</sup> Shah, I. 2015(2); 217 Note: This is in the section meeting with Khidr: an ‘unseen guide’ of the Sufis



Untitled (night-trunking). Nr Whitchurch, 2017.



Untitled (night-trunking). Nr Droitwich, 2017.



Untitled (night-trucking). Nr Whitchurch, 2017.



Untitled (night-trucking). Bitteswell, Nr Lutterworth, 2017.



Untitled (night-trucking). Wakefield, 2017.



Untitled (night-trucking). Lymm, 2017.



Untitled (night-trunking). Droitwich, 2017.





Untitled (night-trunking). Pembridge, 2017.



Untitled (night-trunking). Whitchurch, 2018.



Untitled. Oswestry, 2018.



Untitled (before sunrise). Whitchurch, 2018.



Untitled. Wales, Christmas Day 2018.



Untitled (night-trunking). Chepstow, 2017.

[Scintilla]

Most pilots can look at any airplane and study it for a while and conclude: "I can fly that." But when most pilots look a Pitts, they say, "How could anyone fly that thing?" Just sitting there it looks as if it's breaking the rules.

Laurence Gonzales



Untitled. Nr Cockshutt, 2017.





Untitled (after flying). Gloucester, 2017.



Untitled (after flying). Gloucester, 2018.



Untitled (transit flight). Shropshire, 2019.



Untitled (after flying). Gloucester, 2017.

## Chapter 12

*Imago*: Flowers ii

[Scintilla]

I want to raise up the magic world all round me and live quietly and strongly there.

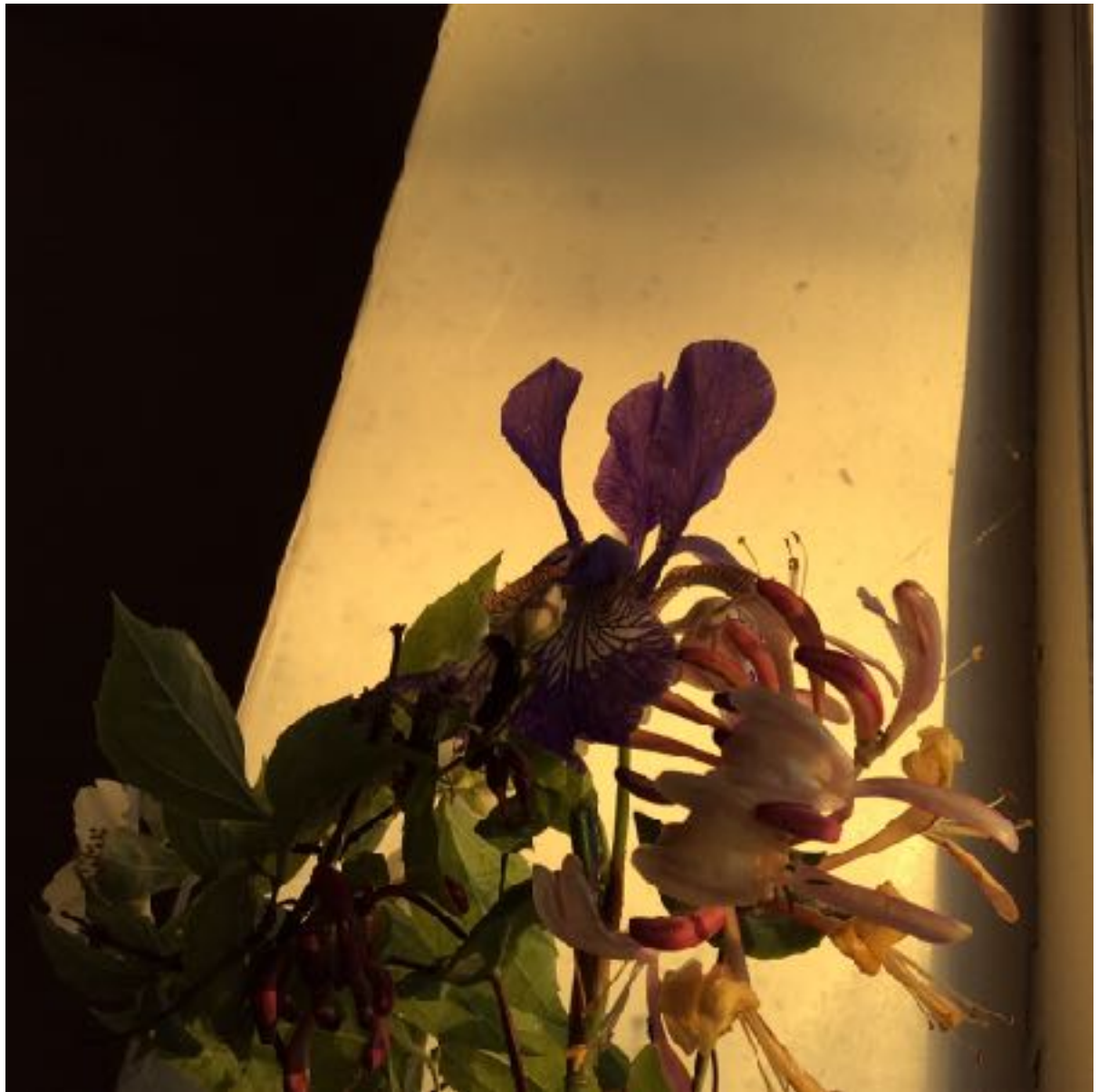
Virginia Wolf



















[Scintilla]

As if all there were, were, fire-flies  
And from them you could infer the meadow.

Rebecca Elson





















## Part IV: Gaze

I believe I will never quite know. Though I play at the edges of knowing, truly I know our part is not knowing.

Mary Oliver





Untitled. Lingen 2016.

## Chapter 13

***Nam-shrub***: on *magical* forces

You are the universe expressing itself as a human for a while.

Eckhart Tolle



Untitled (after sunset, occluded front). Oswestry, 2018.

***Mysterium transeuntum.***

Not all violence and abuse is physical. The divination, and reporting of, these phenomena—as we have seen—is susceptible to a poetic, imaginal holding: available to be re-energised. We can play with dark energies and create light, or light-ness. This is helpful in Imago recovery. The context for the events depicted in my poems—*The Grooming Room*; *The Direct-Debit Debbie Quintet*—and the illnesses referred to throughout development of this thesis have commonalities: unhealthy relationships to work and within families; abuse of process; unexpressed Imagos. The context as explored in images made on my iPhone are similarly part of a practice: a healing, becoming, process. (Deconstruction of these emergent practices requiring a perspective and provenance more theological [spiritual] than vanilla action-research. I found this surprising.) In my case this *unhealthiness* extended to a protracted period without much paid work—certainly nothing resembling a job—while at the same time receiving and un-earthing Imagos buried by successive trauma. Mathew Fox observes:

[...] not having a vehicle through which to express our blessing—the basic meaning of work—results in psychological violence to the self. The artist within, the *imago dei*, cannot express itself. <sup>314</sup>

And:

Work can be a place of irritation and misunderstanding, of competition and of frenzy. It can rob our spirit and oppress our souls. In short work can be an authentic experience of the *via negativa*. It can lead us to a dark night of the soul. <sup>315</sup>

*The Work* can be seen on one level as toolkit for repair of the soul (conventional, established processes procedures and therapies having failed); the *phenomenal toolkit*, as it evolved in various *Ateliers*, born of necessity. ‘Work’ as in job, became my work, became *The Work*: discovery of method and process for recovery; connecting to the other than human; writing; image-making. We might regard changes—illnesses, life-shifts—as dissolutions of identity. Especially if we are unable to rid them of—or dissociate them from—minor pathologies of the soul.

Playing—especially with phenomena and the phenomenal—is one way that I have discovered of doing this. In the conversion of Work into *The Work*—by playful, experimental, peripheral, means—transitions have morphed fearful pathologies into more fruitful, layered, holistic, ways of being and seeing. The picture at the beginning of this Revet was made while truck driving on a Saturday afternoon in December, during the heavy rains of a warm occlusion, at a cheese warehouse, on an industrial estate just outside Oswestry. It was a moment of playfulness in an otherwise unpromising situation. Especially with regard to aesthetics: I was about to go outside and get cold and wet changing trailers. Yet I was curious to see what the effect would be of photographing through the rain and the windshield.

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<sup>314</sup> Fox, M 1995; 9.

<sup>315</sup> Fox, M 1995; 32.

The situation was made a little more odd, aesthetically speaking, by having original transmissions from Apollo 8 on the radio in the cab as cosmological background noise. Making pictures—even in that situation, especially in that kind of situation, is a discipline of transitions: an example of one way that Work may become *The Work*: may become a more ascetic, mystical, spiritual undertaking. Working with the aesthetics of unpromising situations seems to have become a matter of ascetic, aesthetic, discipline and practice for me. Work made me ill. *The Work* helps me recover; lowers my chances of becoming ill again. There is still work to do. Yet it is a shift, away from work-as-woundedness; work-as-harming-the-other; work-as-self-harm; work-as-lamentation: '*We are addicted to work rather than mystics-at-work. If we are not doing healthy work, we are setting ourselves up for compulsive living, for unhappiness, for cynicism, even for heart attacks—indeed for work as lamentation.*'<sup>316</sup> Contact with the phenomenal pathologies of work and the workplace—especially workplace bullying, presenteeism and workaholism—is to connect to the *via negativa*. Fox states: '*The via negativa—the shadow side of work—is indeed a school for learning wisdom.*'<sup>317</sup> No wonder: That we become ill. That our relationships fail. That our organisations and workplaces become dysfunctional, toxic. That we die early.

Fox proposes that our inner work may be non-action; that we operate at the level of being: '*Non-action is expressed in two ways: awe and enchantment; and suffering and nothingness. We do not make awe, awe comes to us. We do not manufacture suffering, suffering comes to us.*'<sup>318</sup> [that]: '*Authentic work flows from authentic being.*'<sup>319</sup> Which raises a question, at least on behalf of the workers in the fridge-freezer behind the truck, maybe for all of us: '*After all, who wants a mystic (the divine child in each of us wanting to play in the universe) fouling up the machine?*'<sup>320</sup> And that: '*The machine era did not honour beauty as an important philosophical or theological category; efficiency counted more. [...] Since it was anthropocentric, taking humans as the measure of truth, it was incapable of connecting us to the inner work of the universe.*'<sup>321</sup>

Margaret Wheatley attributes this malaise to attempts at Newtonian, linear, local, mechanistic patterning and modelling—in a non-mechanical (human-animal), non-local, non-linear, Quantum universe:

I am weary of the lists we make, the time projections we spin out, the breaking apart and putting back together of problems. It does not work. The lists and charts we make do not capture experience. They only tell of our desire to control reality that is slippery, evasive and perplexing beyond comprehension. Like *bewildered shamans* we perform rituals passed down to us, hoping they will perform miracles. [...] If the world is not a machine, our approaches cannot work.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Fox, M. 1995; 34.

<sup>317</sup> Fox, M. 1995; 40.

<sup>318</sup> Fox, M. 1995; 56.

<sup>319</sup> Fox, M. 1995; 81.

<sup>320</sup> Fox, M. 1995; 84.

<sup>321</sup> Fox, M. 1995; 84.

<sup>322</sup> Wheatley, M. 1999; 27-28 emphasis mine.

At one point in the next section a fellow ADOC participant inquires: *what has shifted for me, how am I different, what has changed for me in the way I see myself, the world and others?* <sup>323</sup> My shorthand response: *my access to those parts of my being that respond to both awe and enchantment is more fully alive; I perceive things differently: more deeply, more fully, more peripherally. I am able to explore these in imagery—imaginally—in ways that I can show to others. I get to show or read a poem or piece of text; I show pictures. These small acts elicit responses, open up conversations.*

Access points to inner work are free at the point of use, readily available: *'Our creativity is not a cute thing for weekend dabblers in the arts; it lies at the essence of who we are. We are all creators, and therefore we all have work—good work—awaiting us.'* <sup>324</sup> Attuning to this *essence of who we are*, lies at the heart of my practice; of opening and enablement. It is a practice of the margins, the periphery:

But the conflict need not be a negative thing; indeed it is part of the journey of the *via negativa*. "Only through his inner conflict, the artist gains the courage, the vigour, and the foresight to grasp the impending change of attitude before others do so, to feel it more intensely, and to shape it formally." <sup>325 326</sup>

In my becoming ill, in my recovery, in my witnessing of a loved one becoming ill, I found—albeit reluctantly at first—the impetus to perceive and address underlying issues: *via negativa* (the illnesses) became *via arbora*: an aesthetic of unfolding and healing; revelation of Imago, of identity. We ignore our '*vias*' at our peril—our *via negativa*; *via positiva*; *via creativa*; *via transformativa*; *via arbora*—all serve us, keep us grounded: artistically, spiritually aware. Engaging with the mystery of the periphery is helpful; luckily this is largely a matter of aesthetics.

### ***Mysterium periphericum.***

I made my photos at the *Alder Altar* at the edges of the day. I created a ritual of the peripheral and penumbral.

I make my trucking images at the edges of the day too. It was, is, I have to say, easy. As my awareness deepened I followed the light, or the water, or Yosser.

This was a big shift: letting go one kind of *knowing*, to reveal another, more ethereal, kind. At the time I wondered of its relevance to organisational change. I still do. In the second part of this *Revet* I endeavour to pin that down, and relate to the upcoming section on phenomenology.

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<sup>323</sup> See Chapter 15 *Flights on fictional planes*.

<sup>324</sup> Fox, M. 1995; 115.

<sup>325</sup> Fox, M. 1995; 115.

<sup>326</sup> Rank, O. 1975; 361-362, quoted in Fox, M. 1995; 115.

In his paper *Action Research as Spiritual Practice*, Peter Reason speaks of the work of creation spirituality as being the work of prophets:

Fox uses the term 'prophecy' here: we are all prophets (just as we are all mystics), and the prophet is one who interferes:

*To be compassionate is also to be prophetic... The prophet interferes with the injustice, the unnecessary pain, that rains on the earth and its creatures when humans neglect justice and compassion. That prophetic call to interfere with injustice resides in all of us.*<sup>327</sup>

These four paths of creation spirituality can be seen as a journey from the joy of original blessing, through the darkness of pain and suffering into creativity and on to working for justice in the world.<sup>328</sup> In this sense, each path negates, grows out of, and builds on the previous.<sup>329</sup>

My path, my practice—the *via arbora*—grew, albeit unwittingly, out of Fox's (and Reason's). I didn't initially see that this practice was germane to wider practices within the action research community. My work—as a prophet, an interferer with injustice—began on *The Leviathan*, continued with my works as outlined in *Atelier*, and the *Direct-Debit Debbie Quintet*: in my days in the stream I was drawing spells, with light, being transgressive. This evolved, into what I term *Action-Phenomenology*. That is, the *practice* of an apparently esoteric set existential philosophical *theories*: what phenomenology *looks* like for those who either don't wish to engage with Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty; or how phenomenology may *work* in practice "*for people who aren't content to leave phenomenology 'on the page' as a fancy idea, but want to know what to DO about it.*"<sup>330</sup> Peter Reason states:

So both for both creation spirituality and action research the consummation of our endeavours is practical, and the purpose is to contribute to the well being and flourishing of humans and all living beings. Fox describes this notion of flourishing in terms of compassion and justice.

But flourishing requires transformation in another way, transformation of the mindsets we hold, the ways in which we frame our world, indeed in the very process of framing itself.<sup>331</sup>

Working at, or beyond, the edge of my own capabilities and knowing—denuded by illnesses, and the malign influence of *Direct-Debit Debbie*—a new way of experiencing the world, of practicing, found me. By living and operating on this phenomenal edge this *prophetic* seeing—of, into, through, beyond—became visited upon me: I didn't recognise this as *Action Research*. Or as being about organisational change. It didn't look, or read, like anything I'd seen before. It appeared alien, as prophecies sometimes do.

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<sup>327</sup> Fox, M. 1991; 23.

<sup>328</sup> The four paths: *via negativa*; *via positiva*; *via creativa*; *via transformativa*.

<sup>329</sup> Reason, P. 2000; 6.

<sup>330</sup> From personal communication from Paula Aamli 3.6.19.

<sup>331</sup> Reason, P. 2000; 17.

It was, and is, in a way, profound flourishing: the flourishing of the spirit in the face of illnesses, adversity and malign influences. Stepping out of a frame, I created space for a new one to emerge. Not yet fully formed, it does not look like much of the standard models Action Research or Inquiry: the continuance, perhaps expansion, of a heretical pursuit. What started as a fascination—with process; with aesthetics—became, stealthily, something more. What I was witnessing—apart from externally—was an internal phase-change: my internal boundaries had shifted, allowing a greater degree and depth of discernment. Margaret Wheatley notes: *'The boundary lives within the system, becoming visible as it explores its space of possibilities. The order is already present, it has now become discernible.'*<sup>332</sup> To be a prophet—a perceiver of, and interferer with, patterns—necessitates being, living, on the edge: being, or becoming, peripheral. This helps with discernment, and with attending allowing flourishing, rather than illness, to occur on the edge of the patterns of the chaos: *Action Phenomenology* indeed. That boundaries live within the system has implications: for the sacred adventurer; the inquirer into the other-worldly. This implies a participatory world view: processes non-linear; iterations the method of the Action-Phenomenologist: *Iteration launches a system on a journey that visits both chaos and order.*<sup>333</sup>

Organisations and professions predicated on predicability and order, often—maybe always at some point—exhibit the quantities of non-linearity and chaos: patterns are recurrent and iterative; results and outcomes unpredictable. The role of the peripheral is that is often a good place to both observe—and if required, play with—patterns. Margaret Wheatley writes: *I believe that fractals have direct application for how we understand organisations. All organisations are fractal in nature. I can't think of any organisation that isn't deeply patterned with self-similar behaviours evident everywhere. [...] These recurring patterns are what many call the culture of the organisation.*<sup>334</sup> Organisations and professions continue to operate as though the world is linear, outcomes are predictable, cultures are controllable. (Action) phenomenologists—*sacred-adventurers; prophets; magi; dervishes; goddesses; ascetics; mystics; alchemists; angels*—may beg to differ: Interfering with patterns, from the periphery: *'It is the nature of life to organise into patterns. We can develop different patterns of behaviour. We slowly become who we want to be.'*<sup>335</sup> The playing with patterns is an internal matter too—'the boundary lives within the system'—in the putative realm of *Action-Phenomenology*: we need to pay attention to our own internal re-patterning; practice of deep self-care. Fox notes: *'Artists have been most deeply wounded by the paradigm of the industrial age. [...] And artists have paid a dear price as well—identified by society as crazed or addicted, denigrated as beatnik or hippie.'*<sup>336</sup>

Artists, ascetics, mystics, magi, dervishes sing the world into being as they wish it to be: other interventions—legal, political, psychological—having proven binary, limiting. Working with the peripheral (Sacred), binary, desecration narratives dissolve. We, they, find our phenomenal, magical, voices: our *Nam-shrub*.

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<sup>332</sup> Wheatley, M. 1999; 118 emphasis in original.

<sup>333</sup> Wheatley, M. 1999; 122-123.

<sup>334</sup> Wheatley, M. 1999;128.

<sup>335</sup> Wheatley, M. 1999;130.

<sup>336</sup> Fox, M. 1995; 207.



## Chapter 14

### Studium ii: *reflections*

If you would keep quiet, clear of memories and expectations,  
you would be able to discern the beautiful pattern of events.  
It is your restlessness that causes chaos.

N. Maharaj



Untitled. Linggen, 2016.

## Reflexive critique:

Post Bled I read *In an Unspoken Voice*, by Peter Levine; wherein he refers extensively to the embodiment of trauma: that it's not just a brain or even mind thing; trauma exists in the body too. Healing must encompass, or even start in, the body in order to be effective: motorcycle riding, walking amongst flowers, and standing in a stream at dawn, must fit the bill. Peter Levine outlines the situation thus: *Many of us humans, unfortunately, have become alienated from this innate capacity for resilience and self-healing, this, as we shall explore, has made us vulnerable to being overwhelmed and traumatized.*<sup>337</sup> And that:

Humans, in contrast to animals, frequently remain stuck in a kind of limbo, not fully reengaging in life after experiencing threat as overwhelming terror or horror. In addition, they exhibit a propensity for freezing in situations where a non-traumatized individual might only sense danger or even feel some excitement.<sup>338</sup>

Out on the bike, is for me what Peter Levine might term a form of '*somatic experiencing*'; transformation of trauma, a re-negotiation.<sup>339</sup> From the inside it feels more like a *re-engineering*—re-shaping—of mind, body, brain, spirit. Riding the bike a primal, grounding experience: swooping through the landscape; feeling the land through bottom and thighs; the tug and buffet of the air: *Since the body enacts all of these survival options, it is the body's narration that therapists must address in order to understand these reactions and to mobilize them as transforming trauma.*<sup>340</sup>

Those 6 months of intensive, experiential, experimental inquiry—visceral aesthetic experiences—laid the foundations for the emergence of a theosophy of change. Riding from Bled—considering Bortoft and Van der Kolk; reflecting through the lenses of Strenger and Levine upon my return—led me towards a theory of Imago: repression; recognition; recovery; unearthing, unfolding.

Imago work as an active extension of a phenomenological inquiry; as practical extension of the underlying philosophy of phenomenology: work of power, non-linear, often non-ordinary, non-local. This became true of [mental] health: my own sanity either returned, was restored or was in adverse circumstances retained, by deployment of non-linear existential practices. Various ad hoc *Ateliers*—bike; *Alder Altar*; various Flower Gardens—formed healing spaces. Working with toxic energies in this way is confusing, sometimes frightening, for outsiders; putative adversaries; de-railers: *'He's talking about a tug on the senses, to being tugged out of himself. Yep, we lose ourselves, our old sense of self replaced by an infusion of the world, the senses so wildly renewed. And for some, this is too frightening.*<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Levine, P. 2010; 27.

<sup>338</sup> Levine, P. 2010; 24.

<sup>339</sup> Levine, P. 2010; 74-74.

<sup>340</sup> Levine, P. 2010; 49.

<sup>341</sup> Sewell, L. 1999; 191.

Showing up as yourself in your own life can be dispiriting and upsetting for others. My *phenomenological practice* shifted noticeably: from a nice-to-have, thesis-underscoring tick-box; to a radical practice of Identity-recognition, recovery, and shift. It had become agentic: “Agency” is the technical term for the feeling of being in charge of your life: knowing where you stand, knowing that you have a say in what happens to you, knowing that you have some ability to shape your circumstances.’<sup>342</sup>

I formed an appreciation of *seeing*—**Sensing**—as a physical, psychical, radical act: known since my 1990’s self-healing practice with Leica in Rectory Wood, now *deliberate* practice: Merleau-Ponty outlines this *Sensing*:

The sensible quality only appears when, rather than abandoning my whole gaze to the world, I turn towards this gaze itself and I wonder *what I am actually seeing*; the quality does not figure in the natural exchange between my vision and the world. [...] This attitude makes the spectacle disappear: the colours that I see through the reduction screen, or those that the painter obtains by squinting, are no longer the colours-of-objects—the colour of the walls or the colour of the paper—but rather coloured areas, although not without some thickness and together vaguely located on the same *fictional plane*. [...] Thus, there is a natural attitude of vision where I join with my gaze [...] *I untie the link between my vision and the world or between myself and the world in order to catch it in the act and to describe it.*<sup>343</sup>

It is at these levels of extensive and co-extensive sensing that the phenomena of Imago recovery; of recovering identity, happens; due to the reciprocal nature—the subject-object exchange of energies—attendant to *The Imaginal Gaze*.

The gaze that co-exists on that same *fictional plane*, defined by Merleau-Ponty. At the extreme becoming a highly precise experience of *a modification of the entire body*. An experience that if attenuated or disrupted by separation—from person, place, being, or object for instance—pathology of body-mind, trauma, ensues: *From within this attitude, at the same time that the world is pulverized into sensible qualities, the natural unity of the perceiving subject is shattered and I become unaware of myself as the subject of the visual field.*<sup>344</sup>

I discuss this at greater length in the next chapter, my quest, and question, being:

*How to work with the invisible, the intangible, in order to effect tangible results for others in terms of identity recognition, recovery un-earthing and un-folding?*

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<sup>342</sup> Van Der Kolk B2014; 95.

<sup>343</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012; 272-273 emphasis mine.

<sup>344</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012; 273 emphasis mine.

## Chapter 15

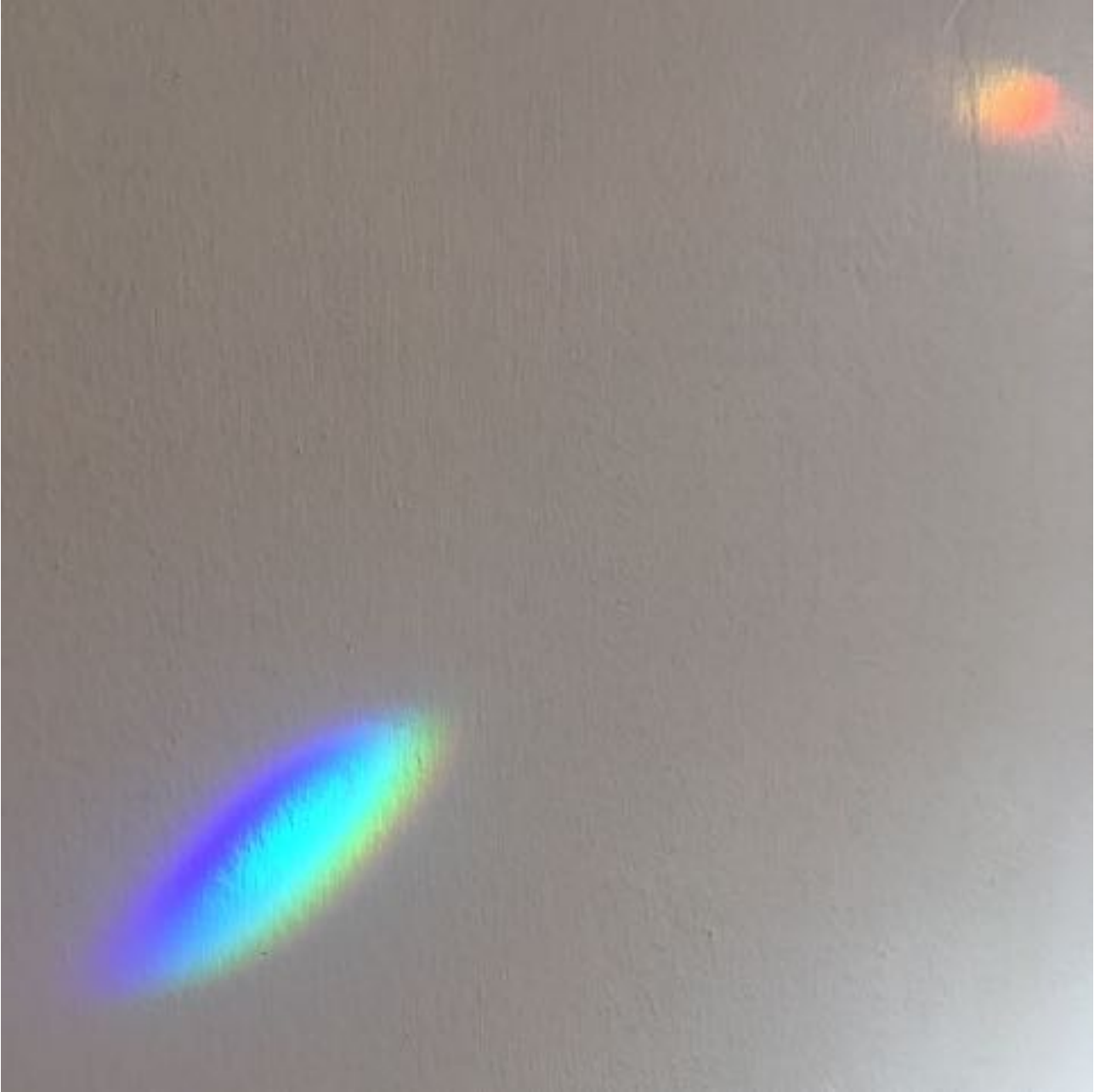
### ***Flights on fictional planes:*** An invitation to purposelessness

*'This is the quantum universe,' said Spike, 'neither random nor determined. It is potential at every second. All you can do is intervene.'*

*'What do you suggest I do — to intervene?'*

Spike leaned forward and kissed me. *'Bend the light.'*

Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods*



Untitled. Church Stretton, 2018.

His seeing was never the same again.  
The connections between things had changed.<sup>345</sup>

Padma Hejmadi

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<sup>345</sup> Quoted in Sewall, L. 1999; 106.



Untitled. Lingen, 2018.



Writings and images in this dissertation are eclectic: co-located on the same *fictional plane*. I have seen, sensed, things variously, often sensuously, often—in the total absence of evidence or coherent relationship between events—deductively, intuitively: by insight alone. I have written a dissertation that is fanciful, fictional: events and people described imaginary. Were they to be real, they would be too painful: impossible to process; make sense of. We all want our narratives to make sense—preferably in ways which reflect well on us and our loved ones—don't we? Hence the location of events, of occurrences and happenings, of worldly facts, on an otherworldly fictional plane, or planes (not all otherworldliness is beautiful or enchanted; erasure lurks too).

Facts, the data, are too dry, too arid in their legal, or quasi-legal, probity to be the truth. Truth is wet, slippery, painful, beautiful; unfathomable. Susceptible to re-enchantment, *truth* enjoys different, fluid, dynamic: fluidity that attends the light around dawn in the springtime. *Truth* is susceptible to the *Imaginal Gaze*. Shifting this gaze, by attending to its effect on Imago(s), we can shift, recover, recognise, unearth, identity. The *Studium* was intended to clarify, authenticate, voice. Borrowed from Roland Barthes, the term was originally intended to refer to photography, or so I recalled.<sup>346</sup> On revisiting *Camera Lucida* for the first time in over 20 years, I find that the term *Studium* also has a phenomenological import:

In this investigation of Photography, I borrowed something from phenomenology's project and something from its language. But it was a vague, casual, even cynical phenomenology, so readily did it agree to distort or to evade its principles according to the whim of my analysis.<sup>347</sup>

(Re)encountering Barthes was like those other re-encounters—with past, place, method—that took place as I moved with Yosser back to The Court, to the environs of Rectory Wood. I've been borrowing—from both Barthes and phenomenology—all along; appropriating *philosophy-as-method-phenomenology*, to circumscribe, and explore, practice. A practice of aesthetics: visual imagery; sometimes, and for a while, *visual-poetic* imagery crumbled in its ability to render the scene viably: then calling on *literary-poetic* imagery; *lyrical inquiry & ontology*; *narrative inquiry*.<sup>348</sup>

Barthes deploys another term: *Spectator*. Although the foregoing chapters are mainly words, even within those words dances much imagery; I sense that the *viewer* is at least as much *Spectator*, as *Reader*. Maybe *Voyeur* too? Thus I—author of this thesis; writer of the experimental writings; maker of the experimental images on my iPhone—become, in Barthes terms: *Operator*. Of keyboard; pen; camera; bike; cat; stage: *metascopes*.<sup>349</sup>

Yet I don't see my role as a matter of *Operation*. When I *operate* in these realms; something else happens: occurrences of subtle power.

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<sup>346</sup> Barthes, R. 2000.

<sup>347</sup> Barthes, R. 2000; 20.

<sup>348</sup> See: Neilsen, L. in J. Knowles, & A. Cole, 2008 93-101.

<sup>349</sup> Barthes, R. 2000.

Barthes' appropriation of phenomenology in respect of photography is the appropriation of philosophy by a theorist. My appropriation is the appropriation of the transgressive insurgent. Appropriation—of possibly deadly—power: combining philosophy, theosophy, necessary theory: Practitioner power. This may manifest as *magical*. An earlier (edited) reflection describes this:

*What I did, in short was become more aware of, able to identify, and attuned to, patterns: of nature, patterns in my own health; patterns within the health of another, and their family; patterns within a stream and within flowers; patterns within the behaviours of a cat; patterns surrounding our home.*

A cycle is suggested: discernment; playing; disrupting patterns: creation of perturbations. In *Chaos*, James Gleick points out: *'But nonlinearity can stabilise a system as well as destabilise it. Nonlinear feedback regulates motion, making it more robust. In the presence of nonlinearity, a perturbation can feed on itself until it dies away and the system returns automatically to a stable state.'*<sup>350</sup>

The very act of photographing is a ritual—of organising, or recognising, or reorganising—patterns from chaos. Play is part of the process too: with light; viewpoint; framing; time; chance; subject; enchantment; fantasy narratives. Photographing becomes transgression: capturing perturbations, reverberations and resonances: to recycle, amplify, reverberate, point out, or neutralise and stabilise the *chaos*—in front of the lens; within the life of the photographer.

In this way, acts—photographing; image making; enrapture—are radical: entry points to the realm of the magical. We photograph, we remake our world, if so inclined. Photographing is analogous to poetry: we can use both to re-make and re-imagine our experiences. Creating new, and healing, worlds via seeing: via an active, *participatory*, gaze. Gregory Cajete describes the ground of practice:

Art in traditional Native societies, in effect, reflected the ritualization of the life process. For much of Indigenous art, the “aliveness” of an artefact was the primary aesthetic criterion, rather than “beauty.” *This did not mean that Indigenous artefacts were not beautiful. Instead, their inherent beauty was a natural byproduct of their “life.”*

And:

The ceremony of art touches the deepest realms of the psyche and the sacred dimensions of the artistic creative process. The sacred level of art not only transforms something into art, but also transforms the artist at the very core of his or her being. *This way of doing and relating to art makes the process and context of art-making infinitely more important than the product.*<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Gleick, J. 1998; 193-194.

<sup>351</sup> Cajete, C. 2000; 46-47 emphasis mine.

Dealing with the [mental] health of others I met crises of perception: I was living within shifting halls of mirrors, or, as I said in a call to Angela, it was (and is) like living inside a kaleidoscope.<sup>352</sup> Deployment of artful ritual and knowing has helped dispel the worst effects of this. Otherwise I may have gone mad. According to Gregory Cajete: *'Ceremonies and rituals choreograph situations to bring people in contact with those compacts, the entities involved in relationships. The ceremonies themselves become ways of coming to know, of understanding.'*<sup>353</sup>

My outlined practice as *'method'* and all that implies—that it lends itself to easy description; is repeatable; may be deployed as strategy; be taught, transcribed, transmitted culturally—fails on most, if not all, counts. The de-systematisation of the non-linear, not unreasonably, resists systematisation. Aesthetics of the magical, of enchantment, resist categorisation; preferring to remain experiential, mystical, ineffable, of another world. Vine Deloria expresses it thus:

I suggested earlier that the original religious perception of reality becomes transformed over time into philosophies and theologies, which purport to give a logical and analytical explanation of ultimate reality. These explanations, of course, have eliminated the human emotions and intuitive insights of the original experience and in their place have substituted a systematic rendering of human knowledge concerning the natural world. *From this process of analysis have come the respective divisions of the natural world into spiritual and material, eternal and ephemeral, this-worldly and other-worldly, and absolute space and time dimensions.*<sup>354</sup>

The dimensions of the magical are a field, defining either some kind of wave field, or a field of a kind as yet undiscovered by 'conventional' science. The practice of magic is to work within these dimensions, in the apprehending of patterns within the field and playing with them, with curiosity, open to unimagined happenings:

*If working, or **Operating**, in the realm of the **Imaginal Gaze**—the realm of the (possibly) magical, or even impossibly magical—what kind of shifts (of beliefs; of knowledge; of praxis) are needed to underwrite the validity of, the existence of, a practice of **The Magus**?*

*How might such a practice manifest? What, if any, are the qualifiers?*

Merleau-ponty locates [coloured areas] vaguely on the same *fictional plane*. Given that this thesis is a study of mind, aspects of mind—more than the objects, events and phenomena depicted—it is the state of liminality of mind that is under observation and discussion, rather than objects and events.

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<sup>352</sup> Angela Winterton, the psychologist who has helped me with both PTSD, and in unpicking the family dynamics behind the Direct-Debit Debbie situation.

<sup>353</sup> Cajete, C. 2000; 81-82 emphasis mine.

<sup>354</sup> Deloria, V. 1999; 354 emphasis mine.

As for phenomena, it depends where these are deemed to exist:

*Is the **fictional plane** an internal, or an external, one?*

*Is there a shared subject-object consciousness, in say the picture of the *Convolvulus* flower in the introduction?*

*To what extent are accounts from and of this plane to be termed **lucid**?*

*In what ways may we affect, or effect, this lucidity?*

*To what extent is the knowledge (of the system; of phenomena) within the system and the phenomena?*

*What transforms the observer, even **Operator**, into practitioner, into **Magus**?*

My claim here is four-fold:

To qualify as Imaginal-Magical, there needs to be non-ordinary (non-local; quantum) sensing present: *Imaginal Gaze*.

Sensing involves patterns—imaginal; visual; tactile—a matter of aesthetics.

Post-sensing, the patterns are apprehended, often in a penumbral or ritual setting.

Within the apprehending there exists, for a while, possibilities: playing with; a *potentia*: becoming , creating, other. <sup>355</sup>

The practice of *The Magus* is a practice of relationship: as much a way of relating to practice, as practice. It is on this *Magus* relationship (to underlying practice of sensing; apprehending; re-patterning) that I now focus – *Magus* as relating to practice, where the *Imaginal Gaze* is the practice; where *Imago Un-folding* is the outcome of practice.

(My sense is ‘*Magus*’ practice would work on organisational, and other, scales too; it was what I did in my life as an educator. The roles of the *Seer*, *Oracle*, *Dervish*, *Prophet*, and—no less—the *Shaman* are rooted in millennia of human endeavour. I use *Magus* for poetic reasons, though—etymologies permitting—I regard this term as interchangeable with the above.)

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<sup>355</sup> Zohar, D. 1994; 24.

In purer, *Action Inquiry*, terms, the work seems to hover between *Lyrical*, *Artful* and *Narrative* arenas of inquiry. The method is *First Person Inquiry*, often with others. Explored and experimented with, these curiosities constitute an emergence: *Action Inquiry* becoming *Action Phenomenology*—potentially both *activism*, and *transgressive*. My self imposed training *Atelier*, my arising disciplines—the experimental image making and writings—originated in order to help a loved one, ended up being healing for me; assisting life transitions. Method visits me, or arises, apparently unbidden. In *Art Heals*, Shaun McNiff proposes dialoguing with images: a practice which I endorse, and add to, dialoguing with, or inquiring into, the context of imaginal production. ‘*We must temper the tendency to see images as part of the artist who made them. [...] This decentering of the ego is not an attack on its existence, but an attempted opening to the ecological interplay of expression.*’<sup>356, 357</sup>

McNiff refines this: ‘*Nothing creative exists in complete isolation. Artists, like shamans, draw their medicine and inspiration from highly individuated relationships with familiars—themes, figures, methods, styles and materials—that interact with the artist throughout the creative process.*’<sup>358</sup> Healing, recovering, identity, is a matter of re-integrating levels: phenomenal; psychic; physis. It is necessary to move through the personifying stage—artistic, or shamanic, creation and production—towards spontaneity. For *Operator* to transition to *Magus*, for the journey to acquire the quality of *Magical*, the required *techne* is most readily characterised as *disciplined play and playfulness*: Playing, tending curating became *method*. The craft of this process may be defined as pattern divination, recognition, disruption: in accordance with McNiff’s assertion that, ‘*[Our] “person centred” therapies can benefit by expanding their range to the persons of expressions.*’<sup>359</sup>

*Magus-practice* became *Ur-Phenomena*: playing with light-enchantment and word-spells as antidote to the narcissistic materialism of quasi-legalistic process.<sup>360</sup> Reading aloud at *Inexpert18*, of *Direct-Debit Debbie: A love song*, gave me an inkling of the power of voice and process.<sup>361</sup> ‘*Playing*’ with *Debbie*, in public, left me feeling queasy, disorientated. My consolation that, at long last, I felt some degree of agency, and communion. Shaun McNiff states:

Personifying is an imaginal process that has always been the basis of poetic consciousness, and it remains ***fundamental to the spontaneous expressions of the arts***, dreams and imagination.[...] Art therapy in particular has concentrated too much of its resources on conceptual analysis and not enough attention on *the potential of passionate expression to renew and reconstitute psychic life through spontaneous events*.<sup>362, 363</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> See: McNiff S. 2004. 82-100.

<sup>357</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 83.

<sup>358</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 84.

<sup>359</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 85.

<sup>360</sup> Bortoft, H. 1996; 43, 231.

<sup>361</sup> See: <http://canscorpionssmoke.com/inexpert/>

<sup>362</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 85.

<sup>363</sup> Bold emphases mine. I explore the validity of the spontaneous and Ad Hoc as method further in Part V Light.

Reconstituting identity is a matter of collaboration and ecology.<sup>364</sup> Artefacts—poems; pictures; experimental writings—are not process, but byproducts of process. *Artefacts*—extant on phenomenal, *fictional planes*—evidence imaginal processes: gaze; unfolding Imagos; the other-worldly.

*Process* is anti-pathological, not the artefacts themselves (though I am assured that these contend power too). The craft, the *techne*, of *Magi* then, an invocation: of magical, sacred, adventure: to explore, to experiment with, to develop, process. *The Magus* contravenes and convenes: crafts, rituals, procedures. These conventions may become convocations: of practice; identity; anti-pathogens.

In this craft lies a shift onwards from the idea that pathologies lay within the stories (which they do), that in improving or bending stories we realise our lives. Which we may do: towards a ground where the *techne*—the aesthetic; the *feel* of process—of creating story, becomes the anti-pathogen.<sup>365</sup> Practice has moved beyond, though still encompasses, such factors as the neurological changes that take place when writing and reciting poetry.

*Is this why the **Magus** persona worries bystanders, onlookers, naysayers seeking to derail that way of being?*

As a creator of artefacts, via the *Imaginal Gaze*, *The Magus* inherits their power; becomes psychopomp; derailleur: transgressor.

This may appear as magical: as angelic, sanctification, connection with the sacred.

Or, as a black cat called Yosser.

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<sup>364</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 86 *emphasis mine*.

<sup>365</sup> Hillman, J. 1983 and 1989 as quoted in McNiff, S. 2004; 88.



Untitled (Yosser). Church Stretton, 2018.

When an object or person is isolated from the interplay of creation, there is a loss of soul, and the angel is the mediator who treats the separation.<sup>366</sup>

Shaun McNiff

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<sup>366</sup> McNiff, S. 1995; 27.





Untitled. Lingen, 2018.

If *The Magus* has any extra skills at all—beyond the realms of ordinary and local realities—it is the ability to recognise and to work with patterns: Phenomena; Imagos; Angels; Idiots. In a territory where the practitioner is intersecting with such phenomena as soul, the sacred, enchantment—maybe the magical—is it surprising if *The Angels* put in an appearance? After all their antipodes, *The Idiots*, do and nobody bats an eyelid?

Whereas *Magus* is a recogniser, player with, sometimes re-organiser, of patterns, *Angels* serve as conduits, transmitters of patterns: Angels are waves, not particles (though sometimes they seemingly manifest in particle form, and may even, on occasion, masquerade as idiots). *Angels* are messengers, their primary mode of transmission of patterns, aesthetics. *Angels* show up as beauty, as enchantment, in much the same way that the presence of idiots may be divined by displays of ignorance. Neither of these phenomena—beauty, ignorance—can be easily pre-defined: but one knows upon encountering it.

The *Angelic* is present, is available, manifest, in the natural world, and the light that falls upon it. Playing in this world gives us, and our Imagos, access to this dimension of being. What I did on those 40 mornings of the *Alder Altar* project was to play with, and in, this natural world, in the penumbra of the day. This arena of the angels verges on the numinous, the eco-theological. I turned back to *Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, first encountered and read in 2014. It fell open at a page marked by an invite to a funeral ceremony for AL. The writing on the page was on penumbra.<sup>367</sup> I re-read the whole book, finding layers of resonance that had lain hidden on previous readings. My time at the Alder Altar brought the book alive: the book illuminating aspects of my practice. Exchanges via the penumbral emanations at the Alder Altar anticipated my *bricolage*.<sup>368</sup>

As well as being personal narratives, my practices serve as field notes, narratives of asceticism. Not as extreme, in practical terms; my strategies echoed some of those embodied in mysticism of various hues: *solitude; attention; withdrawal; stasis; place-making; ritual; gaze; contemplation; eros; reciprocity*.

All intertwined: becoming for me a new way of being in the world. Inner shifts ensued: gave permission, extended invitation to others to do likewise, to experience shifts, or potential for shifts, in their own lives. This *bricolage*—of make do and mend, made up on the hoof, with no particular purpose in mind—embodied a force, a resonant way of being. It served others, and served as an anti-toxin for me.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Christie, D. 2013.

<sup>368</sup> Christie's book, *Blue sapphire of the mind*, relies heavily, though not solely, on Christian mysticism. I personally struggle with organised religions, particularly mono-theistic religions: conceptually; as manifest in society; and as *purveyors* of a 'God'. Whereas my experience leads me to a '*maybe there is something*' position: of the possibility of gods, and of other means of attending the spiritual, the soul and the sacred. (In short: it feels good that those thousands of monks collectively spent many thousands of years sitting alone in cells, so that I don't have to.)

The above reservations apart, I respect the practice and traditions of aesthetic, contemplative, perhaps ascetic practice, as noted and explored in *Blue sapphire of the mind*, echoing my emergent practices, particularly: *Hesychia* (seeking stillness); *Topos* (place-making); *Theoria* (gaze, or [my interpretation], *Imaginal Gaze*); *Anchoreisis* (withdrawal); *Prosoche* (attention); *Diakrisis* (discernment); *Logos* (voice, or heartbeat, of the world); *Eros* (exchange, intimacy, reciprocity); *Kenosis* (emptying, participation); *Telos* (paradise as practice); *Apokastasis* (reverse movement); and *Autarkos* (utter independence).

<sup>369</sup> *Bricolage*: Christie, D. 2013; 16, 21, 361.

Mike commented:

It would be useful to know what has shifted in you. How are you different through the inquiry? What has changed for you, in how you see yourself, in how you see the world, in how you see others?

[WhatsApp message from MS 27.5.18]

*And if I had to name this practice, this way of being, this renewed quality attention?* I would call it *purposeful purposelessness*: practice that lays somewhere between *eudaemonic* and *bricolage*; between the happiness of *purposeless-yet-challenging* pursuits and *make-do-and-mend* discipline: *activities* that may, to the casual observer, seem perverse. At the extreme, I might call it *Magical*, or *Angelic*: a practice of mediation, of interpolation; interpretation and noticing incident; making connections, noting patterns. Shaun McNiff observes:

I asked my poet-friend Vincent Ferrini, “*What is an angel for you?*”

“*An incident,*” he said.

The latin *incidere* means to fall upon, to happen. An incident is a distinct but apparently minor occurrence that is linked to something else. The incident refers to the angel, that something else, that falls upon us.<sup>370</sup>

Incidents cause openings, cause separation; trauma: shifts in perception and ways of being—that may be read as angelic.<sup>371</sup> Incidents, and related objects, emanate energies referred to by McNiff (quoting Rudolf Arnheim and Charles Olson), as ‘vectors’. McNiff’s reading of this word is suggestive of a subtle, powerful, import; referring to ‘carrier’ as the latin root of the word vector.<sup>372</sup> Manifestations of the angelic occur in the subtle space of penumbra. Returning to Christie:

**Or perhaps we should speak, as anthropologist Michael Jackson does, of the “penumbral” region as the space we enter and inhabit in moments of intense and expansive awareness.** A sensitivity to the penumbral, Jackson suggests, with its connotations of a “*phenomenologically indeterminate zone ‘between regions of complete shadow and complete illumination,’ ‘an area in which something exists to a lesser or uncertain degree’ and ‘an outlying or peripheral region,*” can help deepen our awareness of the fluid, mysterious, open space between things, and of the relations between them.<sup>373</sup> But it is not only the indeterminate character of the penumbral that recommends its use here; it is also its immensity, its abundance, its always emerging, ever-unfinished and mysterious character.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> McNiff, S. 1995; 34.

<sup>371</sup> McNiff, S. 1995; 34-37.

<sup>372</sup> McNiff, S. 1995; 96-97.

<sup>373</sup> Jackson, M. 2009 xii, xiii quoted in Christie, D. 2013; 233.

<sup>374</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 233 emphasis in original. **Bold emphasis mine.**

The *long slow work of stillness* noted by Douglas Christie is a concomitant of withdrawal—ritual and connection with *immensity and abundance* of the other than human world—a matter of aesthetics, above all. The links—between *The Magi* and the magical, and *The Angels* and the angelic—are ones of energies and awareness; playing with, bending: energies; light; realities. These aperçus into apprehending of the non-ordinary seem hardly to qualify as method in terms of a well organised systematic established method: repeatable epistemology.

I see the value of the *method* as my reports of what happened, and what it was that I did. Others report that my accounts of method, and the artefacts—byproducts of process—are affecting. Artefacts may serve as demonstrations, or ‘permission’; as enabling conversations and access to dimensions of apprehending that seem either unavailable, or not immediately apparent: *‘If I can commune with a cat, a steam, flowers, why don’t you try?’*

This is (re)introduction to peripheral vision: on the peripheries of awareness of deeper, repressed suppressed, partly unexplored selves in the penumbral half light: the demi-shadow of everyday self. Outing Imagos—like communing with flowers, a stream, a cat—is an activity of the penumbra. And, when fully allowed, an ecstasy: *To speak of the penumbral,*” Jackson suggests, *“is to invoke this hazy and indeterminate region between a world where we experience ourselves as actors and a world where we experience ourselves as acted upon.”*<sup>375</sup>

Working, learning, in such ways is to open, to unfold: *Learning to open oneself up to the penumbral, to the more, learning to experience oneself as “acted upon” in this way requires vulnerability, openness and receptivity.*<sup>376</sup>

*Angels*, and *Magi*, are likely to occur or appear in this space: showing up as healing, magical, or both. Appearance, manifestations, of these energies may be disturbing: inducing the surfacing of demons: *‘The creative work of angels is paradoxically dependent upon the conflict inducing demons who prepare the soul for change and healing.’*<sup>377</sup>

Wound-denial—untransformed—has a way of percolating into the lives of others: *However when the wounded person denies the affliction, it does not diminish, it grows.[...]This is how cycles of wound work their way through families and generations of families, through troubled societies, and finally through nations.*<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> See Jackson, M. 2009; 39 quoted in Christie, D. 2013.

<sup>376</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 233-234.

<sup>377</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 113.

<sup>378</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 113.

Finding this level of awareness is to find a fluidity of the soul: akin to Beisser's paradoxical theory of change.<sup>379</sup> Dwelling, for a time, with the wound opens renewed possibilities of awareness: *Artful Bricolage* illustrates that the angelic—reciprocity—in indigenous cultures manifests as *correspondence*: *[And the] correspondence principle has the potential to revitalize the field of art therapy, offering both a theoretical framework and a practical description of how energies impulses and forces are transmitted between things and how different kinds of phenomena can affect the people exposed to them.*<sup>380</sup>

Artefacts move beyond the demonstrative and illustrative: becoming communal; agentic. This re-arrangement and reimagining of experiences acquires a sacred quality: within the playing with light and patterns emerges a sanctification; not dissimilar to that earned by the contemplative mystics. In the pre, and immediately post, dawn, at the makeshift atelier, the playing with light and patterns of light and water attunes me, and others, to deeper, more primal, resonances.

Playing with, bending, patterns and light, we imagine and create renewed realities: we may become Magi, become Angels.

*If, phenomenologically speaking, becoming Magus and Angel is a possible—emanating from a practice of apparent pointlessness—then what, if any, is the utility of playing in this ground?*

*What is its function in change: or is it 'merely' decoration, or dancing, at the ceremony?*

*How do my inner shifts correspond with shifts, or lack thereof, in others?*

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<sup>379</sup> Beisser, A . (n.d.).

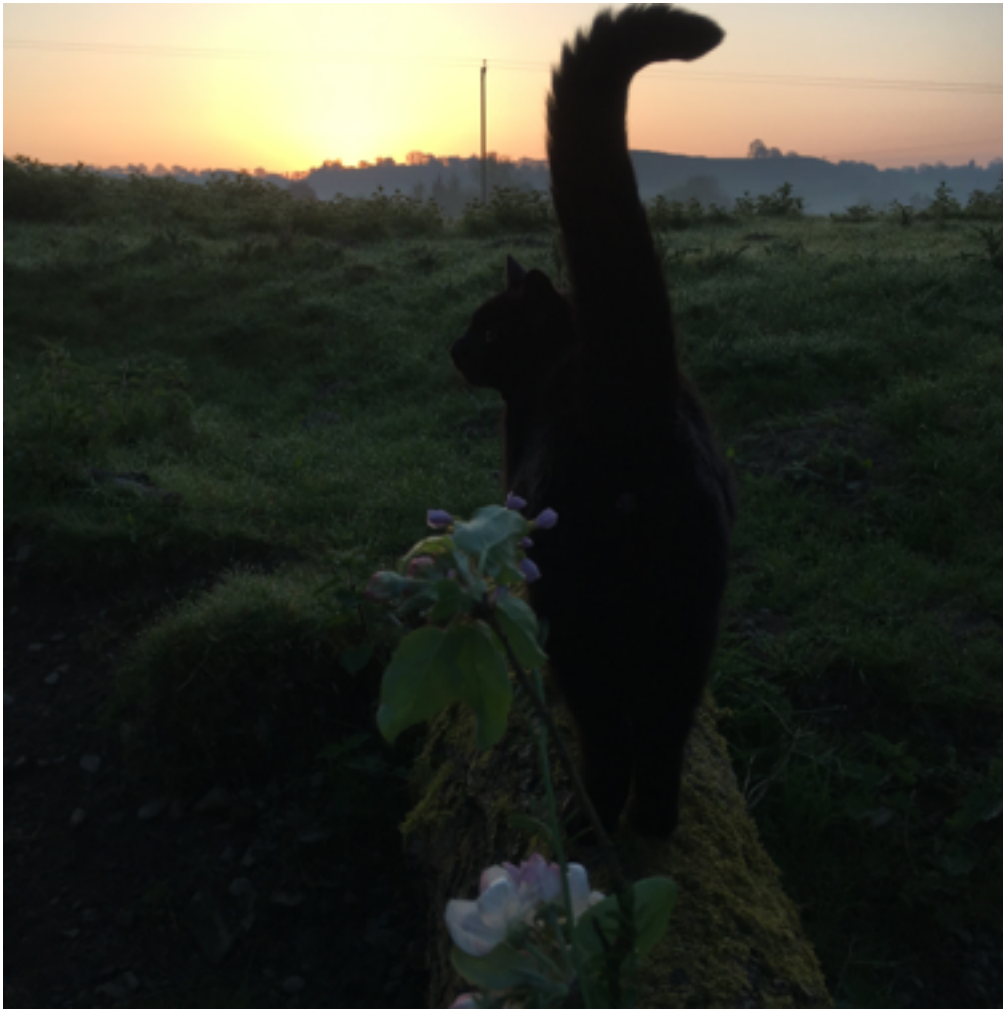
<sup>380</sup> McNiff, S. 2004; 138.

Being a Sufi is to put away what is in your head - imagined truth, preconceptions, conditioning - and to face what may happen to you.<sup>381</sup>

Abu Said

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<sup>381</sup> Shah, I. 2015(2); 255.



Untitled (Yosser & flowers, before sunrise). Lingen, 2018.

The carrier wave linking Magus, Angel, Imago is aesthetic; lies in the reciprocal energy of what I term *Imaginal Gaze*. This alludes to a quality of attending—empathising; listening; to Angels; others; a cat; flowers; the *heartbeat of the world*; one's inner Magus or Shaman. Such practice, I contend, is anti-pathological.

Many activities—either depicted or referred to in *The Trees* writings—come from a place of Imago: connecting to The Ford; to Yosser; healing or creating a space for healing; making journeys: by motorbike; piloting an aircraft. Sometimes these Imagos emerge in stasis, via the Atelier; in movement, via Ateliers of a different variety: sharing an aesthetic linking field of energy. This thesis may read as spectacle: as an account of an unviable, un-sustainable life, unwinding in slow motion, in front of a gaping—perhaps disbelieving—audience; events depicted are true, recounted on *fictional planes*. It is, too, a shift from what Laura Sewall terms endogenous (internally generated) attention, to that which is exogenous (externally generated).<sup>382</sup> Laura Sewall also writes of two forms of practice goals within the Theravada tradition of Buddhism: *samatha* and *vipassana*; respectively: *one pointed attention*, and *development of insight*.<sup>383</sup>

Reflecting on the four essential elements of this chapter—*Magus; Angel; Imago; Gaze*—their linking quality, pre-qualification for inclusion, is that of attention. How and why it is paid; shifts; encouraged differently: how we might *bend the light*. We may, or may not, be able to cause shifts in patterns. We may certainly be able to effect shifts in our perceiving, our apprehending and our resonating with those patterns: the exogenous may become, intentionally, endogenous. We may not be able to edit the world. But may, with care, adopt practices that edit the world's attention to, and effect upon, our inner spectacle. With a trick of the light we can change the wiring of our minds: move between one pointed attention and insight; help ourselves to see our *selves*; our Imagos. We may—with practice, discipline, attention, love, intimacy, hearing, patience, luck, persistence, guidance, connection, presence, ecstasy—develop a method of Unfolding Imagos: *Imaginal Gaze*.

I reflect on commonalities and effects that might be ascribed to method, ways of knowing and being: pre-sensitisers, precursors and portals to the dimension of the other-worldly. Play; trauma; illness; near-death; the sacred—those other *classrooms*: the sky, road, flowers, altar, camera; writing, seeing (outwardly and inwardly); bike, plane, occasionally—strangely—trucks; love, loving, falling in love: All playful rituals: ways of noticing differently. All resistant to ascription: of places on 4 by 4 biz school quadrants; thingness; being packaged and sold.

*Perhaps this usefulness is wrapped in the same cloth as those reflective journeys—of other pilgrims peregrinators and ascetics over time? Journey made on account—semi-sacrificially, as outsider—so that others in the village don't have to?*

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<sup>382</sup> Sewall, L. 1999; 101-103.

<sup>383</sup> Sewall, L. 1999; 105-105.



From my place on the edge of the village, I see both into, and out from the hub: my abodes my *omega point*. This translates to practice too: I live on the edge, on the border, in many ways and dimensions: *Is it this degree of liminality that attracts opprobrium, envy?* When the aesthetic of liminality becomes my state all that I do is to engage my peripheral vision—with playfulness and curiosity—disengaging with toxicity in the process: *Is this my (self-selected) form of dysfunction? Or an alternative form of functioning?*

In my engagement with these aspects of numinosity I have indulged in disengagement from the barbarism of organisational, and familial, life: in so doing have found sanctification. Traded: for my place by the stream at The Ford; the safety of my motorbike seat and the cockpit of my plane; being with Yosser; being more present to beauty: of the flowers; the woods. My trips in these devices and liminality served as disrupters and inverters of malign and pathological energies. Interpreted as escapism, as avoidance, I believe these practices to be evolutionary: re-connecting to that which serves our more primal needs and roles. In earlier times these methods would be determined or defined as ways of invoking the mystical and magical; ritualised as initiatory: *Now? A form of re-connection to more subliminal, evolutionary, revolutionary, forces?*

Jerome Bernstein identifies three portals to the Borderland: *evolution; personality structure; trauma*.<sup>384</sup> One quality of *The Imaginal Gaze*, is a healing of what Bernstein terms the *psychic split* of the western psyche: *[reconnection] is a reconnection to nature as a dimension of existence, as a life form, as a reality principle, different from that to which we have accustomed ourselves, integrating with it*.<sup>385</sup> Practices ascribe a quality of separation, or aloneness: In *Solitude*, Anthony Storr refers to this quality in art:

At the dawn of history, the arts were strictly functional, and functional for the community, not for the individual artist. The Palaeolithic artists who drew and painted animals on the walls of their cave dwellings were not making works of art in order to express their personal way of looking at the world, but were attempting to work magic. As Germain Bazin writes:

*The primitive artist was a magician whose drawing had all the virtue of a magic spell, an incantation.*

Bazin believes that early man painted and carved in natural forms 'to ensure the fertility of his prey, to entice it into his traps, or to acquire its strength for his own purposes'.<sup>386</sup> Herbert Read refers to cave paintings as exemplifying 'the desire to "realise" the object on which magical powers were to be exercised'.<sup>387 388</sup>

In playing—with what William Ayot terms *sacred technologies*, plus an iPhone, an old motorbike, a stray cat called Yosser—I unearth, unfold, hold; my Imagos: my own ways of being in the world. Eventually, hopefully, to help others unfold, re-connect; to their own Imagos, ways of being, and love.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Bernstein, J. 2005; 81-98.

<sup>385</sup> Bernstein, J. 2005; 81.

<sup>386</sup> Bazin, G. 1962; 11, as quoted in Storr, A. 1988; 75-76 emphasis mine.

<sup>387</sup> Read, H. *Icon and idea*. 1955; 27 as quoted in Storr, A. 1988; 76.

<sup>388</sup> Storr, A. 1988; 75-76.

<sup>389</sup> Ayot, W. 2015; 136.



Untitled (Yosser after sunrise). Lingen, 2018.

## Part V: Light

[method ii: *manifestations*]

To see things in the seed, that is  
Genius.

Lao Tzu

Interlude

*Sinker 5*: A reflexive research narrative, (cont).



Untitled (before the call). Church Stretton, 2019.

### **Sinker 5. Spontaneous-daydreams, a reflection**

'Art is the only language we have for awe' states Mathew Fox, in Jensen's *Listening to The Land*.<sup>390</sup> It was awe, and the mysteries attending to awe, that led to my earlier framings. I had created a dissertation around the uses of creativity, aesthetics and beauty as method for self-healing and empowerment: acts of beauty as invocations of radical change. Yet in the viva process it was clear I had not articulated this sufficiently clearly, or theorised in sufficient depth, for the work to be readily recognised as a contribution to knowledge. How could my *method* be more clearly articulated? How could it be *theorised*? It seems that I had created work that readers were intrigued to be with, but unable to fully connect to in the required manner. I have created a further section, Part V *Light* in response. Within this section I inquire more deeply, and for my own curiosity, into three unresolved aspects—processes, methods, framings—of inquiry, namely: *Via Arbora*; *Action-Phenomenology*; *4th-Person Inquiry*. A further curiosity was the question: what constitutes and defines *theory*—especially in this context? (*Theory* became as nebulous as *method*.)

In parallel with the writing—the *theorising*—I was making images spontaneously (initially not *purposefully*), deployed throughout the text as a living real-time testimony to *method* (process) and *theory* (seeing-into) in action. Inquiry revealed whole fields worthy of a discrete doctoral inquiry: within *Via Arbora* alone, a further five named sub-fields of potential inquiry. Working within the last of these sub-fields—*Time*—I became absorbed by the possibility of *theory* as being *process*, more than frame. Working with images—contemporary epiphanies in unusual situations—I deconstruct the practice of image-making, and the implications for the deconstruction of time as a theoretical concept. I do this in part to illustrate that experimental method is not necessarily a set series of procedures, rather a curious, experimental mind-set, (requiring reset as to what constitutes the *framed* [practice; image] and the *frame*: [theory; field; paradigm]).

Theory, like the gaze, started to become *participatory*; no longer a lens, or frame, but integral with practice, with seeing. *The very definition of meaningful research makes it impossible to lay down any simple or unambiguous rules for evaluating the research in question*.<sup>391</sup> Inquiring into moments of unrequited spontaneity led me towards deeper considerations: of time, of phenomena, of other-worldly dimensions; and consideration too, of the most effective framing appropriate to substantiate such inquiry. I made pictures, then reflected on process in order to unpick this. The necessary *theoretical* triangulations became clearer: as movements between Artful-Inquiry, Phenomenology and Theology. Alone, none of these offered adequate support, or interrogation, of practice. In combination, triangulated—with the aid of Rovelli, Bachelard and Christie as my key thinkers—they were able to offer both. Theology, in particular, offers some tools with which to challenge and explore various etymologies; not least those pertaining to the notion of theory, and the theoretical. I wandered, stumbled, across the notion of the root of 'theory' being a form of *seeing into*. Intimating that alternative investigations of theory pertaining to action-inquiry are available: *how acts of micro power and seeing-into could be connected; showing how these fit with a broader discourse at the cultural or societal level*.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Jensen, D. 2004; 76.

<sup>391</sup> Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. 2000; 274.

<sup>392</sup> Oliver, C. 2000; 91.

## Chapter 16

**Roots:** Notes on the *Via Arbora* (*physis*, nature).

Go to the pine,  
If you want to learn about the pine,  
Go to the bamboo,  
If you want to learn about the bamboo.

Bashō



Untitled (Trees, species unknown). Old Radnor, 2014.

## The Trees #32

### Yew:

2019, May. *Me and Yosser hadn't been back to The Ford for some time. But there was work to be done on one of the trees, this time by the professionals. The Yew tree by his hatch at the east end of the building needed pruning, in preparation for works to rebuild the chimney.*

*We hung out for a couple of days. Chopping wood, writing, re-acclimatising, taking pictures of flowers. Chasing Jinns.*

*Alan, the tree surgeon, was due on the Friday. Me and Yosser were primed to supply teas and biscuits, and, when the job was done, some of Julian's cyder. The tree gang rolled up, Alan, and his two assistants: one a recently qualified tree surgeon, one a recently retired close protection body-guard. And Alan's dog, an aged Staffordshire Bull Terrier.<sup>393</sup> A lovely bunch. I gave them teas, and then went about my business. Yosser had disappeared. No matter; must be the dog.*

*When the guys had finished, they gathered for cyders just as it started to drizzle. I had a conversation with Alan about trees and inter-species communication, starting warily, in case he thought me nuts. He got it straight away, and we chatted about the Tudge book, *The Secret Life of Trees*, and what we might learn from trees ('to slow the fuck up'), and from other species.*

*Then Yosser turned up, warily at first. The dog was back in Alan's van.*

*I remarked to Alan about Yosser's prolonged absence: 'Oh, he was in the very top of the Yew tree when we arrived; I thought he was a crow's nest... We had to bring him down.'*

*When the tree gang had gone, I reflected - on our conversations, and upon Yosser's behaviour. I had never seen him in that tree before at all, let alone at the top of it. Strange behaviour, even for him. The only possible conclusion was that, in his own way, Yosser had been trying to protect the tree. So I looked him in the eye, and asked him straight.*

*Yosser returned my gaze, unflinching, giving me one of his penetrating funny looks.*

*That'll be it then.*

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<sup>393</sup> Yosser has two breeds of dog which he prefers to provoke: Staffordshire Bull Terriers, and Alsatisans. I have no idea why.



'*Something other than the human mind is a play here,*' states David Abram in *Becoming Animal*.<sup>394</sup> When I contemplate, meditate upon the ways of the *Via Arborescens*—those days in the stream at dawn with a log and flowers and a stray cat, learning, starting to learn, some ways of apprehending life systems around, hitherto barely, if at all, touched upon by me—I find myself blown back there: A tumble weed connection with tumbleweed connections to worlds: human, other-than-human, otherworldly.

The *method*—reference points for future researchers, inquirers and adventurers—was for me experimental processes, emergent, situation specific. Perhaps site specific too. I offer some reflections in order to open up further grounds for exploration.

The situation was that in the wake of an illness in me, caused by occupational stress, my partner became ill, leaving our home, a house by a stream in Herefordshire. In the wake of that event, and due to the involvement of a lawyer—*Direct-Debit Debbie*—I responded creating both a space, and a ritual within that space: photographing flowers. I curated an altar on which were placed subjects—flowers—to be photographed repeatedly at dawn, for an extended period, ultimately, of forty days.

This much was conscious and deliberate. Yet it was also a situation where, as William Ayot puts it, '*I stumbled into the world of ritual*'.<sup>395</sup> As yet unawares as to the import of having done so. During this time, insights gained were around the ways in which resonances between people—transfer of phenomena such as occupational related stress, burnout, PTSD—were not dissimilar to, perhaps even consonant with, transfer of feelings and states between humans and the other-than-human world. And that connection to the states of being available in the other-than-human entities was of itself both healing and freeing: an imaginal process, enabling further participatory growth development and responses. Apparently heterogeneous, we and the plant world have more connectedness than one may at first suppose.

In the extremis of ritual and post ritual states, this connectedness becomes revealed; we can *see* it. The claim, perhaps radical, is that the *other* apprehends, *sees*, too: that this *seeing* is reciprocal; that reciprocity energises the resonance of images emerging from, by-products of, rituals employed. The *one-ness* is catching, communicable; subjects, pliant to the gaze.

Working in the stream on the log with the malleability of life energy (light), subject energy (plants), and spirit guide (Yosser), I came to an awareness that working in this way exhibited certain qualities: of the magical, of enchanted-ness. These qualities tended to play out in my observational experimental writings too, specifically *The Trees* series. '*Science and traditional knowledge may ask different questions and speak different languages, but they may converge when both truly listen to the plants*' writes Kimmerer, a statement that plays out in my writings, conversations and observations post my work at the altar with Yosser.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Abram, D. 2010; 12.

<sup>395</sup> Ayot, W. 2015; 21.

<sup>396</sup> Kimmerer, R. 2013; 165.

This combination—stream, log, light, plants, guide, ritual—seem to have convened a space for becoming more aware: of self, of other, spiritually. Writing now, late 2019, I'm reminded of an email that I sent to Steve in the early days of the Alder Altar:

Loved it in the stream again this morning, a thin place, especially for me, especially now. I reflected on all the mornings I have lived here and could have done this, and what we miss by not being up at dawn taking pictures of dew on blossom. Or the sky, or water. I feel like one of those early single hander sailors - was it Moitessier? - on a RTW race, who quit and just kept sailing on...

I am really living here, for the first time in eight years, it seems.

[From email from me to Steve Marshall 12.04.16]

There was a *Via Arbora* as *process* in that chaos; convening of elements and curating of space, informed by my sixteen plus years of teaching photography; and study of the practice of photography in various forms since 1981. The *practice* of teaching and learning photography, became the *Via Arbora*; the *process* of connecting (to the more-than-human); and thus *method*—of blessing healing and development. Through half-closed eyes and senses, I was connecting to the world of plants, predicated by my training at horticultural college back in the '70's; working with tropisms, osmosis, other biological phenomena, and Latin. Drawn by my own inner tropisms—to light, animism, connections to the more-than-human, poetics—I played, danced, peregrinated my way into, and along, the ligneous *Via Arbora*. Playing in this road of animism was an act of becoming, unfolding.

The foundational tree—*The Alder Altar*—was the keystone of this practice; which unfolded along with my re-connected Imagos: photographer, experimenter, biker, writer, gardener, home-maker, peregrini. This was all a matter at first of playing with phenomena—time, light, flora, fauna, arbora, the feline interlocutions of Yosser the cat—and then writing about the processes. I can now say that that time, of developing, subconsciously, the *Via Arbora* method, remade me; is me now, over three years later.

This playful foundational means of growth, this method, was simple: curate a space for connecting to nature (a log over a stream); create a ritual (photographing flowers at dawn); write about the processes and share them; extend to wider contexts (photographing flowers, skies and other moments of epiphany). Refine and repeat.

Then, when writing about the events and phenomena depicted, recall broader aesthetics: the cold, the aural symphonies attending dawn and standing in a stream, aromas, affection, love, from and for an animal—Yosser. An overall observance: noticing, playing with patterns.

According to Bortoft, this way of seeing—of, into, through—is in essence *dynamic*:

Phenomenology is a shift of attention within experience, which draws attention back from *what* is experienced into the *experiencing* of what is experienced. [...] By focussing on the act of distinction – which means drawing attention back from *what* is distinguished into the *distinguishing* of what is distinguished – we discovered that the *happening* of distinction is the appearing of what is distinguished. This takes us to the heart of phenomenology: the phenomenon is not only something which appears, but which appears *as appearing*. So the phenomenon is not merely the appearance of what we usually think – but the *appearance*.<sup>397</sup>

A quality of my experience of dynamic seeing is that it is, at least to a degree, reciprocal. The gaze in its resonance reveals reciprocities and connections: between subjects; between subject and observer; between subjects, observer and audience (viewers). Yet in writing of and reading about such phenomena, we are confined in understanding by our (written) language. In some of these writings, language becomes, necessarily, non-representational, allusory.

The space Bortoft notes as *'the difference between language as disclosure and language as representation'* is the place of experimentation and discovery for me; if not necessarily a place of reliable reportage.<sup>398</sup> I can find and 'do' process; find and create meaning; delve into the essence of appearance and *appearance*. And yet there may be no apparent utility beyond *floating in a ballistic zero-gravity kind of way and just admiring the sensations and the views*. Interpretation of dynamic seeing, and being, requires a concomitant dynamism of thought—maybe of being too—on the part of the reader, the viewer. *Re-making of worlds* requires participation from these agents; within this re-making lies the true *language of disclosure*.

I found that in the doing and reporting of the way of the *Via Arbora*, a different kind of purposefulness emerges: masquerading as purposelessness, but not in the listless way—more of a purposeful passivity. A state of being *poised*: observant, waiting, prepared—for shifts in the qualities of attention and attending to: appearance, *appearance*, and *appearing*. Method manifests as subtle, barely visible, apparently passive, difficult to report upon, yet radical, potent. Where the observer / listener retunes to the patterns lies the potential for shifts, in both context, and participants.

As trees unfold in the forest, as Yosser communes with a Yew, as flowers unfold on the Altar and window sill at dawn—there is potential: for the uncanny and the enchanted to become manifest; for Omega points to be transited. Return to previous states—unlikely. From within apparent purposelessness, we create purpose, create light. It makes us; *'Then, at a crucial moment in the evolution of the original cell, another cell capable of using the oxygen of the atmosphere with its immense energies appeared. Photosynthesis was completed by respiration,'* states Thomas Berry in *The Great Work*.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Bortoft, H. 2014; 165-166 emphases in original.

<sup>398</sup> Bortoft, H. 2014; 167.

<sup>399</sup> Berry, T. 1999; 197.

Light makes us: generates the weather systems, powers the carbon cycle, governs geo-biological systems, regulates our earthly ecologies. Light is a form of grace, by which life is created, and by which, in turn, life may be understood. The ritual of *The Alder Altar*—the first conscious ritual of the *Via Arbora*—was a transect of these dynamics. The sun had created the Alder tree that became the altar, the rain that became the stream, the flowers, the light that lit them, by which they were brought into being. Berry writes that:

New fields of energy become available to support the human venture. These new energies find expression and support in celebration. For in the end the universe can only be explained in terms of celebration.

And that:

[our] need to continue such seasonal-based liturgies like those of indigenous peoples and of the classical traditions, we need to create new liturgies based on the transformation of episodes of the evolutionary sequence in the physical, geological, and biological stages of development. In both cases the inner psychic resources of the human venture are restored and increased.<sup>400</sup>

Creating the *Via Arbora* of the *Alder Altar* was my way, subconsciously, of subscribing to the liturgical impulse. By way of trying to create benediction and healing in the making of art in response to a deepening connection to more-than-human world, I happened upon a means of human healing and development. The emergent practice was three-fold: linguistic; aesthetic; ritualistic. Gary Snyder writes of one of Dōgen's talks: *'To carry yourself forward and experience a myriad of things is delusion. But myriad things coming forth and experiencing **themselves** is awakening.'*<sup>401</sup>

To experience this slippage between worlds is also to experience slippages in time. The *Alder Altar* was a space—a *dreaming spot*—where this time slippage was allowed to become, for brief periods, method, practice.<sup>402</sup> Time, and space, was fluid. This fluidity showed up in various ways: visually (photographs), textually (experimental writing), connectedness (with Yosser; with the other-than-human). It is helpful (to me) to think in terms of my becoming more myself, and in so doing, allowing Yosser to become more himself too. I'm sure both are true. There was a concurrency of development going on; within and without. The space seemed to shift, elements of these shifts remaining, over three years later.

In *The Practice of the Wild*, Gary Snyder states: *"Dreaming" or "dreamtime" refers to a time of fluidity, shape-shifting, interspecies conversation and intersexuality, radically creative moves, whole landscapes being altered. It is often taken to be in a "mythical past," but it is not real in any time.'*<sup>403</sup> The episodic nature of the emergent practice (liturgy), emergent texts (photos, writings) and emergent connections taken together become an experience of, or a conduit for experiencing the sacred. These episodes describe and evoke the nature of the emergent *Via Arbora*; perhaps presaging the shift from the *Cenozoic* to the *Ecozoic* era. The episodes are evocations of the sacred.

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<sup>400</sup> Berry, T. 1999; 170, 171.

<sup>401</sup> Snyder, G. 1999; 83 bold emphasis in original.

<sup>402</sup> Snyder, G. 1999; 91.

<sup>403</sup> Snyder, G. 1999; 91 emphasis in original.

As Thomas Berry states:

For we will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presences whence all things come into being. Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality. We become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world about us.<sup>404</sup>

Five emerging significant elements of the practice of the *Via Arbora* emerged: i) *The Sacred* (access to the other-worldly); ii) *Place* (making and curation); iii) *Communion* (with the more-than-human world); iv) *Shape-shifting* (playful, transgressive, knowing); and v) *Time* (fluidity, granularity). These elements of practice—which I have previously termed random, or ad-hoc, are *experimental*—the root of which is in the medieval latin word *experimentalis*, ‘having personal experience’, also ‘experienced, observed’. Practice unfolded, along with the inquiry and my own recovery. It was not pre-planned, or *methodical* in the conventional sense. Though method (and disciplines) emerged, establishing a *method*, and creating artefacts, was not the point; playing with *processes* was. Inquiry, in this instance, became retrospective.

Practice is also episodic. There seemed to be a natural genesis of cycles numbering in the region 30-40, after which the energy of the practice would dissipate, occasionally, to resurface briefly if needed to serve a purpose or illustrate a concept. There were 40 days at the altar, 35 *Daily Flowers*, 31 experimental writings in *The Trees* series. Then there are the anomalies: *The Bled Travelogue* emerged as a stand-alone (but maybe presaged photos of trucking peregrinations); photographing skies seems to be ongoing; poetry—pre-eminent prior to the Alder Altar—all but disappeared (only re-emerging in order to deal with *Direct-Debit Debbie*).

Each episode, and series of episodes, would inform or contribute to the formation of the next. To work in this way requires persistent curiosity and courage, though in my view it would be foolhardy *not* to have the courage to be curious in this way. For me, ‘*What happens if I don’t try...*’ is a more scary proposition. *What happens if I do try...* speaks of finding out, of discovery. In preparing a practice benediction to help another, my own states—of mind, of being—shifted. It did not occur to me at the inception of the first practice of the *Via Arbora* that this would be so.

The *Via Arbora* may be a risky conduit to the other-worldly and the enchanted, but it is not as risky as staying *grounded* in a world, situation, or boundary of knowledge, that is harmful. There is more to a state of mind than solely state of mind, as Abram intimates.<sup>405</sup> States of being are in play too: ‘*In the Apache language, the root word for land is the same as the word for mind. Gathering roots holds up a mirror between the map in the earth and the map in our minds*’ writes Kimmerer.<sup>406</sup> Exploration of the *Via Arbora* is a pathway, to elevated, altered states: of being, of mind. Playing with *The Sacred* is the first step on this path.

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<sup>404</sup> Berry, T. 1999; 49.

<sup>405</sup> Abram, D. 2010; 12.

<sup>406</sup> Kimmerer, R. 2013; 235-236.

*The Sacred*: Access to the otherworldly occurs in that poised space between equilibrium (discipline, balance, harmony) and disequilibrium (imbalance, disharmony). This is the manner in which transcendence became manifest in my inquiry, as a matter of patterns: apprehending, recognition of, playing with. Thomas Berry writes that: ‘*Only Earth held a creative balance between the turbulence and the discipline necessary for creativity*’.<sup>407</sup> In my emerging practice premeditated *method* was notably absent. *Practice*—especially that of the evolving *Via Arborescens*—emerged from this tension noted by Berry: that between discipline and wildness. The creation of the altar and the ritual was an order of sorts, and play. These playings—of light on flowers, the interlocutions of Yosser—were, initially, disruptions: becoming largely, but not wholly, predictable. In becoming predictable, less experimental, it seemed to have served its purpose. Having made the necessary discoveries, it became time to move on: with predictability comes equilibrium. As Berry puts it:

Yet an equilibrium of these forces would have brought about another barrier to creativity, for equilibrium would produce a fixation in which creativity would be lost. The universe solved this problem by establishing a creative disequilibrium expressed in the curvature of space that was sufficiently closed to establish an abiding order in the universe and sufficiently open to enable the wild creative process to continue.<sup>408</sup>

It seems that in establishing experimental practices I had—albeit unwittingly—emulated this *curvature of space*. In so doing—in developing, evolving, unfolding such imaginal practice—I had revealed another apparent dichotomy: that between the role of the artist and that of the philosopher. Berry states:

The artist revels in the ultimate disequilibrium of things. The philosopher is controlled ultimately by the balance and harmony of things, by reasoning and intelligence. Both are valid, both are needed.[...] *So the philosopher and the artist are both poised between the two possibilities*. In this mysterious balance the universe and all its grandeur and all its loveliness become possible. Exactly here the presence of the sacred reveals itself.<sup>409</sup>

It occurs to me that it is also a quality of adult development, and attenuated adult development, that this tension—between wildness and discipline—needs to fall into the realm of *creative disequilibrium*. It is the reluctance, either through fear or other discomfort, to do this, to take the necessary steps, that leads to other disruptions—potentially more toxic, damaging and powerful—to occur down the line. If the *Via Arborescens* is a way towards re-wilding—of self, towards a re-balancing of the inherent tensions within such practice—this also needs to be held by the tension of discipline. For creativity, and *Imagos*, to flourish, there needs to be a balance, between abiding order, and wild creative process. The aspects that were immediately within my purview were processes to experiment with: ritual, image-making, writing. Also within my purview, places and spaces: to create, to play within, to make art, to create the disciplines of practice, with no known, preconceived or anticipated outcome—save for making some kind of as yet unfathomable difference. That and having a bit of fun, often in apparently dire circumstances—outcomes unfolded from creation of place.

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<sup>407</sup> Berry, T. 1999; 52.

<sup>408</sup> Berry, T. 1999; 52.

<sup>409</sup> Berry, T. 1999; 53 emphasis mine.

*Place*: In creating *The Alder Altar* and its associated practices, I curated a space—unbeknown to me, initially—for witnessing, for listening, to the *heartbeat of the world*. It became a ligneous *Camera Obscura*, a conduit, into dimensions of the sacred. Barry Lopez writes:

When we enter the landscape to learn something, we are obligated, I think to pay attention rather than constantly pose questions. To approach the land as we would a person, by opening intelligent conversation. And to stay in one place, to make of that one, long observation a *fully-dilated experience*. We will always be rewarded if we give the land credit for more than we imagine, and if we imagine it as being more complex even than language.<sup>410</sup>

Robert Macfarlane notes Cilek's 'pilgrim rules': [...] *the two most memorable were the 'Rule of Resonance': 'A smaller place of great pilgrimage'; and the 'Rule of Correspondence': 'A place within a landscape corresponds to a place within the heart.'*<sup>411</sup> Imagining, or re-imagining landscape, the landscape re-imagines us: we change as a result of the interaction. It was thus with my experiences of the *Alder Altar*. Constant questioning seems inappropriate—indeed a kind of desecration. Yet it is part of the process, at least as far as satisfying the academy is concerned. As noted in the email to Steve cited earlier in this chapter, the sailor Bernard Moitessier quit a Round the World yacht race—one which he was likely to win—in order to 'save his soul'. It is in the light of what Lopez terms '*fully-dilated experience*', that I remain; writing into the questions that stem from a deep relationship to both place, and to the more-than-human world. It is by re-entering that experience that I find the impetus to continue, to *save my soul* in a different way; when the questioning and inquiry has frequently left me feeling depleted—in a state of exhausted torpor. Creating the *Alder Altar* as *space* was, apparently, happenstance: random, ad-hoc, without conscious intent; initially. Created at a time of great perturbation—psychically, emotionally, both within me and a loved one—what changed the *Alder Altar* the space, into *The Alder Altar* as a *place of power*, was the series of creative practices, developed and performed by me and Yosser over a period of 40 days.

This was a process of curation. The initial creation was unconscious: the subsequent curation anything but. Curation led in turn to a sanctification—both of space and emerging practice. What started out initially as an inquiry into familial and organisational dysfunction, toxicity and [mental] illnesses—and into abuse of legal process—became an inquiry into the development of practice which may counter such phenomena. Or at least lend deeper insights into the forces at play. The practices initiated at the *Alder Altar* were carried forward into different spaces as what I term practices of *The Atelier*: where the Barthes notion of *Studium* and *Punctum* combine: lending deeper attention, to subjects, phenomena; to participants and observers.<sup>412</sup>

This curation—of space, the sacred, *The Atelier*—leads to *Communion*.

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<sup>410</sup> Lopez, B. 1990 quoted in Deveraux, P. 1996; 219 emphasis mine.

<sup>411</sup> MacFarlane, R. 2013; 237-238.

<sup>412</sup> See chapter Chapter 15 *Flights on fictional planes*.

*Communion (The Atelier):* To enter *The Atelier* is to enter a space of Communion: 'Once we have been touched by the grace of super-imagination, we feel it in the presence of the simpler images through which the exterior world deposits virtual elements of highly-coloured space in the heart of our being.' states Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*.<sup>413</sup> Once our work at *The Alder Altar* was complete, me and Yosser decamped into what was to become the first manifestation of *The Atelier*—at once both a practice and a space. We had started this on 23rd of May, 18 days after the end of the ritual of the altar. The first flower to be photographed in *The Atelier* space was a bluebell, a white one. It was sent out as *Daily Flower #18*, along with a parable:

The parable of the white bluebell.

Last week I had an email from a friend who is among those who receives the *Daily Flowers*. The email contained a picture of flowers (this does seem to be catching), in this case a white bluebell among a field of blue bluebells, and asked for my take on it.

My response was along the lines of - '[This is] the right coloured flower in the wrong coloured meadow.... Or, the wrong coloured flower in the right coloured meadow...'

To which my friend's response was:

*'It's your difference that sets you apart, not your similarity; stand out!*

*Be different, be crazy, be silly, be sad, be happy, be fancy, be loud, be tall, BE YOU!!'*

*The flower does not care that it looks different from the thousands around it. It still stands tall and proud; in fact it had an amazing scent (the others didn't).*

Which is interesting. Because I have been living Trungpa's dictum of '*the most difficult discipline being to become who you are*' for some time (or so I thought); my coaching practice (and photography teaching before that) is based on helping people to find, and to connect to, their 'inner white bluebell'. In an early doctoral paper on personal brand, mine was being thrown out of organisations.

All of which is obvious, and was, just as soon as I was challenged.

Which makes me realise, that even for 'professional white bluebells' – such as I like to consider myself to be – the work to define and maintain the boundaries of one's identity is constant.

For me: taking pictures of flowers, riding motorbikes, doing my research, writing, walking, teaching people to fly – are all a part of my 'White-Bluebell-Ness'.

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<sup>413</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014a; 242.



To celebrate my WBN, I picked this one from the garden, and photographed shortly after dawn yesterday.

Two things to ponder from this parable maybe:

'What's your WBN?'

and

'What are you going to do today to celebrate it?'

This is an early instance of my practice of *The Atelier* as *grace of the super-imagination*, an act of communion. Being sent the photograph of the white bluebell, and being asked to respond to it, had a heightening effect on my senses. I became attuned to a white bluebell in the garden of the ford, and, as it was not in a suitable place to do it justice photographically, I brought it indoors to make a picture placing it on the ledge. (Where I'd first placed the Daffodils that became the flowers that kicked off the Alder Altar series.) It was also an image that resonated; that provoked many heartfelt responses from recipients. One such from my brother is typical:

I celebrate it every time I look at our woodland (we were a laughing stock when we planted it), look over our pond (we were a laughing stock when we dug it) hear Arthur play (we were derided for encouraging music in favour of pursuance of a "proper" career, and I don't think parents take Hector's abilities terribly seriously either).

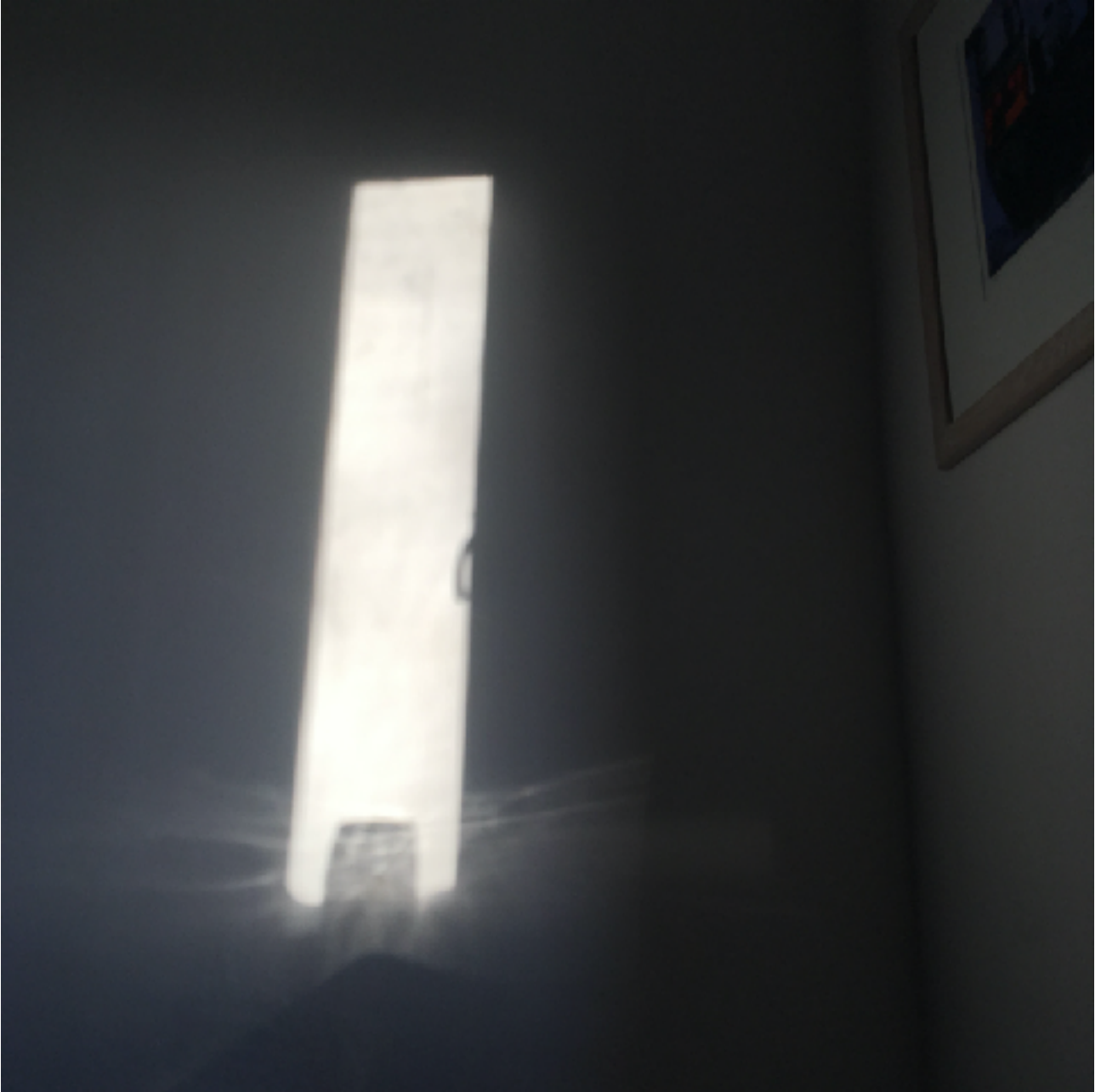
A lifelong policy of sheet anchor safety with a generous salting of the outrageous (Taleb recommends a 9/1 ratio, but ours has been more like 7/3) has shown a zero success rate with all the "safe" bets while all the chancy ridiculous stuff is yielding treasure beyond imagining. White bluebells rock :)

[Email from Julian Stanley 23.5.16]

The *Via Arbora* led to the practice of *The Atelier*, which, in turn, leads to resonances within the lives of the audience; sometimes offering possibilities: of shape-shifting, *transcendence*.



Untitled (White Bluebell). Lingen, 2016.



Untitled (The Atelier). Lingen, 2016.

*Shape-shifting (transcendence, membranes)*: To enter the realm of the animal (or plant) mind is to enter a realm where one becomes—or commences a journey into becoming—other. In *The Eye of the Sandpiper*, Brandon Keim observes:

[...] hardly a week goes by now without seeing headline grabbing demonstration of animal thoughtfulness. It's left me with the conviction that *to walk outside is to walk into a kaleidoscope of inner worlds*.

The poet and environmentalist Gary Snyder described ecological relationships as “nets of beads, webs of cells.” Through his eyes, landscapes pulsate; each organism is suspended in a vast, interconnected field of energy and life, glowing like so many *illuminated jewels*. To which I would add: each of these jewels is thinking too.<sup>414</sup>

The practices of *The Atelier*—developed initially during the rituals of *The Alder Altar*—were practices *designed* to intersect the realities of the *glowing illuminated jewels* surrounding me and Yosser.<sup>415</sup> It is to this thinking-ness of the jewels that I turn when moving between, or apprehending moving between, forms of being. The most obvious (to me) being: in my communions with Yosser, with flowers, with the environs of our home, Archers Ford. It was by following my (our) *White Bluebell-Ness* that me and Yosser became more deeply connected (to each other) and ironically also disconnected (physically) from our home. In ignoring the sanctions of *Direct-Debit Debbie* we found each other, ‘lost’ our home—and found sanctification. Text of *Daily Flower #34* illustrates:

Yosser had made his mark. I had started to listen to the universe even more earnestly. His method was gaining popularity with other participants in this inquiry.

His method: Strut across his bridge (not the one that I made for him), meander towards the altar, maybe pause and undertake a rite, more probably than not wander towards the pile of felled trees in the field, pause, wander further away, cross the stile down to the brook, pause, wander back towards the ford, and – now we get to the clever bit – find a rabbit hole.

On finding a rabbit hole, Y’s pauses take on a transcendental, time warp, kind of quality. Y enters the multiverse, where all things are possible may happen at the same time, and yet time does not exist.

And, as it happens, neither do I exist.

I shuffle. Y shuffles. I think my shuffling broke his spell – or, more likely, alerted subterranean rabbits to our presence.

Spell broken, Y leads me to a Blackthorn tree in our back garden.

[Excerpt from field journal: Day 18/19. Friday 15th April 2016: Yosser, water]

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<sup>414</sup> Keim, B. 2017; 46 emphases mine.

<sup>415</sup> I use the word *designed*, with caution, as it connotes purpose. Although ‘purpose’ - including this note - may have emerged, it was not consciously preconceived. And, in some ways, feels as much matter of pre-ordination, as of pre-conception.



Untitled (Yosser, Blackthorn). Lingen 2016.

Following Yosser to sites of special interest (to him) helped me to start seeing differently: to become firstly more deeply acquainted with our environs, then to a becoming—to notice what Yosser noticed, and, sometimes, to become—just a bit—‘Yosser’. That isn’t to say become more cat-like, though that is implied; more to take on, momentarily, a *Yosser-ish* persona; in much the way one might with a partner in a long-term relationship. If I had not followed Yosser on his perambulations, then I would not have seen, nor made pictures of, that Blackthorn blossom in our garden, much less made pictures (and a story) of the event, and then sent them out to over 100 people. That post provoked this response:

Beautiful! I like the free quality of your following Yosser.

Writing stopped about 4-5 days ago. Getting back into it today. Still don’t have flights to Bled.

[From email from Katherine Semler 16.8.16.]

Far from being a constraint (though at times it felt like it was), following Yosser has freed me up. Yosser became more of a constant than a constraint, granting new permissions.

**The Ford:** On the second bank holiday in May, Yosser had woken me from a deep sleep by wailing beneath my bedroom window. That morning, we resolved to clear the hard track to the stream that comprised the exit to the ford, the old way into our home, prior to circa 1972. This way had been clear and useable, when we first moved in 10 years ago. Now, with the passing of time, a part filled ambition to turn it into a large log store (which didn’t get past the first layer of logs), the way had become cluttered: with litter from the overhanging trees, some part-felled shrubs, an inter-weave of bramble, and now, the odd nascent tree. Hazels will be among the first to reclaim brown-field sites post apocalypse, it seems.

I tugged at old logs and brambles and shovelled and forked the decomposing litter. Yosser sat like a sphinx, part-observing, but with feigned disinterest. Occasionally we would get up and do one of his lolloping growly runs that we call his ‘fly-bys’. I have no idea why he does them. Perhaps he sensed the need of deeper involvement than his sphinx mode was managing to convey? Whatever, it was good to have him along.

At one point my senses became overwhelmed with anger at the involvement of *Direct-Debit Debbie*, The Toxic Lawyer, in our situation...that without knowing us, or our side of the story, she was trying to make us homeless, when there was no need. It did not make sense. Me and Yosser took time out, and wrote two poems, on two consecutive days. We also sent out a Daily Flower email and wrote a blog post. All of these were crossing the boundary—into the land of toxicity. It was like I imagine re-entry to Chernobyl to be. Another post-apocalyptic zone; a similar set of feelings.

Then we went back to our shambles and the brambles and forest litter that was spawning new life—and left to its own devices, a new forest— and we started to feel: Our way back into soul space; connected to each other; connected to our home more deeply; and, seeing the tree-creepers and coal-tits and the yawning possibilities ahead, we found blessing. We found the opening up of this boundary to be a healing one, crossing a stream of awareness. We even think we may have found a new way forward, when all had seemed helpless, in our starting to open this gateway to the stream, and the old ford. We had found a different way to enter, to leave, to keep our home.

We had unburied older, deeper connections: To rootedness; to the sacred.

Whenever I come to start writing, to re-commence work on my doctoral thesis, I find I'm usually blocked, not knowing where to start. The same was true of this—where the ambition is to provide an account of emerging practice, patterns and theosophy.

So I started, as is becoming my habit, with an experimental writing piece: *The Trees #9. The Ford.*

This is after all an inquiry into aesthetics.

[From *The Trees #9*; Doctoral writings 2017]

*Seeing*—theorising, creating *theōria*—from the perspective of Yosser, helped recommend the practice of shape-shifting into my world, a practice that remains with me. Others noticed this tendency of inquiry too:

I like the idea of Yosser composing poetry. When he sits sphinx-like, I wonder if that is what he is doing and the growly fly-bys are just his way of letting off energy in between his auto-philosophy?

[From email from Blu Tirohl 7.6.17]

The burnished realities of the Alder Altar days have morphed into a more conscious, and conscientious, switching, or series of switchings. We bumped into it, then, largely when noticed or remarked upon by others, sought to play with the phenomenon. This caused me to reflect upon Yosser's love: of the world, and, to a lesser extent, his love of me. It seemed to manifest in what were initially *strange* ways, yet now I realise that the perceived *strangeness* was a coming into being, or revelation, of a new (to me) way of *knowing*. We both, I think, became different during that period, me more so. Keim wonders:

Could a bird whose basic physiology adapts to changing seasons, who can perceive atmospheric infrasound, and see the Earth's magnetic field, have emotional capacities beyond our own? *Including, perhaps, forms of love that are not merely analogues of our cherished feelings, but **something unique to them?***<sup>416</sup>

It has been said that these propositions—that animals have emotions and experiences that influence, that their, and in turn our, behaviours—are radical.

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<sup>416</sup> Keim, B. 2017; 66 emphasis mine.

Yet to me, at least now, they seem obvious. Often, when I write, Yosser manipulates me out of my writing chair. (As I write, on Christmas Eve 2019, he has just done this.) Obviously I have no idea of his motivation, but it seems to be that he wants to keep me company as I write. I am occupying the only suitable (for either of us) chair. So if he manipulates me out of it, I have no option but to get another. This example of interspecies communication is but one example of transcendental morphing—shapeshifting. Such transcendences—migrations through membranes of experience—are both more common than one might suppose; also non-linear and non-hierarchical. Movement might be horizontal, or downward. Yosser’s fluidity in this regard never ceases to amaze me, to keep my inquiring mind on its toes.

Seeing in this way goes beyond activity and adjective: becoming a sacred act. Yet to suggest that a cat may adopt an altered state of consciousness is a radical claim that goes beyond the *suggestion* that mental experiences affect the behaviours of animals, a *claim* that is itself considered radical in some quarters: ‘*When the zoologist Donald Griffin wrote in The Question of Animal Awareness that biologists should investigate “the possibility that mental experiences occur in animals and have important impacts on their behaviours,” it was still a radical suggestion.*’<sup>417</sup>

None of us know what occurs inside an animal’s thoughts, and probably just as well that we don’t. But close observation does give some clues; and was certainly an aid to me in finding a way of seeing, that seemed, and still does at times, to transcend the states of conventional, local, rational boundaries. All of this points to what is a central (if largely invisible and unstated) tenet of my thesis: that conventional scientific method is limited in its ability to apprehend, and thus comprehend, all layers of reality, such as: the possibility of being guided in a practice of shape shifting by an animal; the possibility of some plants being the indications of other ways of being and knowing. In *When Elephants Weep*, Masson & McCarthy point to this apparent deficiency of conventional scientific method:

It is not necessarily the case, however, that emotional explanations for animal behaviour are impossibly complex or untestable. They are just more difficult for scientific method to verify in the usual ways. *The unwarranted step seems to have been taken that what cannot be readily measured or tested cannot exist, or is unworthy of serious attention.*<sup>418</sup>

In seeking to further human knowledge in these realms, our analogues find the limits of their usefulness: We cannot know of (or be in) realms of parallel or non-local realities when the prescript is ordained by conventions. We need to find freer, altered, realms within which to play and observe. For my part, I take the view that finding worthiness is an activity best undertaken by others: I find myself not particularly motivated in this regard.

In order to relate to other aspects of post-conventional knowing and being, I propose as further fields of research: *Action-Phenomenology* and *4th person (sacred) Inquiry*.

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<sup>417</sup> Keim, B. 2017; 52.

<sup>418</sup> Masson, J. & McCarthy, S. 1996; 29 emphasis mine.



*Time (fluidity; granularity)*: Photographs occur as readings, as lesions, in time—which is itself a phenomena: granular, and not continuous, as is commonly supposed. In *The Order of Time* Carlo Rovelli states:

Perhaps the rivers of ink that have been expended discussing the nature of ‘continuous’ over the centuries, from Aristotle to Heidegger, have been wasted. *Continuity is only a mathematical technique for approximating very finely grained things. The world is subtly discrete, not continuous.* The good Lord has not drawn the world with continuous lines: *with a light hand, he has sketched dots, like Seurat.*

Granularity is ubiquitous in nature: light is made of photons, the particles of light.<sup>419</sup>

The act of making photographs is both an imposition, and a super-imposition, on the granularity of time: The imposition is that of the interlocutor/observer, the super-imposition is that of recycling the *captured* light, by way of making the latent images into artefacts: Phenomena become seen, manifest in the material world. The photographic act becomes one of recycling light into material. That light having started out as material—burning helium some eight minutes or so before striking the subject—apprehended by the photographer-observer’s camera: The imposition: *The finder*. The superimposition: *Availed light*.

Photographs are interruptions in the (illusory) continuity of time: the act of making photographs, similarly an act of interruption of *apparent* continuity. Light is granular—fine grained—like halides and pixels excited by photons. It occurs to me that there is a coincidence between the granularity of time and the granularity of light: both occur in multiple dimensions. The particulates—of time, of light—potentially constructing or invoking parallel realities.

‘*For a long time, we have tried to understand the world in terms of some primary **substance***’, states Rovelli.<sup>420</sup> Working with light is to work with an apparent *substance* (light) in order to affect other more substantial phenomena: retina, film, sensor, photographic paper. Rovelli goes on to say that the pursuit of *primary substance* is illusory: ‘*But the more we have studied it, the less the world seems comprehensible in terms of something that is. It seems to be a lot more intelligible in terms of relations between events.*’<sup>421</sup>

This *eventual* model—a model of emergent relationships—fits with the idea that the photographic moment may indeed be a means of interlocuting parallel realities; of incurring experiences deemed otherworldly; of an imaginal process—an altered state—which makes the dreamed of realities appear as real. Becoming enchanted is a part of a process in a series of events—interacting with light creating an altered state within the observer/finder—we come to know *other worlds* by becoming *other*, temporarily.

The relationship to events is extended by opening up the observer to participate—visually—with the *subject* (event) momentarily. Fluidity, ambiguity and mystery become allies when indicating, *delineating*, this territory. This helps us to become wise.

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<sup>419</sup> Rovelli, C. 2019; 75 emphasis mine.

<sup>420</sup> Rovelli, C. 2019 89 emphasis in original.

<sup>421</sup> Rovelli, C. 2019; 89. emphasis in original.

As Rovelli puts it: '*we understand the world by studying change, not things*'.<sup>422</sup> The act of making photographs is such an act of study. We are at the same time creating an event and reporting on the experience of it.

This reportage goes on to become an artefact, a thing, a photograph manifest in the world. Within that creation of a thing (and recreation of an event), we then go on to create other events within the minds and lives of observers. The photographic moment becomes replicated—rendered imperfectly—within those who view it subsequently. Photographs are the by-product of the moment, the outcome of altered states of awareness. This may be simple delineation (illustration), or, in the realm of awareness that concerns me: a moment of transcendence. The initial arresting of the flow of attention is random, or apparently so. The shift, I believe, comes in the post-hoc arresting of the flow of attention: a different focus is given to the relation between the finder (photographer) and the world. Working, playing in this way, is playing with light, with time: physics, and *action-phenomenology*, as much as visual art.

I wonder whether the grammar of time, and of light, is sufficient to explore what is happening here? How do epiphanies reveal themselves in the written word? Are images, and pure maths, our only way of *knowing* into these phenomena? What are the implications for the processes (method) at hand? It seems we reach the edge of the expression, grammar and epistemology of time. According to Rovelli, even physics struggles: '*Physicists are not immune from talking nonsense*.'<sup>423</sup> And that:

Physics does not describe how things evolve 'in time' but how things evolve in their own times, and how times evolve relative to each other.

Time has lost its first aspect or layer: its unity. It has a different rhythm in every different place and passes here differently from there. The things of this world interweave dances made to different rhythms. If the world is upheld by the dancing Shiva, there must be ten thousand dancing Shivas, like the dancing figures painted by Matisse...<sup>424</sup>

The *problem* is threefold: perception (apprehending), capture (interlocution), and iteration (dissemination). Rovelli reverts to creating analogues with other forms: Art, deities, philosophy, physics, mathematics. Yet still a synthesis of time proves elusive. The closest that I come to defining the photographic moment—the *moment of recognition*—in physical terms is that it seems analogous to a moment of higher entropy. As Rovelli puts it: '*The flame is a channel through which the wood can pass to a state of higher entropy*.'<sup>425</sup> My *theōria*: The same thing happens at the moment of resonance evident in the ocular fire of the imaginal photographic moment. Also: that such *altered states*, or, *granular moments*, may heal, connect us to the other-worldly.

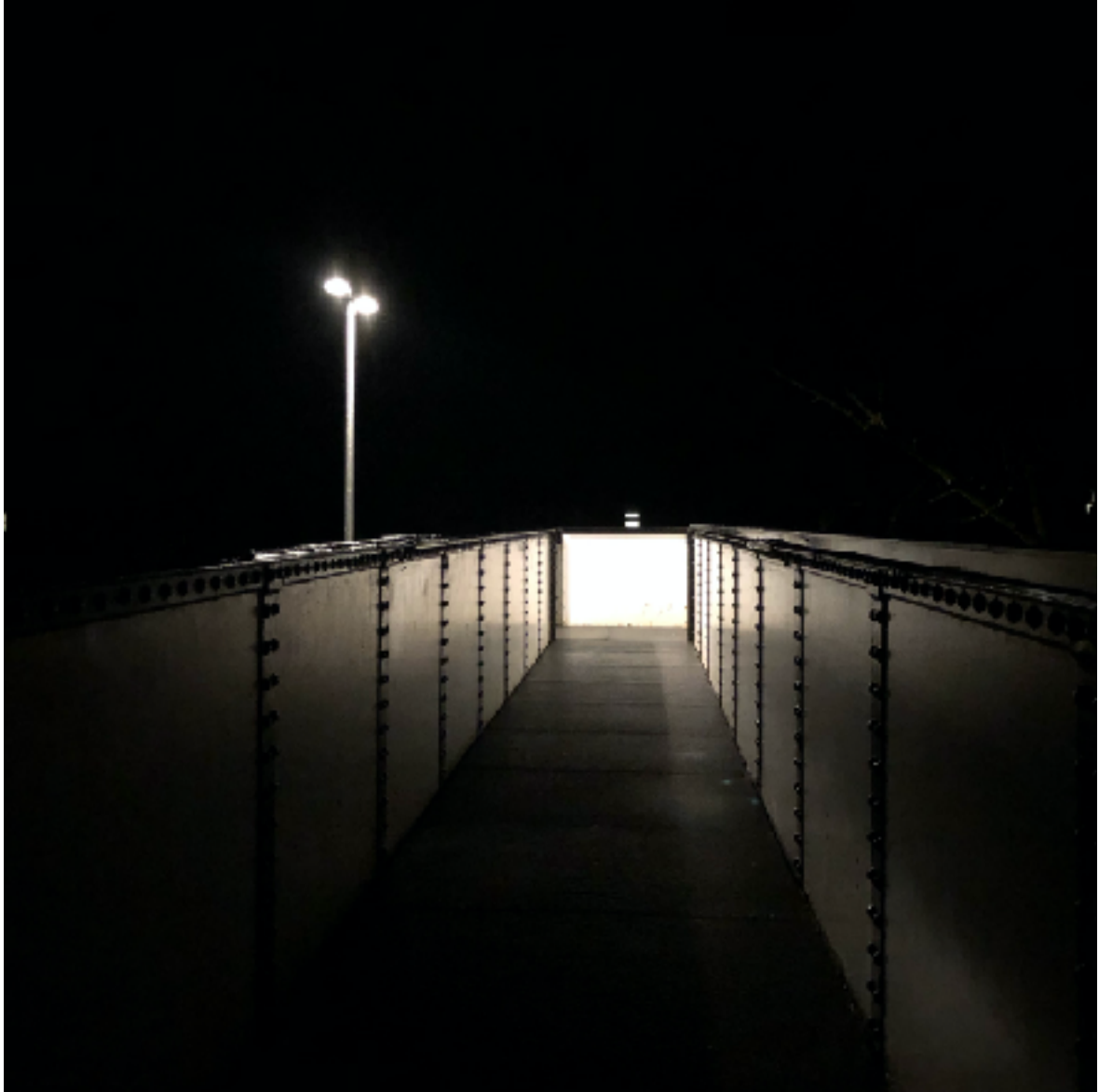
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<sup>422</sup> Rovelli, C. 2019 89.

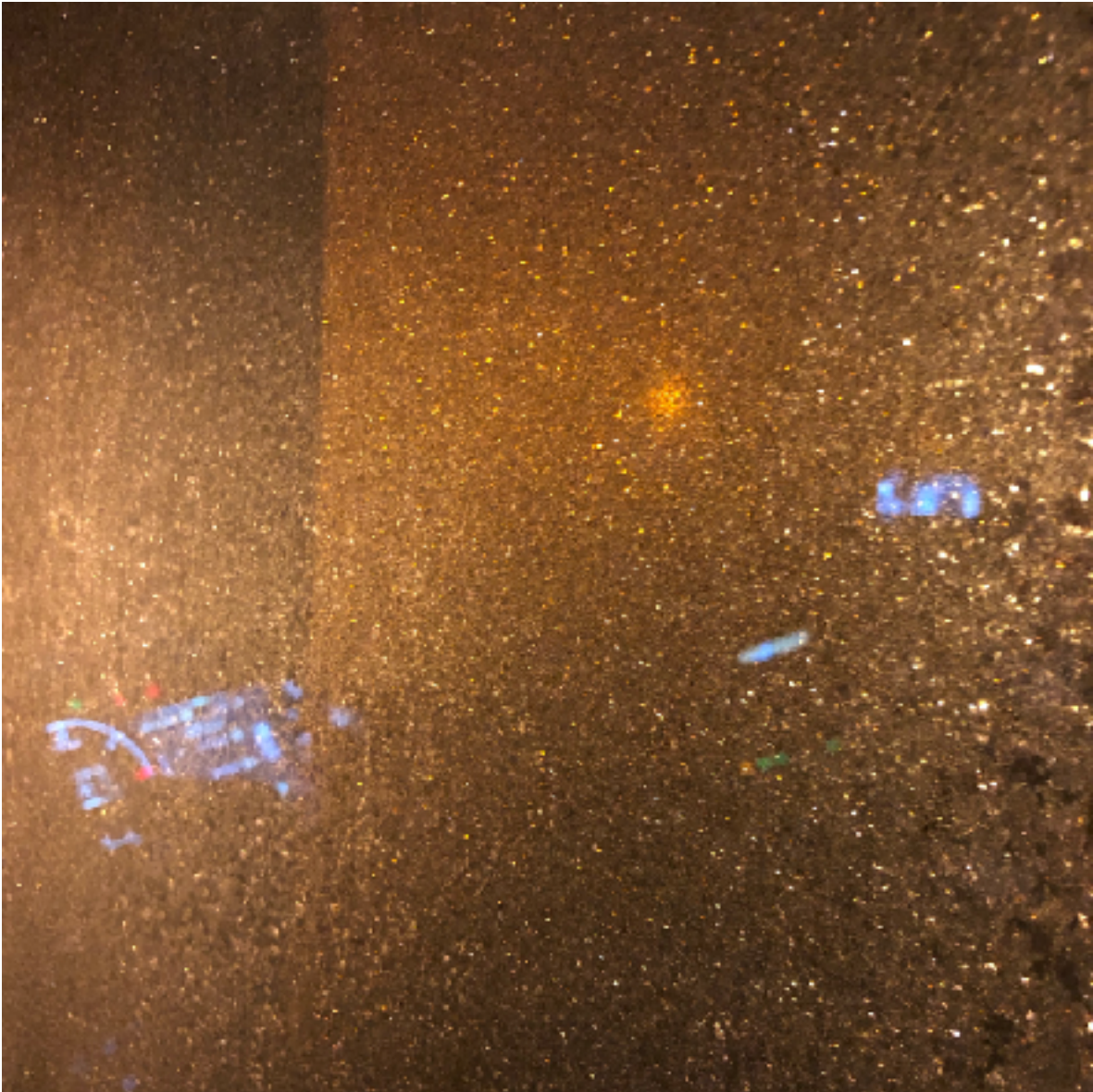
<sup>423</sup> Rovelli, C. 2019; 27.

<sup>424</sup> Rovelli, C. 2019; 16-17.

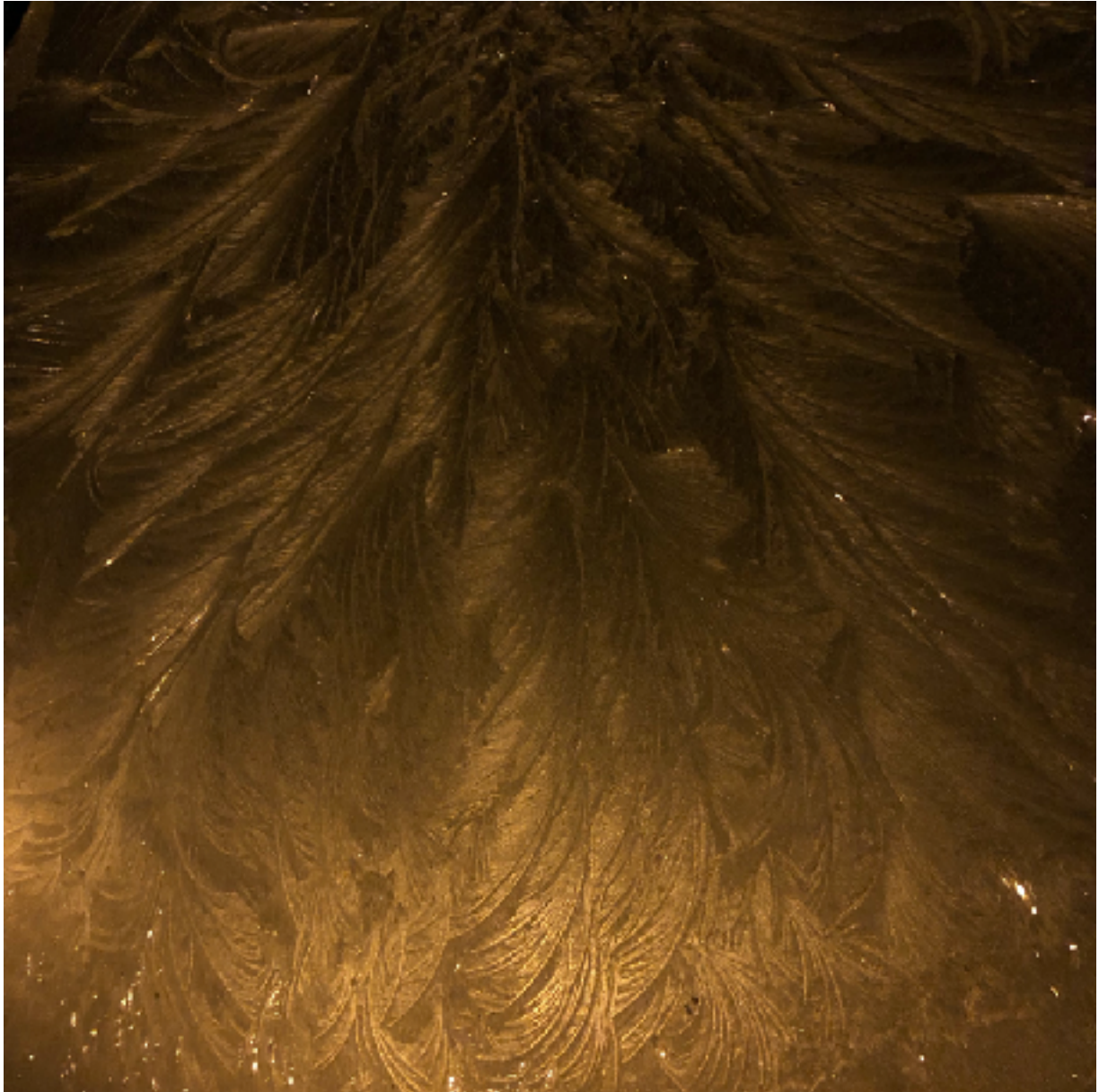
<sup>425</sup> Rovelli, C. 2019; 141.



Untitled (after work, 00.55). Church Stretton, 2019.



Untitled (before work, 06.54). Whitchurch, 2019



Untitled (walk home 22.27). Church Stretton, 2019.

I have been writing on process (method), and the ways in which *seeing* helps, a little, in revealing the nature of phenomena. For a unification—of theory, practice and phenomena—to be revealed in depth the dimension of wholeness needs to become available. Bortoft states:

This is the dimension of wholeness, which is the unity of the phenomenon. For Goethe, the *theory is seeing* this intensive dimension of the phenomenon. This is much closer to the original Greek **theoria**, which simply means “seeing”. This dimension of the phenomenon is not seen by the senses, and not by the sightless fancies of the verbal-intellectual mind.<sup>426</sup> *It is seen intuitively by a change of consciousness.*<sup>427</sup>

This *seeing-as-process* is *participatory*; reliant on resonance. If one shifts thinking, and terminology, with regard to the *new science*, the former observer (photographer, finder) becomes participant—one of the forces at play in the photographic moment; along with light, time and subject. Initially I considered that this only held true for organic (flora; fauna) subjects. However working with an awareness of the quality of attention in this moment leads me to conclude that inanimate non-organic subjects are included too. This is counter-intuitive to me. Leading to inquiry into the nature of *participatory process*, thus the matter of the true nature of time (and light) being granular (in quality), *and* linear (in construction). Given that the observer/participant is the catalyst, instigator, of the process, any alterations or variables need to be in their state: this suggests shifts in consciousness or levels of awareness. To see (apprehend) holistically is to shift temporal realities: to enter an altered *theoria* (to the local, apparent one). Sailors talk of the apparent wind—the wind flowing over the boat as it moves due to the effects of the wind over the sails. We might consider the same to be true of light (and time) during occasions of deep seeing: their nature (apparently) shifting too—due to their co-participation in the seeing *event*. In *Underland*, Robert Macfarlane writes of *Deep Time*:

[...] deep time is a radical perspective, provoking us to action not apathy. For to think in deep time can be a means not of escaping our troubled present, but rather re-imagining it; countermanding its quick greeds and furies with older, slower stories of making and unmaking. *At its best deep time awareness might help us see ourselves as part of a web of gift*, inheritance and legacy stretching over millions of years past and millions to come, bringing just to consider what we are leaving behind for the epochs and being that follow us.

*When viewed in deep time, things come alive that seemed inert.*<sup>428</sup>

Working in a fluid way with light and time illuminates above all the neural (consciousness shifts) that permit altered ways of seeing, sensing, apprehending. This writing—and the photographs included—providing a minimal audit, and description of *method*. The photographs represent the (apparently) *inert*. The shifting ecology of this way of seeing may have deeper implications: for paradigms of research; practice; healing; adult and organisational development. Working with *theōria* in this manner—playing with light and time—is a small, if significant indication of such shifts. The *inert* becomes animated: *phenomenal*.

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<sup>426</sup> This definition is contentious. Though close to my interpretation, I discuss more fully later in this section.

<sup>427</sup> Bortoft, H. 1996; 71 bold emphasis on original. Italicised emphasis mine.

<sup>428</sup> Macfarlane, R. 2019; 15 emphasis mine.

## Chapter 17

### ***Runes: Notes on Action-Phenomenology.***

[Processes, practices & implications (*method*) for researchers and practitioners.]

Man has closed himself up, till he sees  
all things through narrow chinks of his  
cavern. And yet even locked in the  
cavern we hear distant echoes.

William Blake



Untitled (midnight), Wrexham, 2019.



'Only images can set verbs in motion again', states Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*.<sup>429</sup> This is never so true as in respect of the phenomenology of emergence, or my proposed scion of this branch: *Action-Phenomenology*. As I experiment (play) with images—their finding, context and curation—new narratives, imagery and eventualities occur. It is a playing with patterning and re-patterning at several levels, some aesthetic, some of the intellect (games), some—often—deeper, more primal: profound. Yet this profundity, where and if it occurs, does so as a byproduct of process; as *happy accident*; apparently tangential. Without purpose or pre-ordained meaning, it is an occurrence, observed, repeated, up-cycled, reiterated. We lend our meanings later; and in so doing re-patterning commences, or recommences. I *played* the game with the practice of the *Alder Altar*, with the *Daily Flowers*, with *The Trees* writings, with the tales of Yosser the cat, with the planting of trees, and with the utilisation of *The Magic Bird-Box* in response to the antics of *Direct-Debit Debbie*. The pre-requisites: *Curiosity*, a willingness to experiment (often when the pressure for a linear response is high); *Openness*, to experience and the novel; *Testing* the boundaries of narratives; *Creating* the conditions where conventional narrative voice and readings break down—just to *see* what happens.

I often make pictures of 'nothing', or nearly, apparently, nothing. In proposing such spaces, I raise questions that invite narratives, often frustratingly so. These invocations are born to a degree of an altered state of consciousness—a form of self-hypnosis analogous to my early treatments for PTSD by Angela. The process of making the pictures may invite the altered state—and attendant other-realities—to become apparent. Is it not *just* the poetics of light that become more malleable? If we become altered by the things that happen to us (e.g. trauma), why would we not become altered by *anti-venoms*; practices of creating imagery—especially *no-thing* imagery?

Reflecting on, inquiring into, my processes, it occurred to me that phenomenology is something that may be *done*, rather than *just* a way of *naming*. Transcending the descriptive, and nomenclature, it becomes a verb. By playing with the mysteries of situations I was forming practices reliant on the malleability and intrigue of the mysterious, shifting the engagement of the audience (reader). Within my explorations—the poetics and aesthetics of experimental text, the painting with light and tone and colour that resulted in the iPhone images—lay a way of connecting: exploitative of both phenomena, and the acts of (re)creating phenomena. I call this field *Action-Phenomenology*—a term which I am not aware of either being used, or developed as a practice, elsewhere.

The *theōria* (*seeing-into*) of this practice is an invitation to playful experimentation with emergence and non-linearity; the rest relatively straight forward, matters of observation, decoding, and intellect. Though apparently secular—both in conception and execution—realisations occur on less manifest planes, and are of more mysterious inclination. This inflection is manifest in a WhatsApp interchange with David in response to two images, *Untitled (before the call)*, *Church Stretton, 2019*, and, *Untitled (midnight)*, *Wrexham, 2019*.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 129.

<sup>430</sup> Professor David Langsow, a linguistics & classics scholar, who has become a co-inquirer towards the end of this work. See also further, deeper, explication of *theōria* in the following chapter.

DL: So, the title is the bit in brackets, after 'Untitled'?

PS: Ha ha. William Eggleston did it, and I copied him..! Titles tend to look a bit prissy to me, captions less so. And I guess my brackets bit is subtitle / sub-caption, which adds a bit of context—which you'd think would help 'explain', but actually deepens the mystery. Ditto location, which I almost always add.

Eg: What call, what kind of call, with whom?

And: wtf is he doing in an unspecified space in Wrexham at midnight on Sunday..?

DL: It certainly works for me. Very effective. <sup>431</sup>

The exchange illustrates the manner in which the mysterious may become propagated from two, disparate, happenstance occurrences, from instances of photographic eventualities showing up as *other*, in the apparently every day. Bachelard proposes:

[these] examples furnish us with phenomenological documents for a phenomenology of the verb "to emerge," and they are all the more purely phenomenological in that they correspond to invented types of "emergence." *In this case the animal is merely a pretext for multiplying the images of "emerging."* Man lives by images. Like all important verbs, to emerge from would demand either considerable research in the course of which, besides concrete examples, *one would collect the hardly perceptible movements of certain abstractions.* We sense no little or no more action in grammatical deviations, deductions or inductions. *Even verbs become congealed as if they were nouns. Only images can set verbs in motion again.*<sup>432</sup>

This passage by Bachelard—axiomatic to the nascent practice field of *Action-Phenomenology*—acts almost as a manifesto for such work. These are not instructions, more sailing orders—delineations of the starting point for a journey, or series of journeys that may in time assume the mantle of sacred adventures—invocations of the enchanted, the other worldly. Strolling into the realms of phenomenal worlds happened as though by accident; it was like I became an existential *flaneur*, my realm of *derive*, the worlds of a stream, some flowers and a cat, at least initially so; then, becoming more conscious by both observations and feedback loops of audiences and readers, playing with the mysteries caused them to both deepen, and in an odd way, to clarify.

It was in this way—*deepening clarification*—that the putative method of *Action-Phenomenology* started to become confirmed. The unfolding *realities* noted in the images *Untitled (before the call)*, *Church Stretton, 2019*; and: *Untitled (midnight)*, *Wrexham, 2019*, help in some way to see into the *planning* behind the unplanned nature of the call to image-making. Becoming in unlikely moments: once whilst nearing the end of a trucking shift; once whilst belatedly logging on for a group Zoom call. Avoidance of the call—of becoming captured enraptured, entranced, by momentary lapses into other worlds, at unlikely, sometimes inconvenient, times—is inimical to the practice of the *Action-Phenomenologist*.

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<sup>431</sup> WhatsApp exchange with David Langslow 19.11.19.

<sup>432</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 129 emphases mine.

Image-making becomes *setting verbs in motion*, setting ocular fires alight: The ensuing derivations resonant across boundaries, perceptual, experiential, cultural. The appeal of flower pictures and a cat story arguably universal; the yard of a regional distribution centre, or an anonymous wall, less so. Unlikely procurements become available to practitioners in this realm. The flower pictures and the cat stories—apparently superficial—are more than a *cosmetic* aspect of *Action-Phenomenology*. Rooted in *kosmētikos*—order and adornment—patterns open up, available to being played with.

Re-ordering becomes possible between the cosmic (ordered), and cosmetic (adorned), ends of the spectrum of emergent patterns. Delineations occur, I think, at the divergence between *poetry* and *poetics*. *Poetry* I see still as a kind of conformity, if a sometimes slightly rabid, often disruptive, form. *Poetics* on the other hand I find more multi-form, multi-dimensional: Of more radical utility in terms of my practice. We may deploy both as becomes situationally necessary, but it is mainly to poetics that I turn to explore the nascent field of *Action-Phenomenology*.

*Poetics* can be both order and adornment, but in a different way to *poetry*. *Poetics* for me, is more available and appropriate to *non-local realities*: Dancing in realms of the other-worldly, prescribing the journey from the erasure to enchantment. Poetics is for me an *eco-theological* form, occurring in ways that poetry often doesn't: the form available as the foundation of *Action-Phenomenology*.

In my case this shows up as images, sometimes as writings, both experimental. (Specifically, the images made by iPhone.) Stripped of the obesity of poetry, the observations and practices of poetics seem to form a closer assemblage of that (barely) necessary to begin to explore, maybe to describe, the numinous: there being a natural, inherent, suitable quality of *theosophos* to poetics. Playing and experimenting in the realms of the para-ordinary, I may waive poetic rules and truly re-create. Bachelard writes:

It would seem, then, that it is through their “immensity” that these two kinds of space—the space of intimacy and world space—blend. When human solitude deepens, then the two immensities touch and become identical. In one of Rilke's letters, we see him straining toward “the unlimited solitude that makes a lifetime of each day, toward *communion with the universe, in a word, space, the invisible space that man can live in nevertheless, and which surround him with countless presences.*”<sup>433</sup>

It is within this constituency of countless presences that the field of *Action-Phenomenology* presides. It was illness that introduced me to this space; I continue to reside there because I find it suitable and credible for the convention of further works, which I find fascinating. It becomes me.

For some time—perhaps 20 years or so—I have played with what happens when the horizon is either excluded from, or displaced within, the photographic frame, initially to install feelings of flying. Now it seems that other disorientations come into being, calling into question situational and existential *kosmētikos*, our displacements, our relations: to subject; to self.

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<sup>433</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 219 emphases mine.



Untitled (illuminated tree). Church Stretton, 2020.

These disorientations—coexistences—may be either troubling, or appear as affirmations. Beyond adornment, the *kosmētikos*—the order within the images—acts as a means of way-finding, as Omega points to other worlds:

This co-existence of things in a space to which we add consciousness of our own existence is a very concrete thing. [...] In this *co-existentialism* every object invested with intimate space becomes the centre of all space. For each object, distance is the present, the horizon exists as much as the centre.<sup>434</sup>

Bachelard's pre-figuration of phenomenology as an activity, as well as a philosophy, begins to emerge within this text. For revelations to occur, activity (often micro-activity) is needed to curate the space. Working with the poetics of photography for a number of years has helped me to—eventually—figure this out. Reading and re-reading Bachelard, and to a lesser degree Merleau-Ponty, helps me to open up, even upend, my poetic-photographic practice. (It also helps me somewhat to enhance [reverse] my *seeing-into* of the philosophy of phenomenology—though this is not the *objective* here.)<sup>435</sup> Process occurs as a Mayan spiral: 'time' becomes non-linear, fluid; granular: non-local too. Mysterious infinity looms, blooms. This can be troubling, or exciting, or enchanting; depending on the self-orientation and levels of consciousness of the participant. Bachelard states: '*In the realm of images, there can be no contradiction, and two spirits that are identically sensitive can sensitise the dialectics of centre in different ways.*'<sup>436</sup> He goes on to propose a "plains" test:

At one end of the test, we should set out what Rilke said briefly and superbly: "The plain sentiment that exalts us." This theorem of esthetic anthropology is so clearly stated that it suggests correlative theorem which could be expressed in the following terms: any sentiment that exalts us makes our situation in the world smoother.

Then, at the other end of the "plains" test, we could set out this passage from Henri Bosco's *Hyacinthe* (p.18) "On the plains I am always elsewhere, in an elsewhere that is floating, fluid. Being for a long time absent from myself, and nowhere present, I am too inclined to attribute the inconsistency of my day-dreams to the wide open spaces that induce them."<sup>437</sup> <sup>438</sup>

It is a matter of states of attention awareness and consciousness, the ways in which the processes outlined may delineate, govern, and, if necessary or appropriate, expand these. This is the heart of the practice of the *Action-Phenomenologist*: smoothing situations, being in an elsewhere, creating the conditions and possibilities for either, or for both: a form of deep imagining. This is a means both of escape, and deep inquiry. The escapologist's version is the boy staring out of the classroom window, his mind far away.

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<sup>434</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 219 emphases mine.

<sup>435</sup> This sentence raises matters of *intention* and *consequence* here, which I discuss later.

<sup>436</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 219-220.

<sup>437</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 220.

<sup>438</sup> Bosco, H. 1945; 18. Quoted in Bachelard, G. 2014; 220.

The inquirer's version is a deepening of this state: how can escapology be played with, and within its malleability release other energies and realities—and they, in turn, realise us? In his book *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Dermot Moran discusses this, with the work of Sartre as the frame of reference and inquiry:

Imagining, Sartre says, is a magical act:

'We have seen that the act of imagination is a magical one. It is an incantation destined to produce the object of one's thought, the thing of one's desires, in such a way that one can take possession of it. In that act there is always something of the imperious and the infantile, a refusal to take distance or difficulties into account. Just so does the very young child act upon the world from his bed by orders and entreaties. *These objects obey these orders of consciousness.*'<sup>439</sup>

Imagining, then, is, as Husserl had already discussed in some detail, a special way of making objects present.<sup>440</sup>

In some traditions—of thought and theology—this proposition may be troubling, sacrilegious even. Sometimes it is to me too. However, when I come to direct, and maybe even explicate, my practice, this is where I end up: In a field with quasi demigods of the imagination; also with other minor deities, such as a stray cat. The way in a journey of poetics, feeling as though I'm on an eschatological quest (or retreat). Take for instance my photograph: *Untitled (illuminated tree)*, Church Stretton, 2020.

As with many other photographs that happen during this section—*Light*—there is a degree of ambiguity and disorientation: From the accompanying text we have a “*where?*” and a “*when?*” but we don't have a “*why?*” (or even much of a “*what?*”). We may have escaped, but into what kind of world? One where there is a tree apparently alight, and a vaguely illuminated crypt-like structure in the bottom right hand corner? These tensions—held, in part-answered but unasked questions, assist the *Action-Phenomenologist*: Arousing within view matters of deeper consciousness, even primality. Working with such arousals, we can begin to really do *the work* of inquiring into the imaginal: conducive to being played, relayed—*back into the world*.

The Images—splinters of light playing on splinters of the universe—seem to attach themselves as viruses to something primal within the human psyche. Where narrative sense attempts to construct them break down, something else—deeper, more universal, pan-theistic—resides. Working with these imaginal migrants and incomers is the work, and the play, of the *Action-Phenomenologist*. We take pains: To play with the ineffable, put it on a plate, (re)introduce to the world, to see what ensues.

Apparently unstructured in terms of process and method, within the eventual emergent micro-structures lie patterns of wisdom: The *imaginal* act also a *magical* one. The resultant *incantations*—apparently *imperious* and *infantile*—*obey deeper seated orders of consciousness*. We ourselves become remade in the process, by the *special way of making objects present*: Erasures are eradicated.

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<sup>439</sup> Sartre, J.-P. 1972; 141. Quoted in Moran, D. 2000; 381 emphasis mine.

<sup>440</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 381.

The techniques, methods and theologies for these occurrences are fairly simple, and apparently easy to learn; though it has taken me a while to fully realise them. Where Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty and Sartre and Husserl took up the cudgels of phenomena and their study within academe, academically my journey has been more a more prosaic, poetic, excursion into this world: The study, *and utilisation* of phenomena. The resultant *études* become the phenomena, if temporarily.

Many images are nocturnes, products of unlikely noctambulations; their formality reliant on their (unlikely) occurrence. Even those that occur in the daytime have something of the eeriness of the night-scape about them. This can confound the logical (egoic) brain, curious about backstory: this work-play a *theologikos*—a matter study and wonder. And that's okay. The *Action-Phenomenologist* is, after all, tasked with searching: Seeking different proposals and propositions from this life than is offered by the norm. This can be a cause of consternation for some; yet this is the value of the practice. This may also be the first encounter with license to seek enchantment since childhood. Which is no indictment of childhood, but does raise questions about the licensing *system*, that often has hitherto inoculated us from such fancies.

Due to the dissociative (from local realities) nature of the images, viewers must collect, recollect or generate their meanings elsewhere: work to do, when that of the *Action-Phenomenologist* is done. This work can to some be unappealing. The consecrations of the photographic act are there to be experienced, unveiled, unravelled. Special skills, experience or ordination in this process of unravelling are not required. But it does demand a certain predisposition towards re-levelling of beliefs and assumptions. Such is the nature of dealing with phenomena, and, probably, non-local realities. This is renewal *incarnate*.

There are masks (*identities*) available to phenomenological practitioners: that of *photographer*—something that I have rarely called myself, even prior to my inquiry—with its connotations if *idem* (sameness). A photographer takes, or makes, photographs. I find mine. The key to the matter is whether the imaging process is motivated by ego-ism, or is there another player in the mix? My contention is that there is. And that this player is an Imago, an *Imagoic 'Me'* as opposed to an Egoic '*I*'. The separation of these two is reflective of a level of consciousness in play regarding the object of *attention*: Where does *intention* sit? Moran, again discussing the work of Sartre, puts it thus:

Sartre, however, criticises Husserl for positioning a pure ego behind consciousness, whereas, in fact the self is a projection from consciousness and lies outside it like an object. Sartre accepts Husserl's account of a constituting transcendental consciousness, but he rejects the idea that we need to make it into an ego: Like Husserl, we are persuaded that our psychic and psycho-physical me (*notre moi psychique et psycho-physique*) is a transcendental object which must fall before the epoch. But we raise the following question: is not this psychic and psycho-physical me enough? Need one double it with a transcendental I (*un Je transcendental*) a structure of absolute consciousness?<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 377.

There is no transcendental ego for Sartre. [...] Instead Sartre argues for a pre personal upsurge of consciousness towards the world, and a pre-reflective cogito quite distinct from the Cartesian reflective cogito. It is not that I have consciousness of the chair but there's consciousness of the chair. In *Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre further argues that 'non-positional' consciousness of the self is the necessary and sufficient consciousness of objects.<sup>442</sup>

These lines of thinking are concurrent with my ideas regarding *Imago* the *Imaginal Gaze* and the way that *Action-Phenomenology* (in this case in the form of photographic images) shows up in the world. The *Imago* ('projection from consciousness [that] lies outside it like an object') is an imaginal, phenomenal, precursor of the self; the *Imaginal Gaze* ('a constituting transcendental consciousness') is a phenomenal process, occurrent when the Imago resonates with subject / object of the gaze; *Action-Phenomenology* ('pre personal upsurge of consciousness towards the world, and a pre-reflective cogito') prescribes the field where these events happen. The whole dynamic may be summarised in the statement that 'non positional' consciousness of the self is the necessary and sufficient consciousness of objects.

It is to this 'non-positional' consciousness of the self' that I turn in order to further both illuminate and explore the whole dynamic—with particular reference to the dynamics of *photographic-imaginal* practice. Occurring in a spectrum—between escapology and inquiry—the practice is rooted in a deepening of attention and awareness; the attention to altered, transcendent, states of consciousness, fundamental to the process.

Distilling the above further, we work with *Imago* (altered, or altering states of consciousness), *Gaze* (attention), and *Action-Phenomenology* (in this context curation of the [sacred] field).<sup>443</sup> Further refinements (into Consciousness, Attention, Curation) affording us some simplification and some relief from the philosophical complexities in which practice is rooted, in order to have a workable, relatable series of processes that we may—for want of a better term—call *method*.

Reverting now to the image mentioned earlier—*Untitled (illuminated tree), Church Stretton, 2020*, we may now further dissect the process (*method*) and see what happens. As already discussed, I have for many years been prone to making photographs—latterly iPhone images—at dusk and in or around woods. On this day—New Year's Day, 2020—I was with a loved one, returning from a walk.

Nearing home, I spotted the illuminated tree in a larger garden that forms a lesser-wooded clearing within the woods at the edge of the town where I now live. The meta-data from the images tells me that I made six exposures between 16:58:54 and 16:59:20. The image selected is the 3rd in the series, made at 16:59:13.

I was not *consciously* making images to show, let alone discuss in a dissertation. I was merely mildly *curious* as to what would happen (and indeed whether any viewable images would result given the light levels) if I took some pictures. I was surprised that I got anything viewable.

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<sup>442</sup> Sartre, J.-P. 1957; 36. Quoted in Moran, D. 2000; 377.

<sup>443</sup> Further discussion of *The Sacred*, and how we may begin to inquire into it, is to be found in the Chapter entitled *Rites*.



There must have been more light than I was aware of at the time. I found the image intriguing, as did my companion, not least because of what appears as a cryptic structure in the bottom right hand corner of the frame. I had not been *consciously* aware of this at the time of making; my seeing and attention were directed toward the illuminated tree. Yet, in my view, had it not been for the said cryptic structure, the image would not have worked.

If we again further curate the image through a lens of the ecclesiastic—*ekklēsia, ekkalein*—it becomes fancifully possible to imagine that I was *called out* to make the image. Or, I could have just been playing with my phone-camera at the end of a walk. And that's it: *In a very relaxed state, on a walk, playing, making images out of curiosity, happy accident / inexplicable sub-image in corner of frame occurs. Image ends up being intriguing, inviting narratives and / or projections.*

In the world of inquiry, we are continually invited to analyse and sub-analyse every nuance of existence. Yet—the above excursions into existential philosophy and psychology notwithstanding—the truth of the matter is often simpler, more elegant. Nonetheless also a more mysterious process than any pre-meditated, preconceived *intended method* would seem to suggest: inviting consideration of the relationship between *intentionality* and *method*.

Reverting to the image on page 11 of this dissertation, *Untitled, France, 2007*, I reflect that this is the first time I register having captured an altered state of consciousness. One which I would later consciously refer to as a kind of *method* and which I would go on to perpetuate via a series of processes and practices. Made towards the end of a two day motorcycle ride from Northern Italy to Shrewsbury, the image formed is reflective of a super relaxed, altered, state of mind and of being. I was—unbeknown to me at the time—about to enter the period of being subject to bullying and systematic workplace abuse that would both see the end of my career and the onset of the PTSD for which I started receiving treatment in 2012. Initial treatments took the form of hypnotherapy: Angela—the therapist—would lure me towards a relaxed state, encouraging me to visit in my mind's eye a '*place of safety*'.

The image which I then held was the one taken whilst riding my motorcycle back across France in 2007 as the sun was setting. This is interesting for a number of reasons: Riding a motorcycle (and taking photographs whilst doing so) is not normally considered a place of safety yet pulling myself back there had a really big effect on (lowering) my anxiety levels and propensity to be triggered. Riding motorcycles consciously became a healing 'method' during and post the Bled trip and subsequent travelogue and it is reflective of entry into *altered-state* consciousness, both at the time, and subsequently.

The levels of *intentionality*—that with which the image was made, and its subsequent utility—vary (as may be appreciated by the little back story), according to context and any curatorial intentionality. The image was made as part of a series of images for an exhibition—*Time Travel*—and related (then) to the search for a lost paradise.

Ironically—due to its later entirely unpredictable adoption—it became another search for lost states: of mind, of mental health. Apparent *intentionality* shifts, inevitably, when considered through the lens of *consequentiality*. It is to this shift—from apparent intentionality to consequentiality—that we might usefully turn in order to consider the implications for *Action-Phenomenology*: As practice, thesis and convention.

These considerations—of *processes* apparently dilatory, post-hoc, and opportune when seen in the context of pushing the boundaries of method—are reflective of detection of phenomena: offering perspectival shifts essential to action research and *action-phenomenology*.

Prolonged exposure to workplace bullying and systemic organisational abuse can produce life-changing injury, as it has been in my case creating its own epoch, *epokhē*—harming stoppage, fixed point in time—after which nothing remains the same. Psychology and psychotherapeutic therapies, whilst helpful, only go so far in amelioration of such injuries, the brain (and to a degree the self) having become rewired as a consequence. That I have found working with phenomena useful in this regard points to that emergence of processes and practices that may be deemed *method*. Working with, curious playing with, cognition, has helped relieve both symptoms and cycles of unhelpful self-perception.

But *method* started, *apparently ad-hoc*, with two snaps—pictures—made whilst on holidays with no overt, conscious attention whatsoever to their *consequence* at the time of their making. (Indeed, such attention would not only have been unhelpful, it may have mitigated against the production of the images in the first place.)

Yet although the two images to which I refer in this section were not made (intentionally) as part of such a method, they became subsumed *consequentially (post-hoc)*, as *method* emerged. As I tended to it: *method* situated itself in the levels, and sustained cycles, of attention. This occurred due to the *intentional* curiosity about what would happen as the images were curated and given consideration as such. These actions—creativity, curiosity, curation, consideration—separates this as a form of praxis: Shifting from (potential) *Psychologism* into *Phenomenology* helps distill elements of consciousness in the re-becoming of self.

It is at the point of intention—of *curation* and *consideration*—that method becomes conscious: that holiday snaps may become part of a thesis, the hidden, disguised, structural residuals, being given permission to become unveiled. It is in the process relationship—between *intentionality* and *consequentiality* meaning(s) meaningfulness and mystery—that *Action-Phenomenological* practice as ‘*doing*’ emerges.

As Husserl avers: ‘*It is only through such a phenomenological fixing of meanings that we are able to keep the psychological distinct from the logical: “psychologism can only be radically overcome by pure phenomenology”*’.<sup>444</sup> *The refutation of psychologism requires phenomenology [...]*.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Husserl, E. 1906-1907; 253.

<sup>445</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 93 emphasis in original.

Working with images—I contend—takes us, or has the potential to take us, outside our *thinking*, into our *being-doing*. It is in *thinking-into-being* that trauma, and other ‘malfunctions’ of the mind, reside.<sup>446</sup> It is in imagining, *doing-into-being*, that other ways of relating, and other-worlds, show up. Working in such a way is freeing of new ways of being and becoming. The trick is—ironically, paradoxically—not to over-think or complicate matters: to adopt a posture of unintentional intentionality; unconscious consciousness. Bortoft draws distinctions between consciousness *having the structure of intentionality*, and *being intentionality*:

[Husserl] identified the mistake of conceiving consciousness in the manner of a natural object as described by the physical sciences, as if it were an object among other objects of nature. He recognised that it is therefore a mistake to try and imagine an empty consciousness confronting an external world. The fundamental discovery on which phenomenology is based is that consciousness has the structure of *intentionality*—it would be better to say that consciousness is intentionality.<sup>447</sup>

I would say that in reality the situation is more nuanced than this, particularly with regard to *Action-Phenomenology*. It is within the nuance that the altered-state consciousness required by the jobbing *Action-Phenomenologist* resides. It may help if I relate the tale of Pavel:

Pavel was either Russian or Ukrainian, from the border of those two states (I can’t quite recall but I think Ukrainian), the year 2009-10, my last on *The Leviathan*, as it was to turn out. Pavel was regarded by all who knew him (including himself), and those who taught him, as ‘useless’. Hardly ever turning up to workshops; never having done any work if he did. He was destined to fail his degree, dead cert.

Yet Pavel chose to make what few pictures that he bothered to make on a Pentax 6x7 roll film camera; not a simple, cheap, accessible (or in those days, fashionable) undertaking. I was assigned as his tutor, I suspect as a punishment, for both of us.

I sent Pavel off to take pictures. He returned without any. I asked why not. He said, ‘because I am lazy’. Great. We had something to work with. I asked him to go and take pictures of ‘being lazy’. He returned as I recall with some pictures made while sitting in his residence of a table, with a few objects on it. One or two of the frames (out of 10 on a roll) had something – soulfulness. I enquired how they came about. He said that they were reflective of his relationships with his homeland. Evocative vignettes and mini-narratives emerged over the next few months, in which Pavel deepened his relationship with photography, initially by exploring his listlessness, then by making images about his lost homeland (which I suspect was the root of the listlessness, though never articulated as such).

For several months Pavel assiduously made the images; they were beautiful. He gained the highest mark of the year, though he only passed his degree rather than gaining the 1st he now deserved, due to his previous extended, assiduous, lethargies. One of my colleagues bought 4 of the images—something that had never before occurred in my 16 years in the job. Pavel had become a star, a changed man. How?

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<sup>446</sup> These ‘malfunctions’ are there for a reason: starting out as functional, but have, for various reasons, become both subject to distortion, internalised and ingrained. Levine 2010.

<sup>447</sup> Lehrs, E. 1985; 317 in Bortoft, H. 1996; 54.

Well, we, (me first, then him) started paying attention: leading to altered levels of conscious and unconscious awareness. Pavel, I believe (again not articulated at the time), started entering altered states of consciousness when making pictures, possibly – probably – processing trauma. Throughout, for both of us, there were varying degrees of intentionality. Yet had the intentionality been for Pavel to become star of his year, it wouldn't have worked. Attuning to structured levels of consciousness would have militated against the outcome. Pavel became a star, entirely *unintentionally*, as a *consequence of unintentionality*.<sup>448</sup>

A theologian once stated that there are two kinds of knowledge: that which we find out, and, that which occurs to us. The tale of Pavel illustrates the interweaving of these two kinds of knowledge, and how, in correct proportions, these interweavings may result in phenomenological insights, and—given the correct conditions —*Action-Phenomenology*. Husserl (quoted by Moran) avers ‘*The phenomenologist must begin “in absolute poverty, with an absolute lack of knowledge.”*<sup>449</sup> <sup>450</sup> Moran goes on to expand on this thesis:

[in his preface of *Ideas I*], Husserl says he can help no one who has not realised, being confronted with the profusions of different philosophical systems, that in fact they offer no choice at all, since none has taken care to free itself from the presuppositions and none has sprung from the radical attitude autonomous self-responsibility which the meaning of a philosophy demands.<sup>451</sup> <sup>452</sup>

As Moran goes on to state, this meant:

[Husserl believes that] we should not assume any philosophical or scientific theory, and furthermore must avoid deductive reasoning (which presupposed logic) and Mathematica as well as any other empirical science or speculative theory of psychology and philosophy, in order to concentrate on that given directly in intuition (*Anschauung*). [Which gradually came to mean] the most radical form of *self-questioning*. [...] Nothing must be taken for granted or assumed external to the lived experiences as they are lived.<sup>453</sup>

Moran goes on to underpin this: Heidegger will capture this meaning well in his discussion of phenomenology as that which ***appears as it appears***<sup>454</sup> [...] Thus “phenomenology” means ***apophainesthai ta phainomena***—to let that which shows itself to be seen from itself in the very way it shows itself from itself.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> The last time I checked Pavel was a successful fashion photographer in London.

<sup>449</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 126.

<sup>450</sup> Husserl, E. 1967; 1, 2. in Moran, D. 2000; 126.

<sup>451</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 126.

<sup>452</sup> Husserl, E. 1931; 21.

<sup>453</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 126 emphasis in original.

<sup>454</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 127 emphasis mine.

<sup>455</sup> Heidegger, M. 1962; 34.

As an *Action-Phenomenologist*, I extend this into practice as phenomena *occurring as they occur*. It is knowledge in the form of occurrences, and the consequences of experimenting with occurrences, that is the basis of *Action-Phenomenological* knowledge, practice and understanding. Referring to my discussion of my images and of Pavel's tale: It is this *experimentation with occurrences* that is the common thread. A thread which may be traced back through all of the practices of *The Atelier*. As Moran puts it: '*The claim for phenomenological knowledge to be presuppositionless is, then, essentially tied to the notion that we are limited to what is intrinsically given in our intuitions, provided we attend to our intuitions in the proper way.*'<sup>456</sup> It is this provision—to attend to our intuitions in the proper way—and from within this space, to experiment with (often ad hoc) occurrences: the heart of the *Action-Phenomenological* philosophy, and processes—*method*. I cite a WhatsApp interchange with Professor David Langslow in order to illustrate my wariness:

Me: I'm inquiring into the linguistics of the numinous, among other things. Am also inquiring into 'randomness'—what is the translation of the term 'Ad Hoc'?

DL: Literally 'for this (thing)' or 'for it.'

Me: So Ad Hoc could be method then?

DL: As an adjective ad hoc can go with any noun, so yes, an ad hoc method, sure.

Me: Thanks. I was picked up for saying as much at my viva. I'm going to write a justification as part of my conditions.<sup>457</sup>

My elucidation of the production, and subsequent subsuming, of two—apparently random—photographic occurrences, and my tale of Pavel and our joint endeavours, are illustrative of the qualities of *Action-Phenomenological inquiry*. Namely, *that it often is, or appears initially as, happenstance; that altered states of consciousness may be involved, pre-hoc, post-hoc, ad hoc. Phenomena occur as they occur, forming new knowledge; attention to intuitions and occurrences forms part of the practice; paying attention is, in some primal way relatable, thus potentially consequential: to the outsider or observer the method may appear to be chaotic and illogical but subsequent or consequent sublimations allow shifts in sense-making.* And there was me thinking I'd just taken a snap of a tree at the end of a walk; that some years ago I had a chat to an idle student who then happened to get his act together. Bachelard confers a less ambitious agenda for the phenomenologist. Yet one that anticipates the subliminal energies, and the power of play available, endemic, within phenomenology when it becomes poetic practice: a playful making, finding:

A phenomenologist has a different approach. He takes the image just as it is, just as the poet created it, and tries to make it his own, to feed on this rare fruit. He brings the image to the very limit of what he is able to imagine. However far from being a poet [that] he himself may be, he tries to repeat its creation for himself and, if possible, continue its exaggeration. Here association ceases to be fortuitous, but is sought after, willed. *It is a poetic, specifically poetic, constitution. It is sublimation that is entirely rid of the organic of psychic weights from which one wanted to be free. In other words it corresponds to pure sublimation.*<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 127.

<sup>457</sup> WhatsApp exchange with Professor David Langslow 12.12.19.

<sup>458</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 242 emphasis mine.

*Action-Phenomenology* is practice of poetics; of temporality, abstraction and sublimation. Playing with the cohesion of time, with imaginal-poetic incantations, practice may occur as *magical*. Merleau-Ponty writes:

I make contact with time and learn to recognise its flow in my “field of presence,” taken broadly to include this current moment that I spend working, along with the horizon of the day that has already gone behind it and the horizon of the evening and the night out in front of it.<sup>459</sup>

I note this; I recognise it, and yet think it may be pushed further. In my practice—exploring the poetics of *Action-Phenomenology*—I insert myself into the patterned granularity of time. I play there, experimentally, in a space which Bachelard characterises as ‘*the felicitous mood [and grace] of super-imagination*.’<sup>460</sup> Indeed this is largely the space that I’ve (rather enjoyably) occupied whilst sketching out this chapter. It *occurs* to me now that I have been practicing, and at least partly teaching, the practice of *Action-Phenomenology* for 25 years. It has been over the past four years that this inquiry had deepened and become more intense, more conscious: afforded by both the necessity of completing a doctorate, and by having the time to read, contemplate, play, explore, experiment, reflect, repeat; often in the company of intrigued, sympathetic and curious co-inquirers. Graced also by the significant presence of a cat, Yosser. I have scratched the surface of what seems to be a not previously defined or recognised field of endeavour. There is much work to do in terms of exploring the interwoven links between traditional ‘cooking’ phenomenology and the putative emergence of such as valid action-practice. Not least its relevance to the fields of adult well-being and development; spaces where playing with temporality and pattern have much to offer in terms of disrupting unhelpful recycled redundant and patterned dramas, replacing or substituting with more aesthetic, sensuous, beautiful contrivances.

*Method*, as such, is a term laden (in my mind) with deliberation. I have certainly deliberated post-hoc over these observations and emerging practices, yet none have really been *deliberate*. Rather they have emerged from cycles of deliberation, interspersed with—frankly—extended periods of mucking about. When malfunctions and setbacks happened, I played with those gifts too. Yosser turned up in my life unbidden, then sought to become involved in my making photos; my *Alder Altar* endeavours were due to a combination of illnesses and legal malpractice; the ‘skies’ photos, and the images taken whilst on trucking shifts, both emanate from that period, and occur as distractions in my ordinary life—unplanned.

The key, the thing that sets all this apart as valid practice and contribution to knowledge, has been that—with help, and due to circumstance—I have been able to recognise, contemplate on and play with *occurrences*, curating and reorganising these occurrences into a semblance meaning, as it *occurred* to me that there may be one. This has been both the challenge and the intrigue thus far, and opens the way for further inquiry, not least into the existence of field that I term *4th Person Inquiry*, which is, in my understanding, inquiry of and into the sacred and the spirit: A field which the *Action-Phenomenology* I have explored in this chapter is well served for inquiring into.

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<sup>459</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012; 438.

<sup>460</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014; 242.



## Chapter 18

***Rites: Notes on 4th-Person Inquiry.***

[The Sacred, The Numinous, & Non-local Realities]

Mum died at 7:55 pm. It was as peacefully as one could hope for apparently, I wasn't there and Dad arrived just after.

You'd have liked the nurse who sat with her at the end. Big chap called Jamie, covered in tattoos and a biker.

Jx

Email from Julian Stanley 9.10.19





Untitled (Mum's chair). Bulkington 2019.

I am at war with the obvious.

William Eggleston

The disclosures that I enjoyed (and reflected upon), during, and immediately post, the days of *Alder Altar* have stayed with me as a series of micro-practices. These reveal something of the hidden layers of experience, an access usually enjoyed as a result of altered states of consciousness. In *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, Christie refers to: ‘*This habit of dispossession [that] is crucial to the cultivation of a spiritual sensibility rooted in darkness and unknowing.*’<sup>461</sup> The dispossession to which Christie refers is not one of materiality (though included), but a dispossession of emulation; of imitations of received notions of ‘the other’. *Dispossession* being closer to that which Rowan Williams states:

[as] at its simplest, the suspension of ordinary categories of ‘rational’ speech; at a more pervasive level it is a dispossession of the human mind conceived of as central to the order of the world...to use a word like ‘dispossession’ is to evoke the most radical level of prayer... [especially] *apophysis*, the acknowledgement of the inadequacy of any form, verbal, visual, gestural [...] and expression of this recognition in silence and attention.<sup>462</sup>

It is to this field—practice and inquiry as a form of *apophysis*, or *radical prayer*, that I now turn to outline my final putative strand of inquiry—that of *4th-Person Inquiry*: into the sacred, the spiritual, the immanent and the transcendent. This will be brief and indicative—notes on what I have observed or has occurred to me—the intent being to sketch for future research some possibilities of a much larger field.

It occurs to me that prayer, rather than being a request as is commonly supposed, may more powerfully be described as an offer, a gift. In this regard, it seems that the photos taken on my iPhone fall into the category of gifts—if not *radical prayers*—glimpses of *apophysis*: a means of inquiry into the *unseen*, the *unknowable*. Images are *given* to me—I pass them on. This runs counter to the true disposition of ancient (Christian) contemplative practice, where the aspiration, as I understand it, to be imageless: *the [work of] radical relinquishment, of letting go of all images and ideas [about God]*.<sup>463</sup> As neither a Christian, or a believer in *God*, I reject the description of the totality process, while finding enough resonance within my own practice for this theological framing to be helpful, if not vital. The form of *radical prayers* (images) offered in this chapter are therefore put out as experimental gifts in the service of discipline and practice, rather than as evidence of any deity(s). As Christie puts it:

It is for the sake of contact with this mysterious presence—wild and sacred—that one enters into the world of *apophysis*, emptiness, and silence, that one risks becoming lost, disorientated, dispossessed. Also for the sake of renewal that can take root and flourish nowhere else.<sup>464</sup>

In my work I seek to avoid the theological encumbrances of *God(s)*. Offering instead quiet, understated *theologies*: a stray cat, some flowers, a stream, motorcycling, the light on a cloud, or ice.

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<sup>461</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 62.

<sup>462</sup> Williams. R. 2000; 10-11. Quoted in Christie, D. 2013; 371-372.

<sup>463</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 62.

<sup>464</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 63.



Untitled (sky). Long Mynd, 2018.

As I look, find images, and write about these elements, I wonder what they would write of us: the clouds, the ice, the streams, the animals, the flowers. What would Yosser write of me? Where does wildness, and the sacred, begin and end? For it is on the shaded edges—the penumbra of the exchanges between the human and the wild and sacred—that meaningful practice and inquiry occur. We catch the glimpses in our peripheral vision; stare too hard and directly and that layer of being recedes, shyly, back into the shadows. Incurrences into the other-worldly evade hard, scientific, method, preferring instead the elusive maybes to be found, uncovered, in poetic, layered, aesthetic inquiry.

In any such interchange we find ourselves at the edges of what language—even the visual languages of the arena of images—can accomplish in terms of apprehending and relating. (As I write I'm less sure that this is a crisis of language; it seems more a crisis of inter-being, the ultimate expression of which is wildness dying, setting itself in fire, in an exasperated, attempt to gain our [belated] listening, our attention. I peer—outwards toward these gods of nature, inwards towards my own receptors—and wonder: how these are the same manifestation, what utility to others?)

Gary Snyder writes: '*Wild nature is inextricably in the weave of self and culture. The "post" in posthumanism is on account of the word human. The dialogue to open next would be among all beings, toward a rhetoric of ecological relationships.*'<sup>465</sup> Abstracting oneself—in so far as is possible and by degree—is the practice of *apophasis*, the practice of allowance of the *wild-in-the-self*, of deep radical listening, seeing, apprehending, noticing. It is possible to be ordained—trained—in such practices of awareness: the *doing* (being) of such practices helps the self—Imagos—flourish, to come into being. This ordination is availed of by the more-than-human world too: Perhaps this is our connection—or the erasure of our deleted connections—should we choose to take it? Snyder writes: '*Animals too learn self-discipline and caution in the face of desire and availability. [...] The day-to-day actualisation of the vow calls for practice: for a training that helps us realise our own true nature, and nature.*'<sup>466</sup> The abstractions—artistic, experimental words and images—are constructions, small ways of apprehending and intervening in the more-than-human world, potentially healing for both. Christie points to:

[his being] uncommonly perceptive contemplative... [pointing] toward a growing awareness that has come to mark so much of our own emerging sensibility regarding the natural world—that *long, patient attention to the world is a meaningful and significant form of contemplative practice, and that our capacity to deepen and sustain such practice may well prove crucial to the work of tending to and helping repair the world.*<sup>467</sup>

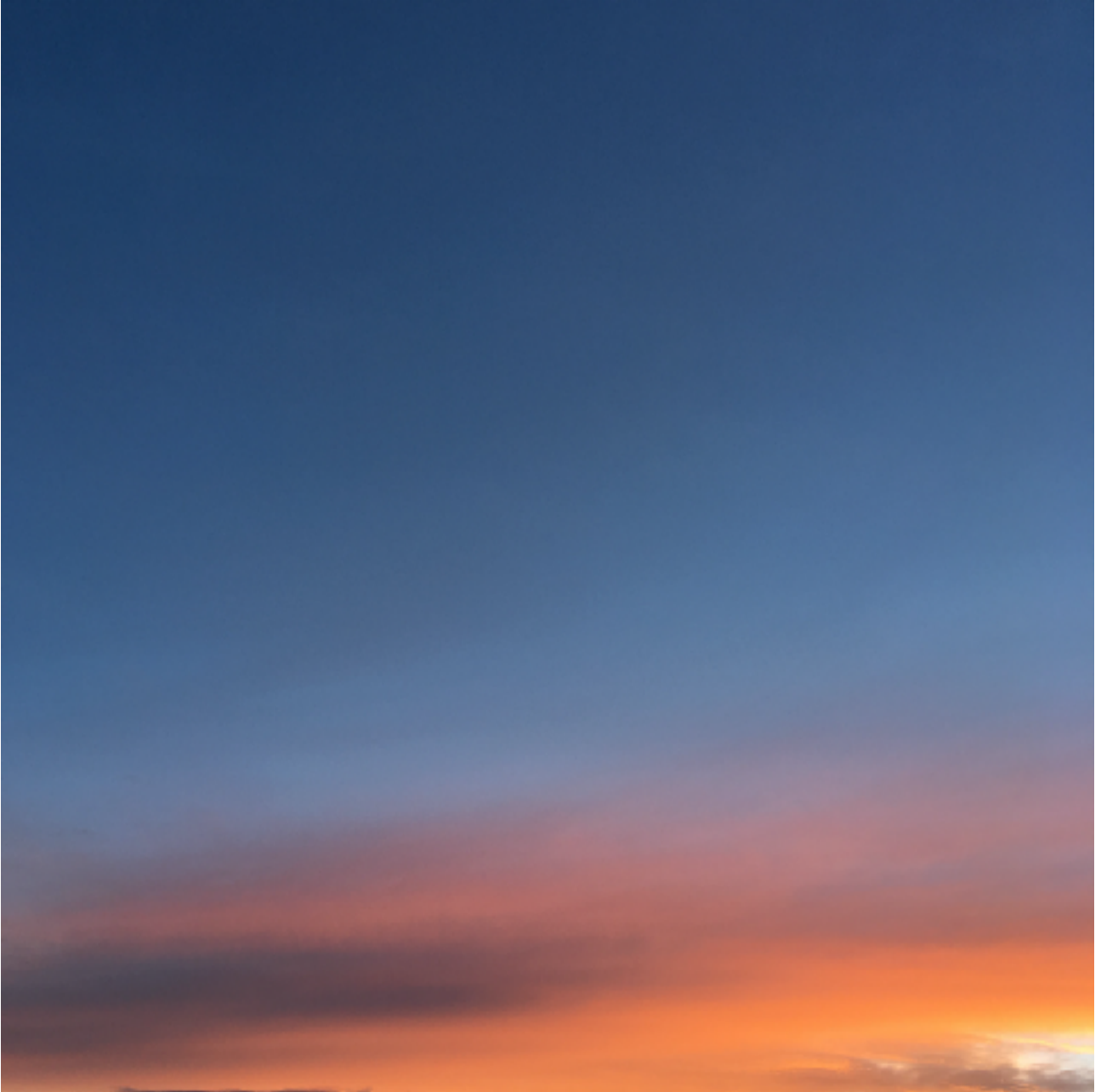
In our deeper connecting, attending to other worlds via contemplative practice we repair both self, and other. Discipline, discipleship, is involved—an integral part of practice and inquiry. One which takes 'work' initially; then becoming *the work*, and a part of the self.

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<sup>465</sup> Snyder, G. 1990; 74 emphases in original.

<sup>466</sup> Snyder, G. 1990; 99 emphasis mine.

<sup>467</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 170 emphasis mine.



Untitled (sky). Long Mynd, 2018.

As one works into *the work*, other promises and meanings become available; other validities of experience; more concurrent with the non-apparent, non-local. These validities—wisps at first—when further interrogated become practice; become their own fields of micro-inquiry. When flying a sailplane across country—as I have for many thousands of kilometres—it is wisps of barely formed cloud that predict the thermals that provide the necessary pause for climb.

The same is true of the interceptions involved in finding, making, photographic images: they are predictors of the likelihood of an offered image. Pre-latency that may allow the formation of a coherent, pregnant, image. It is this *pre-noticing* state that discipline enables. That ascetics over millennia have also noticed this. I find myself mildly surprised at their *logia*—relating to ‘gods’—surfacing, speaks much of the blinkered-ness of our oblivions. Is it not, after all, but a single matter to incline one’s head upward 15-20 degrees and find a picture of the sky, awaiting capture, enrapture, there? What more should the sky do to say: ‘look at me, aren’t I beautiful?’ Yet we don’t, on the whole. These indiscipline’s can be pervasive: we cease to attend to that which nourishes us, makes us whole; we become slow to become, to unfold.

There is a reciprocal kindness to this *unfolding* way of being; paying attention to wisps, to fragments of light, figments of the imaginal, *pays off*. It is not a certain process; yet within its uncertainties lays the ground of the magical: other certainties become apparent. We live in beauty that longs to embrace us, to show us a way. Discipline is one of the ways we might discard the cautions of our everyday attentions. Choosing instead to relay our connectedness; to invoke—even temporarily—the kind beneficence of the heavens. The matter of paying attention, and the quality of attention paid and discernment applied was a core practice of ascetic monasticism. (It helps when making pictures on an iPhone too.) According to Abba Poemen: ‘*Vigilance, attention to the self, and discernment; these are the guides to the soul.*’<sup>468</sup>

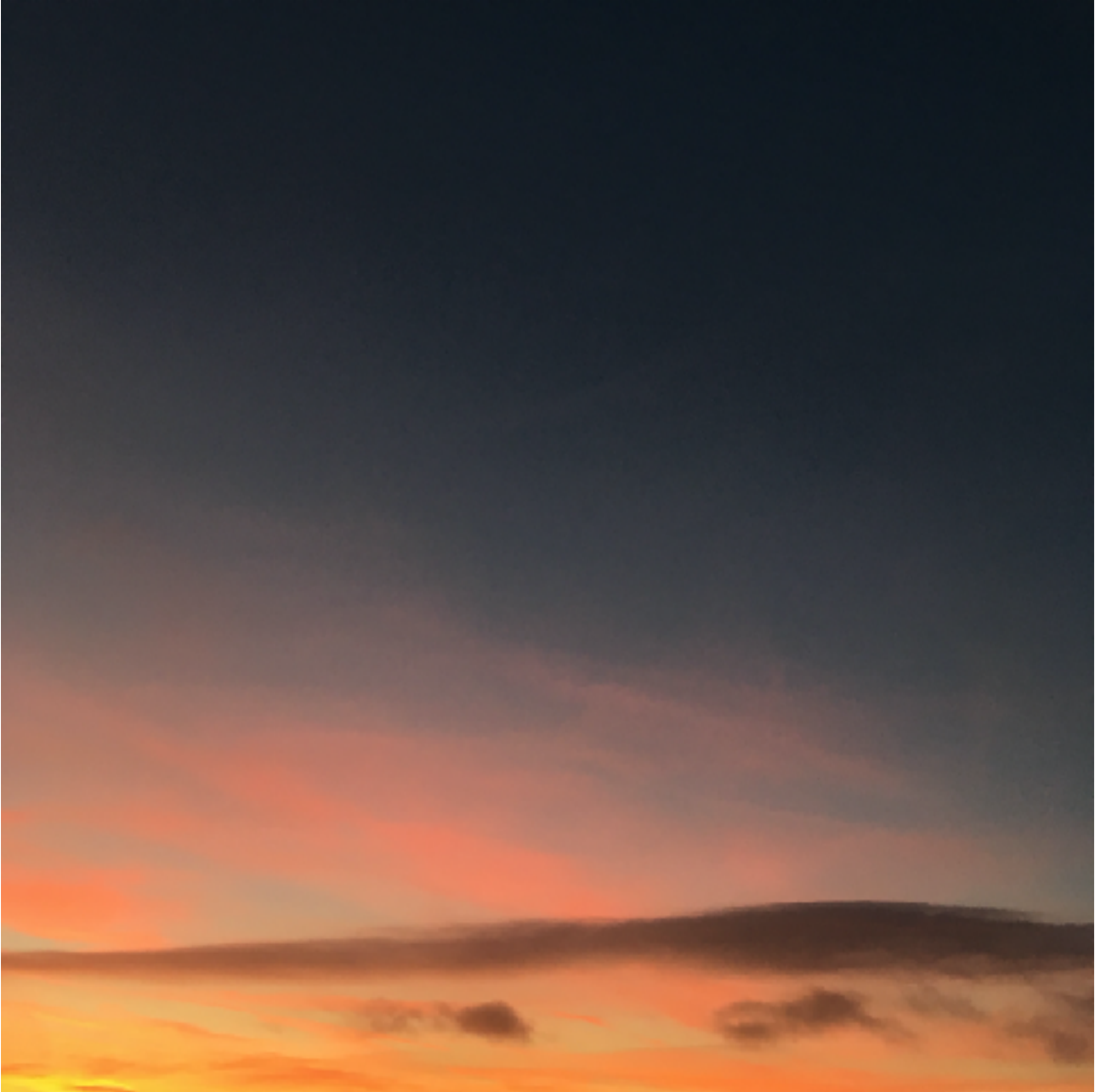
That my work with the *Alder Altar* with Yosser convened subconsciously, semi-consciously, as an act of benediction and vigil is anticipated in Christie’s writing: *Standing on the edge of the riverbank this morning is, I begin to see, another way of keeping vigil, part of the essential practice of paying attention.* <sup>469</sup> Subsequently, I found the more expansive ways of apprehending that I explored at this time started with me, and even growing, becoming more encompassed as a part of who I am: in Imago.

Working as a truck driver helped consolidate these shifts in perception and self-perception, by increasing felt agency, shifting viewpoint (literally, metaphorically), changing self-confidence. My practice—poetic apprehending and attending as survival tools—became part of my daily round, as a discipline subsumed within me: concordant inquiry.

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<sup>468</sup> Ward, B. 2006; 172 quoted in Christie, D. 2013; 147.

<sup>469</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 142.



Untitled (sky). Long Mynd, 2018.



Finding and making pictures: attending, apprehending, discerning and appreciating occurrences, curating them, becalms. In the calmness I see my tendency to have absorbed the emotional and psychological indispositions of others, making my self ill in turn. Stilling my gaze helped to shift this. Christie writes:

The early monks spoke of the value of *prosoche* or attention, of *nepsis* or vigilance, and of *hesychia* or stillness in their quest for an encompassing, contemplative awareness of the Divine. At its deepest level, the contemplative life was understood by the ancient monastics as a way of seeing (or to extend the metaphor as the monks often did, a way of listening or touching or tasting or smelling). *Theoria*, the word most often used to describe this contemplative awareness, refers to a way of seeing that includes but also transcends what is visible on the surface. It is a way of seeing the *whole* of reality [...] and situating oneself with integrity in relation to this whole.<sup>470</sup>

It is the process of integration as a matter of aesthetic engagement in order to unfold appropriately which is the core of the practice of curation of the sacred; the ground of *4th-person* inquiry. John O'Donohue describes it thus: '*You begin to **see through** the enchanting veils of illusion that you had taken for reality. You not longer squander yourself on things and situations that deplete your essence*'.<sup>471</sup> The challenging of states of depletion requires both an inner and outer apprehending: between what Christie refers to as *interior and exterior landscapes*. The exterior landscape challenging inner depletions of the inner one. Christie writes:

Even this language of two landscapes, I realise, risks perpetuating the kind of fragmented way of apprehending reality that has already done so much harm—to us and to the world. What we need most at this moment is a language and a way of living supple and fluid enough to allow us to  *dwell deeply within the liminal space or penumbral region where the imagination and the living world meet and move together*.<sup>472</sup>

To work in this arena of inquiry requires shifts in relationship with language; visual, written, other: a playing with patterns and alignments. Shifts a becoming: both more and experimental. I refer mainly to word and images, but other, less manifest, languages (e.g., interspecies) are included. This is mainly a matter of breaking habit and tradition: of letting go of expectations, criteria, specifications and requirements.

There is an ecology to it, a finding of home ground from which to contemplate. Christie writes that: *[the] contemplative traditions, not only monastic traditions of thought and practice but also kindred religious poetic, and ecological traditions invite us to consider...what it means to see the world ...what it means to see and know the self **within** the world.* <sup>473</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 142 emphases in original.

<sup>471</sup> O'Donohue, J. 2004; 88 emphases in original.

<sup>472</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 147 emphasis mine.

<sup>473</sup> Christie, D. 2013; 146 emphases in original.



Untitled (sky). Long Mynd, 2018.

The field of inquiry into the sacred, the numinous, the spiritual is the framework for the answering of this invitation—to *consider...what it means to see the world ...what it means to see and know the self **within** the world*. The techniques, as I have discussed, are not new; many, if not all, pre-dating organised religion as we know it. Which suggests that something more universal, more primal than the slanted enculturations associated with organised religion. What *is* new, or different about my practice? Stieglitz photographed skies as equivalents; Minor White went further off piste with his Zen like schtick; Sudek delved into his own interior; Blakemore followed Sudek, adding technical superlatives derived from the zone system; Frank lost himself within the road; Winogrand discarded horizons—‘*pushed things a stage further, combining Frank’s ad hoc aesthetic with a pictorial appetite so voracious it bordered on the indiscriminate*’.<sup>474</sup> And Eggleston...? well he did the Eggleston-ish thing of challenging reality by re-presenting it: in bold ocular overloads, and secular, garish, overtones.

Whereas me: I travel with my iPhone making snaps as they occur; when it occurs to me to do so. Sometimes this is consciously purposeful. Usually a curious probing at the universe: to see what experimenting with it visually will reveal. Words don’t help much; often not at all. But they do help locate, and reflect ostensible meanings: adding a *perhaps-ness* into the mix. Helpful when looking for answers in situations where there are none: to allude. Or where those answers that present themselves are deprivations: too painful, too disruptive of *self* to be allowed into the crucible of awareness. This awareness—levels and focus of attention upon which is layered, superimposed a peripheral vision that stimulates differing rods and cones of the psyche—is at the heart of the practice of inquiry into the sacred and *4th-Person* layers of reality. It relies on mucking about with the granularity of time: the illusory nature that much of what passes before our eyes passes for ‘the real’. It is the reverse cast of these materialities: a making of something ‘material’ (an image) when underlying energies and manifestations are one phase beyond (or before) materiality. The pictures are not reports: they are of the manner of reverse illusions. Their ambition being to confound, rather than confirm, what we *see*; what we *think* we see; rendering a deeper, *radical-prayerful seeing: apophysis*.

There is an animism, *physis*, to this. Those ancient contemplative traditions and practices were not born of divorce from the more-than-human (as our contemporary religiosities—including political and economic systems—might be said to be). Rather they co-evolved from sates of intimacy with the other—delineations between other species and humans were more blurred—shape-shifting was as everyday as prayers in the houses of parliament. Earlier superstitions being more bold, appropriate, considered. We can theorise this, to a degree. My version of inquiry into *4th-Person* dimensions is one where the theoretical gives way to the emanations of *poetics* and the *poetic*: primarily visual (a finding, glimpsing awareness) rather than a more secular analytical one. There is a physicality to it; as there must with aesthetic sensibilities.

It is in the metaphysicality of the more raw demonstrations of *other-ness* that I find out for myself *what it means to see the world ...what it means to see and know the self **within** the world*. This is where I uncover, unfold, the curious delinquent metabolisms: of my *Action-Phenomenological* practice; of my field of *4th-Person Inquiry* into the sacred and numinous. I feel it is the first time. And I have been here before..

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<sup>474</sup> Dyer, G. 2006; 172.



Untitled (sky). Long Mynd, 2019.

## Chapter 19

***Light:*** Coda.

[afterthoughts & reflexive research narrative]

Craig: Paul, you work with light and colour in your photos. This is the colour of the light coming through a skylight around 2:30 pm. Outside is like dusk, from smoke haze.

Me: The dust and smoke particles—due to their size—filter out the blue wavelengths. Hence this is the colour of sunsets, and the apocalypse...

Craig: Apocalypse sounds right.

Me: At least it's being heralded in a tasteful palette of oranges and reds.

WhatsApp exchange with Craig Campbell 19.12.19



Untitled (sky). Church Stretton, 2019.

'*Words are savage Gods*' writes Paul Kingsnorth.<sup>475</sup> Other agencies and poetics are available for savagery; or for poetic wildness too. My savagery being experimentation with pictures; though sometimes I experiment with words as well. These choices are subliminal; not random, but usually not far off. The ethereal fabrications made during this inquiry have helped me to open up new paths of awareness, and three fields of inquiry—*Via Arbora*; *Action-Phenomenology*; *4th-Person Inquiry*—developed in order to prescribe the boundaries of my inquiry into aesthetics and identity. There are languages other than words within which we may allow our experiences to reside; choosing the correct, appropriate language (and words) seems to be as much an act of divination as logic. Some of these languages—interspecies communication, and imagery, for instance—are manifestations of wildness, more than savagery.

As I inquire further—into paths of awareness, fields of inquiry—I find myself digging towards the roots of words in order to relate my findings with suitable and appropriate inflection. An inflection that will also render what I have found intelligible and useful to others: *method*, even. Or madness—tragic, comedic—offering scintillations of other layers of awareness and attention. Jay Griffiths writes: *The shaman-fool has a mind that is winged and can fly too high. [...] The shaman-fool has licence, the wild freedom to say anything, speaking in a wild grammar, through wild, untaught intuition.*<sup>476</sup> On a workshop with Jay in 2014 she said (of my poetry) that I was '*good at cursing the curse-able*'. I like to think that the sentiment underlying this inquiry has now progressed beyond the issuance of curses towards the manufacture of viable incantations: of enchantments.

The etymological, *theoretical*, quest to find out what *theory* is; maybe to disturb its received meaning. According to Peters we have: *theōria: viewing, speculation, contemplation, the contemplative life.*<sup>477</sup> Which directs us to the attentional shifts, and associated altered states of being, that I identify with. In conversation with David Langslow meanings become more lucid: '**The**' - *is watch, as in theatre (watching place); I'll check the second element (-or-), which I think is 'boundary'*.<sup>478</sup> It is the attentional shifts; associated fields of inquiry (some *new*, in this context), and altered states of being and awareness which—in conjunction—add to knowledge of these matters: speaking in their '*wild grammar, through wild, untaught intuition*'. Conveyance of such as *method* is as much a matter of *un-teaching*: elucidated in the story of Pavel; in my narratives.

As for the confluences—ritual practices; disciplines; experimental writing and imagery—their commonality is they show up as *eídos: 'appearance, constitutive nature, from, type, species of ideas.'*<sup>479</sup>

These *eídos* unfolding from my *watching place*: Practices of attention and of awareness; natural, phenomenal, sacred: incantations as *apophasis*, as *Radical Prayers*.

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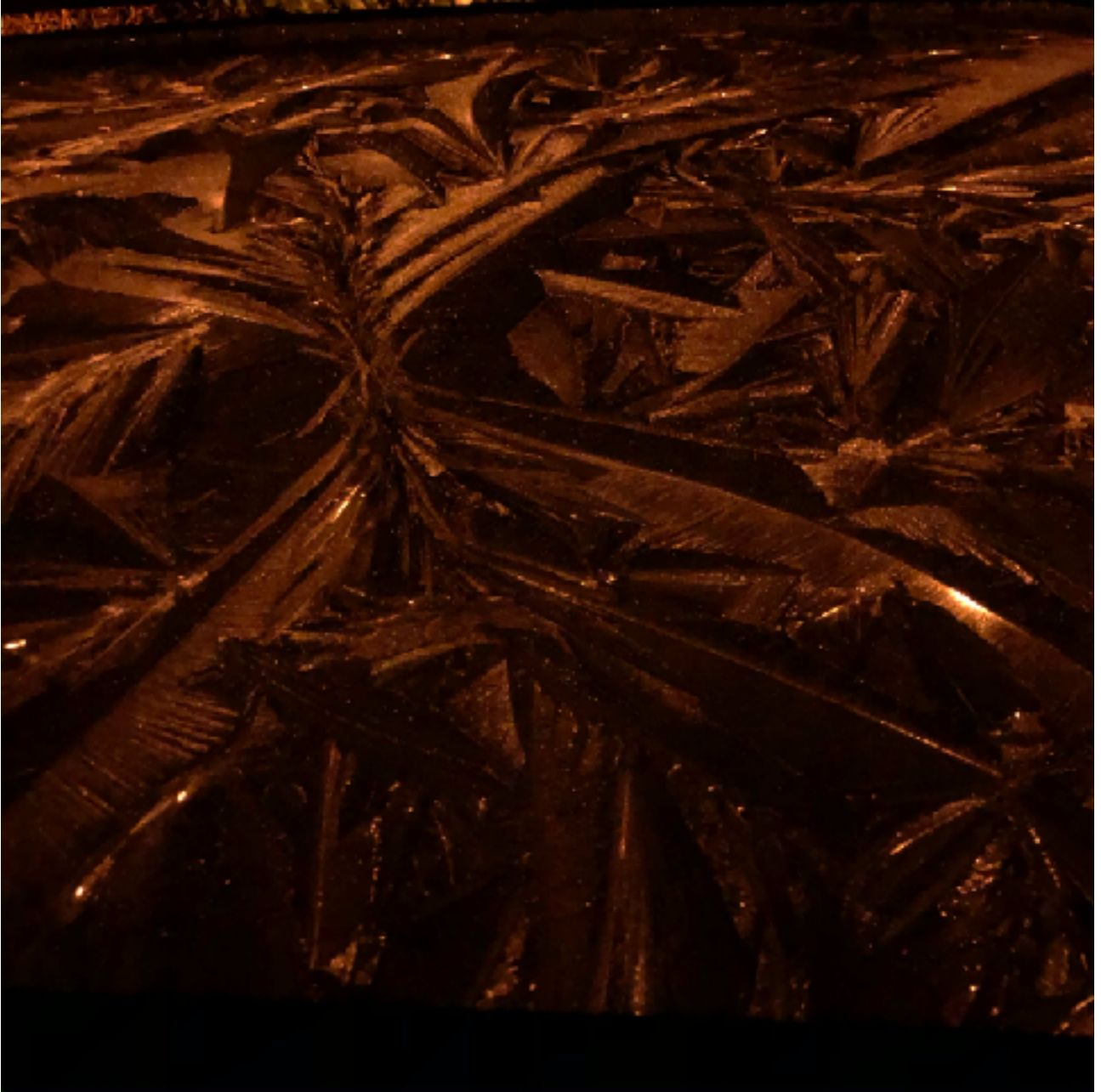
<sup>475</sup> Kingsnorth, P. *Savage Gods: A Crisis of Words*. 2019

<sup>476</sup> Griffiths, J. 2008; 415 emphasis mine.

<sup>477</sup> Peters, F. 1967;194.

<sup>478</sup> From WhatsApp exchange with Professor David Langslow 20.1.20.

<sup>479</sup> Peters, F. 1967; 46.



Untitled (ice; walk home: 21.18). Church Stretton, 2020.



## Epilogue

### *Sinkers 6&7: A reflexive research narrative, concluded*

Dear Paul,

The origin of the *-or-* of *theory* is disputed. The standard view is that it means 'see', so the whole word would mean 'seeing a spectacle'. There are problems with this view, and my suggestion of 'boundary' remains possible, but I had misremembered the standard view, so you should perhaps remove the reference to 'boundary' (or at least put it in brackets as a possibility). However, what I told you about the first element, *the-* 'watch', can stand!

I hope to read more of you on the train home this evening.

all best,

David <sup>480</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> From email exchange with Professor David Langslow 22.1.20—28.1.20.

**Sinker 6.** Poetics: *reflections on theory & practice*



Untitled (Covid lockdown: Clematis). Church Stretton, 2020.

In Part V *Light* I re-approach theory in the only way I know: thorough practice.

Inquiring with AOC colleagues the response was that I '*engage the imagination; step out of usual ways of storytelling and narrative development; embed aesthetics exploration in the craft narrative development; challenge old rules about what is good narrative; offer an imaginative process for healing the wounded narrative-creation process.*' And from another co-inquirer: '*you help people notice spaces in their lives that they may not have even noticed.*'<sup>481</sup>

I inquired about how what I do helps with the restoration of executive functioning: '*Trauma destroys functional imagination. That destroys executive function. You've got to repair imagination to repair executive function. You repair imagination.*'<sup>482</sup> Within a few lines of text I had my answer encapsulated—in those last three words: '*You repair imagination*'. I felt that I'd been seen as coming home into my practice: that it was after all real: and *method*. I was theorising and developing theory: by making images, by dialoguing on etymology.<sup>483</sup>

My current reflections on *theorised method*:

*Moments of spontaneous epiphany repair imagination: learning happens in the ground of un-learning; If (quantum) time is non-linear, granular, then this has implications for spontaneous acts as method; In granular time all will be, or appear as, spontaneous or ad-hoc: seeing-into process becomes process; Process is not linear, or necessarily replicable: it is restorative of imaginal possibilities; 'Theory' is a far from grounded concept: I prefer seeing-into-process-from-the-boundary; Poetics is distinct from poetry: is my means of access to phenomenal and the other-worldly; Poetics may be an activity, or an attitude to an activity: thinkers are drawn from three fields: physis (animism, nature); phenomenology; theology.*<sup>484</sup>

This poetic-aesthetic means of assimilating local, worldly realities leads us on a journey: towards assimilation of the non-local (otherworldly): repairing imaginations. Theorisation may be done from the fields noted. But triangulation of the practices may only be effectively carried out by referral to thinkers from all three fields: theory may become the practice.

A seeing of and into at the same time; manifest as artefacts, and as poetic contemplation. Combined, this process may form a *third image*—whereby more holistic understanding of the *theoretical* aspects of *practice* unfolds a deeper inquiry: into what constitutes, or manifests as, *poetics*.

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<sup>481</sup> Personal communication from AE 6.8.20.

<sup>482</sup> From WhatsApp with Mike Stanford 11.02.20.

<sup>483</sup> Christine Oliver refers to this virtual circle of experimentation as creating and sustaining a 'charmed loop'. Oliver, C. 2000; 121.

<sup>484</sup> See Part V: *Light*, wherein theory is weighted towards phenomenology, triangulated by theology and *physis*.

**Sinker 7. Work-scapes: Apokaluptein**



Untitled (Covidscape: after work, Easter Sunday, 22.30). Witchurch, 2020.

There is an aesthetic to healing. Aesthetics attend too to the matters of breakdown and pathology. I write now on my balcony; *grounded* by the Covid-19 virus, not yet, hopefully, invaded by it. I'm lucky—I live on the edge of the semi-wild Long Mynd. A key worker, I'm able to get out delivering food by truck, when I choose to. The world has changed radically, and forever, since I started writing these Sinkers a few weeks ago. The changes aren't over yet. They've hardly started. Changed too are our *work-scapes*: those ways with which we interact with the world, as units of production; as effective workers, shifters, healers, feeders, teachers, leaders, makers, artists etc. A virus has evicted us from our workplaces and grounded us in, or local to, our homes. A virus may yet evict us from its planet: just when we were beginning to think that it was all ours. Nature, *physis*, is heaving a sigh of relief; having a breather. A precursor, perhaps, to nature moving—as Paul Kingsnorth avers—to *correct the Western Error*:

The Irish writer John Moriarty wrote a lot about *chthón*. His life's search was for ways to re-embed us in what we have lost, to take us around and down again, *to correct the Western Error*.<sup>485</sup> In his autobiography, *Nostos*, he writes:

*Chthón is the old Greek word for the Earth in its secret, dark, depths, and if there was any one word that could be said to distinguish ancient Greeks from modern Europeans, that word chthón, that would be it. Greeks had the word, we haven't.*<sup>486</sup>

A virus cauterises the planet: I reach for the words, concepts and etymologies of the Greeks to articulate such enormity, such invisibility, such fragility. The aesthetics of the situation are more apparent to the truck driver: the wipes, blue gloves and cleaning kits; the separation rules; the empty roads—emptier even than on Christmas Day, or at 3am. There is ethereal, apocalyptic, beauty too in *Lockdown*; in my moving—in often unseen and unstable ways—then relating my tales of these *un-seeings* back into the world.

I have found a time and place for this manner of voicing and relating—working with acts of blessing and compassion as manifestation of contemplative traditions—poetic incantations that may help repair *the torn fabric of the world*—I re-edit my writings. I drive food trucks on the weekends; I tend to Yosser, we share apricots and cream in the sunshine on the patio; I make and send images out into the world. In this way of being—these serial acts of survival, compassion, and benediction—I find a strangely liberating simplicity.

I play: with words and etymologies; gazing through the windscreen of a truck for hours on end at empty motorways and Covidscapes. Making pictures, living in a dystopian film-scape; sense-making: playing with gaze, daydreams, I find renewed spaces in this new order of things. *Seeing* with greater clarity I seek relief within *apocalypse*: from my own errors, from the *Western Error*; from underlying patterns and scintillations. And, in the true sense of the Greek roots of the words I seek *apokaluptein*: revelation, unveiling.

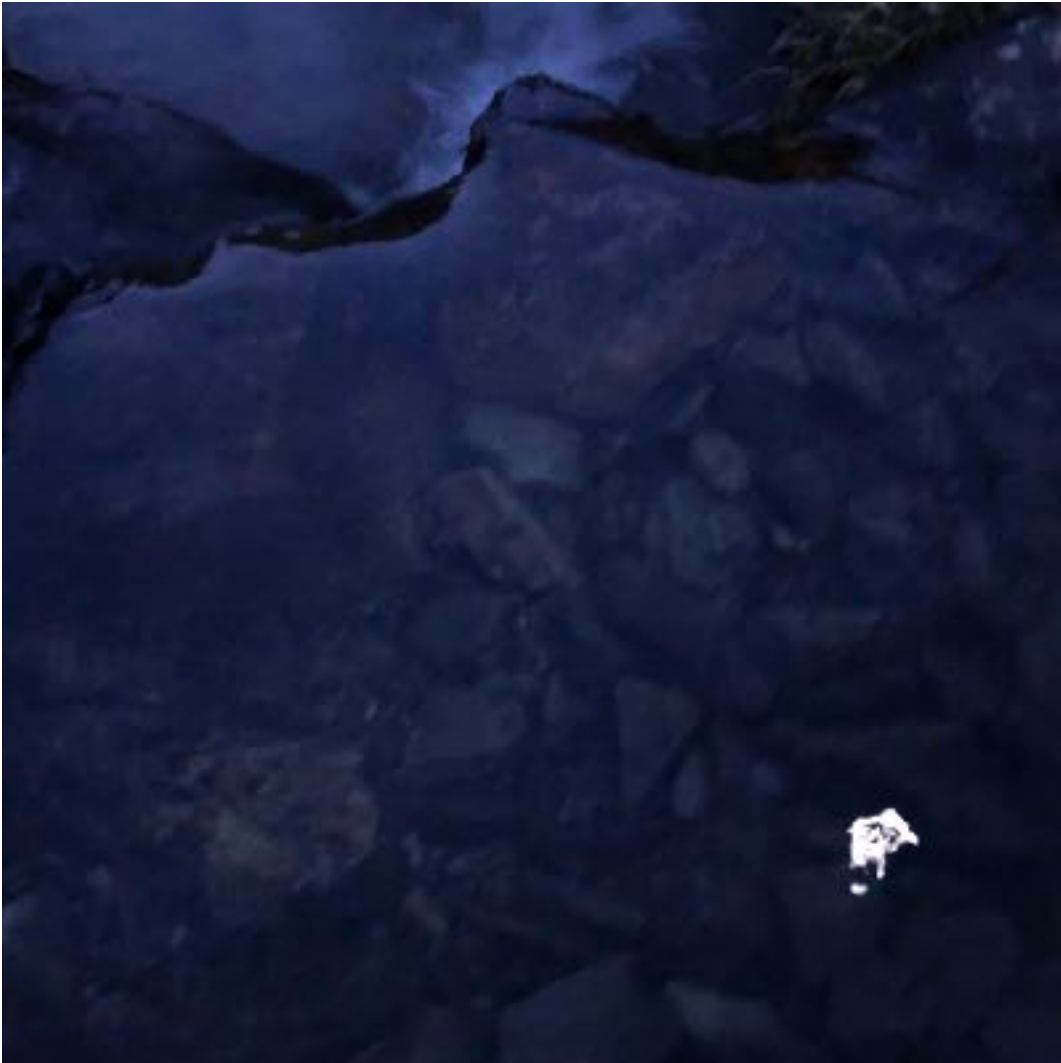
This is my *methodos*: my renewal, *pursuit of knowledge*; my unveiling, *seeing-into* as a way of being.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Kingsnorth, P. 2020.

<sup>486</sup> Moriarty, J. 2001; 77.

<sup>487</sup> Via Latin from Greek *methodos* 'pursuit of knowledge', from *meta-* (expressing development) + *hodos* 'way'. *Methodos*: *Meta* is 'with, among', *hodos* is: 'way' - 'route through', 'road', 'journey'. From WhatsApp exchange with Professor David Langslow 24.4.20.



Untitled (Covid walk: Half-moon). Rectory Wood, Church Stretton, 2020.

## Part VI: SpaceTime

[method iii: *An elucidation on Action-Phenomenology as method of inquiry*]

Though I have been careful to avoid detours into pseudo-scientific research, *I was often attracted to fragmentary thoughts which do not prove, but rather give unequalled impetus to reverie through pithy assertions.*<sup>488</sup>

Gaston Bachelard

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<sup>488</sup> Bachelard, G. 2012; 9 emphasis mine.



Untitled (Covid-scape). Wolverhampton, 2020.



## Meditation (1): *On post-conventional scholarship*

As I lay asleep, a sheep ate at the ivy-wreath upon my head - ate and said: 'Zarathustra is no longer a scholar.'

It spoke and went away stiffly and proud. A child told me of it.<sup>489</sup>

I was asked at the beginning by Chris Seeley: 'What would success look like for you?' Then, at that time, I thought some kind of reconnection; less conflict, more conciliation. Then I didn't realise how much I had become eroded in myself during those years of exposure to systemic bullying and toxicity; not just then in my life, either. Little did I suspect that success would (partly) look like re-becoming a truck driver, or a deep relationship with a stray cat. Re-connections, but of a different kind than anticipated in 2013.

Now, as I exit this doctoral process, the possibility of disconnection looms in two ways: the process is over; there is the possibility of not '*making it*'. Working on the edge of practice and process (and organisationally) is where I've always operated as both a maker and as a teacher: there seemed to be little to be gained (save 'safety') by doing otherwise. And much to lose, not least by former students. In this endeavour of *edge-work* I have always felt supported by the Ashridge branch of *The Academy*, such that I have not often paid much heed as to what '*counts*' insofar as *The Academy* is concerned. And so here we are.

My quest rather has been to seek layers of practice about which I have become curious, which seem to arouse curiosity in others: to be a truly *Post-Conventional Scholar*, in much the manner that I encouraged others in my teaching days.

The roles of the scholar and the poet, as artist and the academic, seem to be conflicted within the academy, in much the way that science and art used to be, and maybe still are: artists are still expected to become scholars, yet scholars need not necessarily become artists. In this theatre of *Post-Conventional Scholarship* I find myself more curious than annoyed as to why this should be. I have throughout tried to demonstrate how it *could* be, were the post-conventional to become a serious endeavour of the academy. My own attunement — on a spectrum from *Via Arbora*, through *Action-Phenomenology*, to *4th-Person Inquiry*—is towards the *Via Arbora* end. I can *do* being 'of *The Academy*', and enjoy it. My heart and soul is in *The Atelier*.

As a working class artisan, why would it be otherwise? I drive trucks; I make pictures; I ride motorbikes; I fly planes. I (sometimes) write poetically about this: these activities being in essence truly poetic, their aesthetic qualities healing. On my healing journey I discovered other paradigms, perhaps for others to inquire into. For now the *Via Arbora*—maybe on a bike, maybe in a boat, hopefully with a cat called Yosser somewhere in my life—will do me. This is my calling, my way of *knowing* and of *being*: my *success*.

Already I have seen poets transformed; I have seen them direct their gaze upon themselves.

I have seen penitents of the spirit appearing: they grew out of poets.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Nietzsche, F. 2003; 147.

<sup>490</sup> Nietzsche, F. 2003; 151-152.



Untitled (floating worlds). Nr Long Mynd, 2020.

## Meditation (2). *On artful knowing & shifting form*

To paint this hour, I thought, would be the most impossible and the greatest joy of an artist.

These impressions repeated themselves every sunny day. They were a pleasure which shook me to the bottom of my soul, which raised me to *ecstasy*. And at the same time they were a *torture* because I felt that art in general and my powers in particular were far too weak in the face of nature.<sup>491</sup>

Building on the work of Seeley & Thornhill, Kaplan, Rosen, Marshall, Richardson, Wilber, Fox and Wheatley, I came to realise an untold set of paradigms—frameworks for knowing—in action inquiry: *Via Arbora; Action-Phenomenology; 4th-Person Inquiry*.<sup>492</sup> Standard model action-inquiry and theory had kept breaking down at the point where I needed to emphasise the weaker signals of the non-local, of the enchanted, in a way which may make sense to the informed onlooker. In working with the faint signals of the penumbral in an attempt to heal a loved one, I had encountered healing for myself. And I had created resonances with others: within both my *ecstasy* and my *torture* emerged practice, and also the putative new paradigms of inquiry referred to above. Dealing with invisible injury (PTSD) within me, and invisible (mental) illness within a loved one, led me to resort to aesthetic means of amelioration and recovery. The social and familial dynamics underlying the emergence of these malaises were my first port of call. I wrote poems and pieces of experimental writing.

These *methods* alone were insufficient to the task of both the deportation of the malaises and their healing. This led me into working with visual images, ritual and the more than human world. In depicting the seen—flowers at sunrise, a cat, skies—I came to be drawn not just to the seen elements of the picture, but to the unseen also: to sensed resonances with the subject which though unseen, seemed to percolate into the images in a manner both barely definable and yet accessible to others. This reads as encounters with the *Otherworldly*, with *Enchantment*. My worldly *square peg-ness* had escaped into other dimensions. This proved easier to tame and to utilise than it has been to elucidate in a meaningful, acceptable, accessible yet still *academic* manner. I came to work with *immanence* as a means of permeating these encounters, often in unlikely situations and settings; for instance whilst driving trucks, or walking at dusk or in the night.<sup>493</sup> The resultant images are abstracts, far from objective, viable visual truths; they relate my experience, referent to *unseen* as well as *seen* presences, and are often evocative of responses from others. The abstractions resonate, as did their *subjects* with me. They matter, they are my donations: *continually new experiences [making] the strings of the soul sensitive, receptive, especially sensitive to vibration*.<sup>494</sup>

Thus every still and every moving point (= line) became equally alive and revealed its soul to me. It was sufficient for me to “grasp” with my whole being, with all my senses, the possibility of the existence of that art which is called abstract in contrast to “objective”.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Kandinsky, W. 1913 in Herbert, R. 2000; 21 emphasis mine.

<sup>492</sup> See Chapters 1: *Analogic resonances*; 5: *Invisible skeins*; 8: *Immanent disclosures*; & 13: *Nam-shrub*. Also refs in bibliography.

<sup>493</sup> See page 113.

<sup>494</sup> Kandinsky, W. 1913 in Herbert, R. 2000; 22.

<sup>495</sup> Kandinsky, W. 1913 in Herbert, R. 2000; 22.



Untitled (Covid-scape: Lockdown moonrise over Snowdonia). Anglesey, Halloween, 2020.

### **Meditation (3). *On relating back to the world***

Time is terrestrial and feeds our cognitive development and relationship to the universe itself. The word “terrestrial” also grows heavy; it has similarities with words like “sublunary,” which place the terrestrial opposite a religious or spiritual space. The word “temporal” isn’t adequate either. The memory field is a matrix of time, memory, and land. <sup>496</sup>

It became clear that this emergent method was one of a spontaneity of response and relating: to the seen; back to the world. A visceral, primal process; evocative of memory, of connection to person and place, overlaying trauma and memory with a more sensuous, aesthetic coming into being. PTSD is the past—memory—not letting go of you: grief for something you’re not even grieving over and want rid of; toxic, temporal distortions. It became clear that in playing with time in order to create the necessary overlays, I was finding in spontaneous moments of distraction, other layers of being, helpful to others, indicative of new layers of inquiry. What became clearer was that there was something akin to a science to these moments of spontaneous epiphany, and that this science was non-linear.<sup>497</sup> What started out as a form of *radical self-care* became something other: *Ad Hoc, Magus* practice, came into its own.

Questions of purpose were raised by the examiners: If the *Via Arbor*a—to my mind the most readily explainable practice—was indeed a method, then could I explain it?<sup>498</sup> Was *Ad Hoc* valid method? Can *Post-Hoc purposefulness*, curation, also be method? <sup>499</sup> Or could I map it to existing conventional method? Moving practice from that noted by Bachelard—the *Action-Phenomenologist* doesn’t just *take the image just as it is, just as the poet created it, and try to make it their own*—they take the images as *they* themselves are. In this act of iteration the image becomes transformative: visual poets use poetics to transform ourselves; thus, we transform others too. At the end of the thesis it became clear that new vistas—matrices of paradigms—were opening up in support of artful-healing: *Via Arbor*a; *4th-Person Inquiry*; *Action-Phenomenology*.

I now point out qualities that I attribute to *Action-Phenomenology*. Dealing with the invisible or barely visible, objects seem to disappear, re-emerging transformed. This process of transformation (not the subject of my attention, or the artefacts which emerge) is at the heart of *Action-Phenomenology*:

All the forms which I ever used came “from themselves,” they *presented themselves complete before my eyes*, and it only remained to me to copy them, *or they created themselves* while I was working, often surprising me. I have trained myself not simply to let myself go, but to *bridle the power working within me, to guide it*.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Skeets, J. 2020

<sup>497</sup> See pages 287-289.

<sup>498</sup> See pages 310-334.

<sup>499</sup> See pages 289, 290, 346, 349.

<sup>500</sup> Kandinsky, W. 1913 in Herbert, R. 2000; 29 emphasis mine.



Untitled (Self-portrait). Whitchurch, 2020.

## Chapter 17

**Reveal:** Supplementary notes on *Action Phenomenology*

## Introduction

The Vedic text the *Srimad Bhagavatam* speaks about how paying attention to the spiritual paradigm makes us serve *sukhino bhavantu*—attunement to other people’s needs; in other words, when we are spiritually healthy we are content within ourselves, we don’t play into fear based decision making and we can then skilfully deflect conflict and misfortune.<sup>501</sup>

This supplement to the main body of the thesis is in response to invitation by the examiners to give further, deeper, consideration to the emergent field of *Action-Phenomenology*. This is a term which I appended to a series of blended, theorised practices developing from what was, initially artful and lyrical inquiry in the main body of the dissertation. Like Bachelard, I have been mindful to ‘avoid detours into pseudo-scientific research’ finding that I too ‘was often attracted to fragmentary thoughts which do not prove, but rather give unequalled impetus to reverie through pithy assertions’. These fragmentary thoughts often becoming detours of a different kind. This said, I have followed my instincts and peered into the *science*—physics—appended to the field which I term *Action-Phenomenology*, partly out of curiosity, partly to triangulate and lend weight to what can seem the esoteric realm of existential philosophy and phenomenology. It is a rarified, let alone relatable world, yet, ironically I found some grounding and clarity when drawing on theoretical and experimental physics in order to ground what seemed to be emerging: quantum-inquiry; *Inquiry into essences*.

I have, again, used the blended theory-practice approach adopted throughout this dissertation—it is the only way in which I find I can begin to relate the immensity of the field. I have though been mindful that the reader needs to ‘know where they are’ in the emerging blend, and have endeavoured to point the whereabouts both in the theory and the practice. This distinction becomes deliberately blurred towards the end—in keeping with the practice of *Action-Phenomenology*. I believe the join to be visible, which would not be my first preference, but does I hope, avoid the overtly kaleidoscopic—without dismantling the kaleidoscope altogether.

In *Method Meets Art*, Patricia Leavy writes of *shape*: ‘The word speaks to the form of our work but also to how the form of the work shapes the content and how audiences receive that content.’<sup>502</sup> I would suggest that appropriateness of shape, thus described, be admitted as quality criteria additional to those outlined in the earlier introduction. Such additional, suitable criteria, as proffered by Leavy are:<sup>503</sup>

*Method-Fit:*

Is *method* as developed appropriate and effective?

*Holistic Approach:*

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<sup>501</sup> Kang, C. 2020.

<sup>502</sup> Leavy, P. 2015; 2.

<sup>503</sup> Leavy, P. 2015; 268-273.



How well do the components (including the preceding dissertation) fit together? Does the form have strength?

*Transparency or Explicitness:*

Note: *'It is important to note that given the nature of artistic output it may not always be deemed desirable to be explicit about process; like other criteria this will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.'*<sup>504</sup> Given this, is the work appropriately explicit?

*Usefulness, Significance, or Substantive Contribution:*

Specifically: *'With respect to considering usefulness as an evaluative criterion it is important to shy away from questions like: "Is it a good piece of art?" and rather ask: "What is this piece of art good for?"'*<sup>505</sup> Does this work serve its stated purpose?

*Aesthetics or artfulness:*

Specifically: *'Arts based practice requires us to think like artists' [moreover] 'an artistic rendering must get to the heart of the issue and present that essence in coherent form in order to achieve aesthetic power. In order to achieve these ends one must pay attention to the architecture of the form.'*<sup>506</sup> Has this been done?

*Artful authenticity:*

Specifically: *'One must balance fidelity to the data with the need to produce an engaging piece of art in order to effectively communicate the essence of those data.'*<sup>507</sup> Has this been done?

*Personal Fingerprint or Creativity:*

Specifically: *'Cultivating a personal style take time and skill' [moreover] 'By developing personal trademarks or styles, researchers are also contributing to the larger repository of approaches to ABR available to others.'*<sup>508</sup> Has this been done?

Having outlined the above, I still feel there is something—barely definable—missing: academic quality criteria being *'of the world'* and all that. Chetna Kang states: *'I think it's challenging for anyone not to be distracted by short term loss and gain, but I believe one answer is to nurture the spiritual side of life'*.<sup>509</sup>

Throughout this dissertation, and especially in this chapter—*Reveal*—I have endeavoured not to be *distracted by short term loss or gain*. The revelation being that *spiritual nurturing* is part of the *method* being developed here.

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<sup>504</sup> Leavy, P. 2015; 272.

<sup>505</sup> Leavy, P. 2015; 273.

<sup>506</sup> Leavy, P. 2015; 278.

<sup>507</sup> Leavy, P. 2015; 279.

<sup>508</sup> Leavy, P. 2015; 280.

<sup>509</sup> Kang, C. 2020.

## **Reveal**

In June 1925, in response to an illness, the physicist Werner Heisenberg retreated to the island of Heligoland, off the coast of Germany. During a state of altered consciousness—achieved partly by the isolated retreat, partly by illness, partly whilst becoming lost while on a walk—Heisenberg was able to model the first formulation of quantum mechanics: it occurred to him as an epiphany. In his book *When We Cease to Understand the World*, Benjamin Labatut writes of this incident: ‘He had no idea how he had arrived at his results, but there they were, written in his own hand; if he was correct, science could not only understand reality, but also begin to manipulate it at its most basic level.’<sup>510</sup>

In a low key, minor way, this inquiry—and my experience—mirrors that which happened to Heisenberg: achieving altered states of consciousness, arriving at understanding without necessarily being able to trace in a linear, academic fashion how I arrived there; yet influencing participants and observers; and, not least, *finding another way of not only understanding reality, but also begin to manipulate it at its most basic level*. Only I use art, not mathematics. Contextualised, I term this practice *Action-Phenomenology*. What follows is a further layer—building on my writing in Part V. *Light*, and in response to feedback from examiners—of exploration: how I arrived at this practice; how it might be theorised; how it may inform the work of practitioners and other researchers; what it *looks* like; the *shape* of the practice.

As explored and explained in earlier chapters, I came to the inquiry using *Artful Inquiry* (specifically experimental poetry and writing initially) in order to assimilate, make sense of, a series of life events. This was later developed, and used a little, in a ‘live’ inquiry situation (the threat of being made homeless and the mental ill-health of a loved one).<sup>511</sup> This experimental writing work, though an essential stage in the developing of my *noticing* and *playing* with adverse situations, has not become central to my practice—poetry gave way instead to the *Poetics* of image-making: specifically photographs made on my iPhone. It will be through discussing the poetics and constructs of this image-making practice that I delve into the relevant realms pertaining to *Action-Phenomenology*. In order to do so, I work my way, into the making and showing of various images that appear throughout this dissertation thus far; and recently produced.

Writing towards the end of this thesis—essentially a work about the role of aesthetics in identity recovery—it became clear that I opened up, or discovered, further avenues to inquiry of potential value to other researchers and practitioners—*Via Arbora*; *Action-Phenomenology*; *4th-Person Inquiry*—all of which merit and await deeper consideration. In response to further feedback from examiners, I now set out in greater detail that arena of inquiry which I term *Action-Phenomenology*. I seek to further define this; to offer insights as to how I work within this realm; to relate the extant theory and writings on Phenomenology and other fields; and how, working within this putative field, action-inquiry might adopt extended qualities: *transcendence*; *immanence*. Both of these qualities—transcendence; immanence—fall into what Bortoft terms *dynamic encounters*: ‘*active looking and the practice of exact sensorial imagination*’.<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Labatut, B. 2020; 106-107.

<sup>511</sup> See Appendix 1: Poems and Appendix 2: Experimental writings.

<sup>512</sup> Bortoft, H. 2012; 11.

Here I offer my perspective on the way in which the work that I do relates both to the broader *theoretical* field of Phenomenology; and how—according to circumstance or context—this work could be termed *method*.

Observers and readers have termed my work and approaches to making work as *radical*. Yet, to me it is just normal and a furtherance of *method*, particularly with regard to photographic and teaching practice.

*Action-Phenomenology* as practice provides a means of delving to the roots and beneath the surfaces and energies that attend the immediately apparent (then playing with these energies and their fields). Building on the quality criteria already outlined in the introduction, quality and discipline of *attending* is the heart of *Action-Phenomenology*. I noted these as being:

*Be curious: about the latent energy of a subject or situation; experiment with it; play with patterns, iterations and dynamics in response to observed shifts of perception and imagination.*

What's happening? *Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.*

*Pay attention: to dynamics; reverberations; resonances; sonorousness; reveries.*

What is shifting? How? *Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.*

*Work, play, experiment: with or within the context.*

What happens now? *Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.*

*Notice: relationships between intrinsic & extrinsic worlds; experiences, map, territory, time.*

What do I notice? *Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.*

*Reflect: what is happening inwardly, outwardly? Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.*

What happened? What did I See?

*Iterate: What do you want to send into the world? What happens (or doesn't) when you do?*

In my accumulation of experiences of image transformation I found the dynamic which industrialises phenomenology; which, from a philosophy of being and seeing, creates a third, holistic, holographic effect; by which other layers of reality may abjure the concrete, replaced by poetic apparitions of the *imagining psyche*. *Action-Phenomenology*, as an apparently new framing and field of endeavour with the Action Research canon, does not submit to 'standard compare and contrast' literature searches and reviews. In line with the inter-disciplinary nature of the *Action-Phenomenological* field (and in addition to phenomenology), it has been essential for me to seek recourse to varied, at times disparate, realms of contextual literature: theoretical and experimental physics; theology; and previously: eco-theology; eco-psychology; art-therapy. (These are covered previously, though reference is made here too, where this seems helpful.)

## Being curious

My coming to understand, to appreciate, this template for inquiry occurred on the return from a motorcycle trip to Bled, Slovenia. I paused in the Sud Tirol for a couple of days. During this pause I was for the first time able to make the connections: between the apprehending of phenomena, their re-iteration, assimilation, and mental health. It was also the foregrounding: my seeing into this way of working as a valid practice in its own right; connecting the practice to the context of existential philosophy, specifically phenomenology; that phenomenology has a role to play in achieving or maintaining a positive state of mental health and wellbeing.

It became apparent throughout the inquiry that the matter of *time* bore a fundamental relationship to both trauma (including recovery of well being), and to the shifts in consciousness and states of being attending artful practices. This is particularly true of photographic imagery, often characterised as *time-based* media. When learning from Charles Harbutt his approach to photography, later further developed by me into a method teaching photography, *Time* was one of his four framings, the framing that I have played most with, been most curious about.<sup>513</sup> Researching *Time*, it becomes clear that this is a complex matter.

Merleau-Ponty writes: *The objective world is too full for there to be time.*<sup>514</sup> If we consider the implications of this (as Merleau-Ponty does), then the notion of time as a flow of events—or as a series of ‘nows’—does not constitute a coherent, observable phenomena. Time is viewed from a perspective. That perspective is not static—in either time or space—and is, in our case both *Earth-centric*, and *Anthropocentric*. If we are to explore time as a phenomena, and from a phenomenological perspective, it is necessary to draw a schema: the grounds of how this might be done; the purposes of doing so. I start by making some claims: that in making a picture of apparently static time (actually a small segment of flow), we move between linear and non-linear experiences; that in this abstraction of time, our human stories and histories are invoked (via memory); that time, as explained by theoretical physics, is granular; our linear interpretation being an anthropocentric, *earth-centric*, construction.<sup>515</sup>

We collude in our own delusion; germane when working in the realms of non-local realities and enchantment. Carlo Rovelli writes: ‘*The entire formal structure of quantum mechanics can in large measure be expressed in two simple postulates: 1. The relevant information in any physical system is finite. 2. You can always obtain new information on a physical system.*’<sup>516 517</sup> Quantum mechanics is built around deep paradox and yet has found a way to live in *The Academy*, a paradox also faced by the Post-Conventional Scholar. In the process of poetic engagement, making images, we—as *Action-Phenomenologists* (if so disposed)—are both *in the physical system*, and *obtaining new information on it*. Becoming existential participants, *we both seek, and are part of, the granularity of the system.*

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<sup>513</sup> The four Charles Harbutt framings: *Subject; Viewpoint; Framing; Time*, to which I added a fifth: *Light*.

<sup>514</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 2012; 434.

<sup>515</sup> See: Greene, B. 2004; Rovelli, C. 2017b; 2019.

<sup>516</sup> Rovelli, C. 1996.

<sup>517</sup> Rovelli, C. 2017b; 216-217.

## Theorising curiosity

Bachelard states: ‘*Only an iconoclastic philosopher can undertake that heavy task: detaching all suffixes from beauty, seeking out behind the visible images the hidden one, going to the very root of the image producing force.*’<sup>518</sup> In going to the *root of the image producing force* we both learn from, and cancel part of the existing condition. As Rovelli states: *In quantum mechanics when we interact with a system, we don’t only learn something, we ‘cancel’ part of the system.*<sup>519</sup>

When we notice the *coherence*, the coincidence of information within systems, we notice our attunement to the granular nature of reality. We also notice ourselves as part of a greater whole: the healing basis of the *imaginal gaze*. As Rovelli states: ‘*Hence time is not a fundamental constituent of the world, but it appears because the world is immense, and we are small systems within the world, interacting only with macroscopic variables that average among innumerable small microscopic variables.*’<sup>520</sup>

For *Action-Phenomenologists* this *appearance* of time is crucial and interesting: by playing with or subverting the construct we may disrupt, or re-construct, apparent realities. Rovelli writes: ‘*A process is the passage from one interaction to another. The properties of “things” manifest themselves in a granular manner only in the moment of interaction, that is to say only in relation to other things.*’<sup>521</sup>

This is the power, and the mystery, of the still photographic image: interesting things happen at the edges of the process. I determine edges of the process as being: radical interactions with media and practice. That point before the point of loss: of image breakdown; of sense making; perceptual interruptions; broken conventions (e.g. subject, viewpoint, light, time, focus, steadiness, composition, exposure, coherence). The poetics of my photographic practice reside in these *moments of interaction*, and their curation. Making photographs is a matter of the *curation of moments of interaction*, analogous to quantum mechanics. According to Rovelli:

This is the second cornerstone of quantum mechanics, its hardest key: the relational aspect of things. Electrons don’t always exist. They exist only when they interact. They materialise in a place when they collide with something else. [...] When nothing disturbs it, an electron does not exist in any place.<sup>522</sup>

It is the same when making photographic images: they are constructed—made, taken—by the *photographer* at a particular time and space: if the photographer is not there, the images never come into existence. This granular-relational nature of *image-poetics* is the practice of *Action-Phenomenology*. It is clear that something other than direct re-production and presentation happens—particularly at the edges of the practice and process—in order for image-making to become, or help become, something other.

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<sup>518</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014b; 67.

<sup>519</sup> Rovelli, C. 2017b; 217.

<sup>520</sup> Rovelli; 2017b; 222.

<sup>521</sup> Rovelli, C. 2017b; 116-117.

<sup>522</sup> Rovelli, C. 2017b; 100-101.

Turning to phenomenological philosophers: whereas Bortoft is attracted to engagement with the transcendental and the immanent, Husserl seems both attracted, and repelled. Moran writes: ‘*Husserl’s own transcendental idealism must be a direct ‘empirical’ realism that also entirely repudiates the idea of the transcendent ‘world in itself’, which somehow comes into contact with consciousness, as sheer nonsense.*’<sup>523</sup><sup>524</sup> At the same time the *transcendental* and the *immanent* do preoccupy Husserl’s writings. Moran writes: ‘*Phenomenological reflection is a reflection of what is immanent in consciousness; yet within this sphere of immanence, transcendences are experienced.*’<sup>525</sup> Moran draws distinctions in Husserl’s work: ‘between the *inadequate* and essentially *corrigible* [capable of being corrected, rectified, or reformed] mode in which ‘transcendent’ objects present themselves in straightforward externally directed consciousness; and the *adequate* and *apodictic* [clearly established] mode in which conscious processes themselves appear’.<sup>526</sup>

The holistic concepts of *dynamic encounters*, *active looking*, *dynamic seeing* and *exact sensorial imagination*—posited by Bortoft, and Bachelard—run counter to what seems a stunted take on the nature apparition and apprehending by Husserl. Bachelard’s perspective in particular is evocative of ‘*the immanence of the imaginary in the real, the continuous passage from the real to the imaginary.*’<sup>527</sup> Husserl may have laid out, revealed, the foundations of phenomenology. But Bachelard’s conception—of the dynamics involved; of *seeing* and the *imaginary*; of *immanence* and the *transcendent*; of the transformative image—is closer to being able to describe and dissect my experience of working with *Action-Phenomenology*, than any insights lent by Husserl. Though the latter laid the foundations for the phenomenological way of knowing (and in my case working), Bachelard seems to anticipate this:

If we could accumulate experiences of image transformation, we would understand how profound is Benjamin Fondane’s remark: “At first, the object is not real but a good conductor of reality.” *The poetic object, duly energised by a name rich in resonances, is a good conductor of the imagining psyche.*<sup>528</sup>

Playing, experimenting with time when image-making, it seems possible to move beyond depictions; towards a form of image that helps re-construct realities. Image-making and *Action-Phenomenology* being analogous to quantum mechanics: *Quantum mechanics is starkly efficient: it explains what you see but prevents you from seeing the explanation.*<sup>529</sup> This relates to Husserl’s: ‘*eidetic account of the wonderful constitution of consciousness*’, finding a pathway in to working with *a series of nows, or granular time.*<sup>530</sup> <sup>531</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> Moran, D. 2005; 178.

<sup>524</sup> Husserl, E. 1968; 99 in Moran D. 2005.

<sup>525</sup> Moran, D. 2005; 147.

<sup>526</sup> Moran, D. 2005; 147.

<sup>527</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014b; 78.

<sup>528</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014b; 78 emphasis mine.

<sup>529</sup> Greene, B. 2004; 183.

<sup>530</sup> eidetic | εἰδῆτικ | relating to or denoting mental images having unusual vividness and detail, as if actually visible: *an eidetic memory*. ORIGIN 1920s: coined in German from Greek *eidētikos*, from *eidōs* ‘form’.

<sup>531</sup> Moran, D. 2005; 38.

Exploring tensions and similarities attending these fields, my understanding of working with *Action-Phenomenology* evolves. This *method*—series of practices—first arose for me back in the mid 90’s, when during a time of perturbation and grief following a relationship breakup, I used to go into a woodland at dusk in the winter and make photos. When there was barely enough light, my keeping still for up to a second (in order to make an image from the near darkness), becoming conscious of breathing, connecting to the environment I found to be healing.<sup>532 533</sup> In *Ideas*, Husserl states:

We proceed in the first instance by showing up simply and directly what we see; and since the Being to be thus shown up is neither more nor less than that which we refer to on essential grounds as “pure experiences (*Erlebnisse*)”, “pure consciousness” with its pure “correlates of consciousness”, and on the other side its “pure Ego”, we observe that it is from *the* Ego, *the* consciousness, *the* experience as given to us from the natural standpoint that we take our start.<sup>534</sup>

It is from this viewpoint—‘pure experiences (*Erlebnisse*)’—that I wish to journey into *Action-Phenomenology*: a journey that is both perceptual and imaginal, which appears to occur in linear time, and against a background of fixed topographies. It may be said to be *intentional*—as in having purpose—and a *pure experience*. It is in the radius where our consciousness of those *pure experiences* meets the objects (subjects) of our attention, that the *Action-Phenomenological* occurs. This may feel like magic.

(Since the 1990’s making pictures as an act of healing, photography in this manner had been, usually, second nature to me: using photography as a tool for self-development and adult-development. This too often felt magical: a curious mixture of psychic osmosis and alchemy, with a bit of coaching thrown in.)<sup>535</sup>

### **Practical curiosity**

For these practices and processes to now be seen as *deliberate*, I work through the descriptors of *the quality and discipline of attending* already outlined:<sup>536</sup>

*Be curious: about the latent energy of a subject or situation; experiment with it; play with patterns, iterations and dynamics in response to observed shifts of perception and imagination.*  
What’s happening? Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.

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<sup>532</sup> See Chapter 6: **Unearthing Imagos**: *origins of practice*.

<sup>533</sup> Later, by chance, I ended up showing the images to Zelda Cheattle during a workshop. They ended up being part of a group exhibition at her gallery, entitled: *Otherworldly*.

<sup>534</sup> Husserl, E. 2012; 62.

<sup>535</sup> See *The tale of Pavel* in Chapter 17: **Runes**: Notes on *Action-Phenomenology*.

<sup>536</sup> Again we encounter to the sticky ground of intentionality. *Thinking* in the traditional sense is not your friend during these practises; any deliberation may occur either before hand, or post hoc. The curated moment of the photographic event becomes sanitised, sacrosanct.

On page 11 of this dissertation appears a photograph—*Untitled. France, 2007*—taken by me in September 2007, when riding a motorcycle; and yet: *What was happening at the time? Was there a latent, and healing, energy in the situation and the image that may not be apparent?* Referring to Husserl, Moran writes:

Intentional *Erlebnisse* can be simple, like having presentations, or more complex, where we have nested clusters of intentional acts, for example when I remember feeling angry about something.[...] A favourite example of Husserl's is the difference between aesthetic approval and theoretical assessment of an aesthetic object [...], to *show the difference between an experiential act and taking a more detached contemplative view of it.*<sup>537</sup>

An object of sorts—a shadow of a motorcycle being ridden—is there, thus conforming to Husserl's notion of an *intentional act*: 'founded on what Brentano called 'presentations' and Husserl prefers to call 'objectivating acts', that is acts which present an object.'<sup>538</sup> In this instance—of the motorcycling picture—the 'Intentional *Erlebnisse*' is complex. A recurrent aspect of my practice and a quality of the field *Action-Phenomenology* being the connections between *experiential acts*, and, by artful abstraction, *taking a more detached contemplative view* of them.

*What happened?* I played with both methods—motorcycling; image-making—as a means of healing. I didn't know what was happening at the time, or that I would find myself writing a thesis about it some 13 years after the event. Would Husserl have considered this to be an act of 'Intentional *Erlebnisse*', albeit a *complex* one? My estimation is that he would.

I went on to deploy my curiosity around latent energy experimentally: playing with iterations and dynamics; responding to shifts of perception and imagination. I found that I could play tricks on my own mind: flipping time; thought experiments around alternative pasts and futures; transposition of experiences.<sup>539</sup>

### **Amplified curiosity**

I wondered about the implications: *Might the practice have wider import? What commonalities and connections with the practices and writings of others?* (Movement in time, topographic space and making images seemed to have a power: healing for me, eliciting responses from others.) Shifts in my practice were empowering to others: my *trauma informed* peregrinations, and their byproducts, were affecting.<sup>540</sup>

*How might I work further with the dynamics of this?*

It seemed—as I fell upon during my later motorcycle trip through the Dolomites—to hinge on the dynamics of *seeing* and *imagination*.

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<sup>537</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 114-115 emphasis mine.

<sup>538</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 115.

<sup>539</sup> In my conversation with Charles Harbutt back in the '90's he suggested that I 'revisit scenes of crime' (meaning sites of previously charged emotional experience). This was to form the basis of my photographic (and teaching ) practice. To an extent it still does.

<sup>540</sup> See *The Tale of Pavel* and *The Parable of the White Bluebell* in Part 5: Light; also: Appendix 3. *Writing the soul*: workshop glimpses.



Relating these to the essential granular, non-linear, nature of time resonated with my insights. John O'Donohue expressed that: *To attune one's self to one's inner rhythm is to come into the deeper levels of one's own hidden and unknown presence.*<sup>541</sup> An excerpt from my Bled travelog expands:

On the way down the Swiss side of the Stelvio I'd had to stop to check the rear brake, which seemed to be spongy and fading. I'd pulled into the ubiquitous Alpen Rose, all seemed to be fine. I'd become very finely attuned to the machine; I was continually re-attuning to my surroundings; to the cool of the high passes; to the heat of the valleys; to the bright motorways; to the shady, sodium-lit tunnels. Somehow all these variations were merging into one. *Attunement is a powerful quality. It helps with adaptation, and can be an anchor for those in the grip of trauma.*<sup>542</sup>

The trip was yielding insights, the insights yielding practice: the practice of stepping into radical uncertainty; via those forty dawns photographing flowers on the *Alder Altar*; via my consequential deepening relationship with Yosser; further deepening relationship with my surroundings and home; via the *Daily Flowers* and the responses; via this trip: undertaken in edgy circumstances. A trip which was becoming both part of my practice, and part of a practice of what Carlo Strenger terms *active self-acceptance* and *self-authorship*.<sup>543</sup>

The dynamics—movement through space; resonance with subject and photography; attunement to self—concur with Husserl's notion of complex intentional *Erlebnisse* (lived 'pure' experiences), where clusters of intentional acts manage to transcend psychologism. An imaginal process, which became apparent to me on my trip through the Dolomites, reading Bortoft:<sup>544</sup>

Back on the map of my 2007 trip now, and crossing my tracks, I followed the N19 to Langres. *I pondered EMDR, and the way in which I found it impossible to feel anxious whilst riding. I wondered whether the mere fact that, when riding, one's eyes are in almost constant movement (the same being true when flying, and making photographs).* It seemed there may be a link, albeit tenuous, between such activities and EMDR and the amelioration of anxiety. Is there a link between this and what Henri Bortoft refers to as the *Dynamic Approach*?<sup>545</sup> Are there ways in which appearance may be altered by, or even illuminated by, active observance, as with say a sonar return? i.e. seeing as a participatory, active, may be to some an aggressive or offensive act. As with the seeing into of love, or the seeing upstream of illness; towards control and abuse? From what occurs, towards the occurrence, from what appears towards the appearance?<sup>546</sup> *Thus occurrence and appearance might change us: conversely, by active looking, might we change them?* By taking this excursion to Slovenia and back through the mountains, it seemed like more might be changing than was appearing on the surface.

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<sup>541</sup> O'Donohue, J. 2010; 47.

<sup>542</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 210-211.

<sup>543</sup> Strenger, C. 2011; 89-102; 108.

<sup>544</sup> Moran, D. 2005; 23.

<sup>545</sup> Bortoft 2012; 94.

<sup>546</sup> Bortoft 2012; 95.

## Paying attention

It was becoming increasingly clear that within intentional experimental acts—complex intentional *Erlebnisse* (lived experiences)—that *seeing* is not a passive process: part of the energy of *seeing* emanates from the *see-er*, altering the dynamic of the whole. This came to be the first stage of my *Action-Phenomenological* practice. The next was one of playing with, attuning, the dynamic imagination; a simple first step in doing this—the next, imaginal, step on the path of altering one’s being—that of *paying attention*:

*Pay attention: to dynamics; reverberations; resonances; sonorousness; reveries.*

What is shifting? How? Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.

Bortoft writes of Goethe’s way of observing the phenomenon of colour:

Observing the phenomenon requires us to *look*, as if the direction of seeing were reversed, going from ourselves towards the phenomenon instead of vice versa. This is done by putting *attention* into seeing, so that we really do *see* what we are seeing instead of just having a visual impression. It is as if we plunged into seeing. In this way we can begin to *experience* the *quality* of the colours.<sup>547</sup>

On page 26 of this dissertation, there is a photograph of a flower, *Untitled (Convolvulus)*. *Lingen, 2016*. On pages 27 and 28, appears a brief explanation of the context of the production of the image; on page 37 another, impressionistic rendering of context:

2016: *August, a Saturday; that Saturday in August was the day that the Convolvulus flower on the apple tree sucked me outdoors at 7am to photograph it; was the day that I really noticed the quality of light echoing those days at the Altar.*

Beyond this, there are few clues to decoding the image. Turning our attention towards the image:

What is it that we are *seeing* here, really?

What is making an appearance?

What is the *occurrence* and the *appearance* that might change us?

Does the flower *attend to us*, as we attend, by proxy, to it?

We are in the realm of the imaginal. In *Air and Dreams*, Bachelard writes:

The sun gives its warmth *coldly*. For dynamic imagination, the way that something is given, the energy involved in giving, is *worth* more than what is given.

A fire so violently drawn toward its opposite has more dynamic characteristics than it does substantial wealth.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> Bortoft, H. 1996; 41-42 emphasis in original.

<sup>548</sup> Bachelard, G. 2011; 135.

In *drawing me outside* in order to make an image of it, the Convolvulus flower was inviting me, compelling me, to attend to my own *inner rhythm*: to attend my own *hidden and unknown presence*. In this space there was a convergence of Bachelard's *Dynamic Imagination* and Bortoft's *Dynamic Seeing*. Forms of being, and events, that embody the concept of time as a granular phenomenon. It is the abstraction of the flower—via the *proxy image* created by light fallen on a sensor—that emphasises convergence: of philosophies; of the abstract granularity of the photographic moment with more linear narratives.

Husserl writes: 'A fundamental question of method is again raised, and with it a doubt which checks as we press eagerly forward into the new territory. *Is it right to set phenomenology the aims of pure description? A descriptive eidetic: is that not something altogether perverse?*'<sup>549</sup>

I re-present a flower via an image of a flower: that image is not a full description of the nature of the flower. Yet my representation is there because of certain intrigues: the circumstances of its making; its appearance; why, some years later, pausing to look at the image calms me, makes me feel better.

And the image doesn't quite make sense. The shadow in the bottom left hand corner suggests that the sun is over my left shoulder; yet the right hand edge of the flower seems illuminated too. *How can this be? What is suggested by the falsity of depth within the image? This image is an act of depiction, description, surely? Is this method? Why?* Is a moment of transcendence being offered?

I collect, curate, abstract, that moment from a collection of moments. We only see a part of the whole, and even that part doesn't entirely make sense.<sup>550</sup> What makes this *imaginal* method is the manner in which this abstraction conforms to Husserl's concept of adumbration. Moran writes:

Perceptual adumbrations have their own kind of fulfilment (*Erfüllung*) or confirmation, and in this process genuine knowledge is acquired in which aspects perceived at one moment are retained in the following moments. Moreover, it confirms for us the sense of transcendence whereby an abiding world is on view, at our disposal, present at hand (*vorhanden*).<sup>551</sup>

## Experiment

The image of the Convolvulus flower is one such *perceptual adumbration: transcendent presence*, an act of *confirmation*. This is partly an act of depiction (description), partly perception, partly imaginal: in relating to the whole object, I *reiterate* both the seen (visible), and *relate* the unseen (transcendent).

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<sup>549</sup> Husserl, E. 2012; 137 emphasis in original.

<sup>550</sup> To help, I now reveal the trick of the light: it is illuminating the flower from the right hand side of the frame; the shadow on the left is the shadow of the base of the flower—where it cuts back the light coming from the right—making the translucence of the flower both apparent, and confusing.)

<sup>551</sup> Moran, D. 2005; 158-159.

Husserl writes:

Let us begin by noting that the aspect, the perspectival adumbration through which every spatial object invariably appears, only manifests the spatial object from one side. No matter how completely we may perceive a thing, it is never given in perception with the characteristics that qualify it and make it up as a sensible thing from all sides at once.<sup>552</sup>

In describing, depicting, the Convolvulus flower, and intimating all sides at once, a granular moment is curated which has resonance extending beyond momentary confines: a poetic moment of becoming, stilled by our *imagination*, when all along we thought we were perceiving.<sup>553</sup> This is the next step which is perceptual:

*Work, play, experiment: with or within the context.*

What happens now? Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.

On page 374 of this dissertation appears an image: *Untitled (Covid walk: Half-moon). Rectory Wood, Church Stretton 2020*. It is an image illustrative of playful, deeper, perception: the ways in which *experiment* may reveal deeper layers, other forms, of the real.

This image only ever existed as a photographic image: the subject—apparently a distorted, reflected, refracted half-moon, stilled—was never there to observe at first hand. We are looking at, dealing with, an illusion.

And it is real. The intrinsic topography of our perception relates directly to the extrinsic topography of the outer, immediate, world. There is in this image movement; through space and time; a series, or cluster, of granules. We are at the same time looking at something that couldn't have happened in a way we could assimilate in real time, and that somehow we did so. Brian Greene states: '*by reaching a point where our whole analytical scaffolding is on the verge of collapse, we realise, forcefully, that we must have left something crucial out of our reasoning.*'<sup>554</sup>

In order to make perceptual leaps, we need to leave reasoning aside. I use various *Ateliers*—topographies—for this: playfulness and experimenting with patterns become effective strategies; some images of the nature of still lives; some of the nature of landscapes; occasionally a mixture of the two: a space where the *dynamics* of the *imaginal* meets the *seeing* of the *perceptual*. While working at the Atelier of the Alder Altar, the earlier, even more impromptu Atelier of Rectory Wood in 1996 was recalled, as were various other correspondences: the useable, malleable light changing more quickly nearer the solstice from penumbra to unusable; a deep, altered state of consciousness.

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<sup>552</sup> Husserl, E. 2001: 39 in Moran, D. 2005; 159.

<sup>553</sup> Technically according to theoretical physics this would be a series or cluster of granular time.

<sup>554</sup> Greene, B. 2004; 169 emphasis in original.

Husserl, would, I think, say that these forms of knowing conform to the notion of the *Eidetic*, and in so doing these are not self-contradictory [nothing is left out of our reasoning]: 'Eidetic *judging*, eidetic *judgement* or eidetic *proposition*, eidetic *truth* (or true proposition)—these ideas manifestly belong to the same system.'<sup>555</sup> It is this *systemic-belonging* (context) which I play with when image-making, by some form of abstraction.

Abstraction—reduction of scale, deletion of horizon, introduction of spatial ambiguity, time-light shifts—becomes the friend of the experimenter, in situations where thinking of a linear nature isn't. Husserl states:

That the real in space corresponds to truths of such kind is not mere fact (*Faktum*), but as a special development of the laws an *essential necessity*. The element of fact in this connection is only the reality itself which serves as the basis for the application.<sup>556</sup>

Husserl's position on the *Eidetic* is concrete, all-knowing, though he writes: 'One should not confuse the *unrestricted generality of natural laws* with *essential generality*. The proposition that "all bodies are heavy" does not indeed take any determinate potential thing within the universe to be a concrete existent.'<sup>557</sup>

This leaves room for existences that cannot be proved in material terms; yet which may be emergent, or be alluded to more tangentially: an interpretation in line with my practice. Within the semi-intentional disorientations attending many of my images there seems to be a space for other realities—*Otherworldliness* even—to occur: true of my earlier images in Rectory Wood (Chapter 6).

This is true also of *Untitled (Covid walk: Half-moon)*. Rectory Wood, Church Stretton 2020, (see page 374).

We are fixed into poetic-time by its ambiguities: it is dark; there is movement (a stream flowing over a rock). There is implied movement: the 'Half-moon' becoming a squiggle of—apparently linear—light, in what we *know* must be moving water; the squiggle and the blurring in the upper part of the image, appearing to be still, confounding our expectation: it is *atmospheric*.

The *atmospheric*, and the ability to attune to, blend and bend with this, to curate it, is the practice of *Action-Phenomenology*: Curious, experimental playing with patterns of connotation and connection as *method*. Bachelard writes:

The voyage into distant worlds of the imaginary truly *conducts* a dynamic psyche only if it takes the shape of a voyage into the land of the infinite. In the realm of the imagination, every imbalance takes on a transcendence. The very law of poetic expression is to go beyond thought.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> Husserl, E. 2012; 16 emphasis in original.

<sup>556</sup> Husserl, E. 2012; 16 emphasis in original.

<sup>557</sup> Husserl, E. 2012; 17 emphasis in original.

<sup>558</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014b; 79 emphasis in original.

The *Paradox*: in order to work with perception, we need to work with the illusory and imaginal.

The *Magic*: playing with shared consciousness, *open imaginations*, to see what happens.

Bachelard writes:

When one goes so far, so high, one finds oneself in a state of *open imagination*. The imagination in its entirety, hungry for atmospheric realities, adds to each impression a new image. As Rilke says, the being feels on the verge of being written: "This time I shall be written. I am the impression that will transform itself."<sup>559</sup> <sup>560</sup>

## Noticing

It is in order to open up how one finds or creates such a space, a state of *open imagination* that I return to the fourth axis of *Action-Phenomenology: Time*, as relating to our *open imaginations*.

*Notice: relationships between intrinsic & extrinsic worlds; between experiences, map, territory, time. What do I notice? Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.*

Bachelard writes:

One of the charms of phenomenology of the poetic imagination is to be able to experience a *fresh nuance in the presence of a spectacle* that calls for uniformity, and can be summarised in a single idea. *If the nuance is sincerely experienced by the poet, the phenomenologist is sure to obtain an image at its inception.*<sup>561</sup>

At the beginning of this chapter appears a photograph: *Untitled (Covid-scape). Wolverhampton, 2020*, an image made whilst I was waiting outside a meat processing factory. There is a comet in the sky somewhere near at hand, but we can't see it. We wouldn't know that to look at the picture: it is an image out of time and context.

The unlikely harmonies of photos made whilst trucking underpin my practice of *unlikely moments of surprise*: the greater the unlikelihood, (almost) the greater the surprise. There is more than one way of apprehending a meat processing factory, it seems.

Not all *Qualities* are immediately apparent in the images which are the byproduct of the practice: there is enough subtle power in the *meta-data*, the unseen but present, for these qualities to be said to form a backbone of *Action-Phenomenological* practice. Otherwise it wouldn't work. The *presence* of the *unseen* is necessary.

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<sup>559</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014b; 79-80 emphasis in original.

<sup>560</sup> Rilke, R. 2009; 50, quoted in Bachelard, G. 2014b; 80.

<sup>561</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014a; 220 emphasis mine.

Which raises questions:

What, if anything, is, or are the unifying phenomena underlying these *Qualities*?<sup>562</sup>

May accession be granted to others: *Taught*, even?<sup>563</sup>

In order to theorise this practice further, I remain with the phenomena of time: attunement to the ways in which *moments of surprise* becomes significant practice. In *The Dialectic of Duration*, Bachelard writes: '*In actual fact all causation is displayed in a discontinuity of states.*'<sup>564</sup> Playing with the patterns and vibrations at the heart of discontinuities is where the work of the *Action-Phenomenologist* may begin. Moments of *aesthetic surprise* are made available in order to wake us up—in the moment of apprehending is when we become awake: to discontinuities; to deeper beauty.

This can be true even in unpromising situations. The paradox: we need to unlearn our imbued linearity; we need to work deeper into our psyches first. We require *the method*.

*Discontinuities of state* provide the opportunity, and impetus: linear *constructed* nature of time; juxtaposed with its more metaphysical, primal cousin—non-linear, *felt* time. Bachelard avers: '*The thread of time has knots all along it. And the easy continuities of trajectories has been totally ruined by microphysics. Reality does not stop flickering around our abstract reference points. Time with its small quanta twinkles and sparks.*'<sup>565</sup> Bachelard terms this process [*feeling*] '*the metaphysical duality of duration*'.<sup>566</sup>

In playing with abstracted time—in pausing for a moment, suspending linearity—we may begin to access altered states of *consciousness*, and altered ways of *being*. Rovelli states: '*I think that quantum mechanics has revealed three aspects of the nature of things: granularity, indeterminacy and the relational structure of the world.*'<sup>567</sup> Playing with abstracted time we render *granular, indeterminate, relational structures* visible: a matter of *re-skilling the psyche*. Bachelard states: '*A whole aspect of the phenomenology of time is obscured when we limit ourselves to reflecting on the development of phenomena.*'<sup>568</sup>

Making images such as *Untitled (Covid-scape)*. *Wolverhampton, 2020* and *Untitled (Covid walk: Half-moon)*. *Rectory Wood, Church Stretton 2020*, we may begin to re-educate our psyches, our *open imaginations*; noticing *relationships between intrinsic and extrinsic worlds*.

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<sup>562</sup> Peripheral; Apprehended (not obscured); Subtle-power; Aesthetic-sensual; Primal-Primordial; Supra-human; Topographical; Polylogical; Time-based (granular); Other-worldly (enchanted); Consciousness related; Eidetic.

<sup>563</sup> My sense and experience is that it can be. This was my practice when working on *The Leviathan*: working with students disadvantage, trauma or story to help them engender deeper ways of seeing, and ultimately, of being in the world. This also speaks to the *Key Qualities of Action-Phenomenology*: Experimental; Non-linear; Scale (micro); Imaginal; Perceptual;

<sup>564</sup> Bachelard, G. 2000; 57.

<sup>565</sup> Bachelard, G. 2000; 71.

<sup>566</sup> Bachelard, G. 2000; 71.

<sup>567</sup> Rovelli, C, 2017b; 111.

<sup>568</sup> Bachelard, G. 2000; 72.

Bachelard refers to this as the *skilful psyche*: 'A skilful psyche is one that had been educated, it manages energy. It does not allow it either to flow away or explode. It proceeds by making very small, very separate movements.'<sup>569</sup> This describes *Action-Phenomenological* practice: small, separate movements; in patterns; in time. Sometimes this shows up as luck. Sometimes it appears as magic; often not looking, or feeling, very skilled at all: *Finding a pathway in to working with a series of nows, or granular time.*

According to Bachelard [*skill must*] 'keep the fundamental hierarchy of many movements. It is kaleidoscopic. It is strictly quantitative'.<sup>570</sup> What is the distinction that shifts what looks like randomness towards being *method*? Creating practice is *educating the psyche* to be *skilful*: via *disciplined curiosity, attention, experimentation, noticing, iteration and reflection.*

## Reflection

*Reflect: what is happening inwardly, outwardly? Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.*

What happened? What did I See?

*Iterate: What do you want to send into the world? What happens (or doesn't) when you do?*

Husserl states:

The connection (itself eidetic) which holds between an individual object and its essence, and which is such that to each individual object a state of essential being belongs as its essence, just as conversely to each essence there corresponds a series of possible individuals as its factual instantings (*Vereinzelungen*), is the ground for a corresponding reciprocal relationship between sciences of fact and sciences of essence. These are *pure sciences of essential being* such as pure logic, pure time-theory, space-theory, theory of movement etc.<sup>571</sup>

The disjuncture between the *sciences of fact* and the *sciences of essences* creates the necessary turbulence for those patterns so essential for the *Action-Phenomenologist* to emerge. My photograph, *Untitled (Horse). Long Mynd, 2020*, illustrates the point. It is an image made on the edge of available (to me at the time) process, the edge of what constitutes a 'good' photograph: it is dark, a bit under exposed, shaky, the composition odd, to say the least, subject indistinct. Within the *sciences of fact* paradigm as to what constitutes a *good* photograph it is, again, one for the bin, and yet...Why do I include it? I took it on a walk just a couple of days ago.<sup>572</sup> I could have given myself an easier ride choosing a safe (in conventional terms) picture that is more factual. And yet: What was *happening* inwardly, outwardly? What *happened*?

What did I see? I was connecting to *essence of horse*: the image is *relational, indeterminate, granular*.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> Bachelard, G. 2000; 73.

<sup>570</sup> Bachelard, G. 2000; 73.

<sup>571</sup> Husserl, E. 2012; 18 emphasis in original.

<sup>572</sup> October 2020.

<sup>573</sup> Rovelli, C. 2017b; 91-121.





Untitled (Horse). Long Mynd, 2020.

This image is not descriptive (or barely), but rather points towards what Bachelard calls: '*Our sense of duty to seek higher, rare and pure rhythms of mental life is therefore reinforced*'.<sup>574</sup> <sup>575</sup> Looking at the passing horse in the dusk is primally evocative: attunement by making images is even more so. The chimeric, visually illusive, elusive horse stimulates other senses: a spiritual adumbration. Attuning to *underlying rhythms of the barely visible* works as a practice of wellbeing. Therapies may be outgrown: working with essences, with phenomena less so. Moran writes of Husserl's elaborations of his own work:

[as a] pure eidetic science, a 'science of essences' which would also provide the grounding for all scientific knowledge, and would finally, in Husserl's mature vision, become co-extensive with philosophy itself, phenomenological philosophy as such. *Everything which appears to consciousness could be studied by phenomenology.*<sup>576</sup>

The image of the horse is an image of the essential: it appears to our consciousness as more than a horse, though we can barely make out what it is due to the paucity of data in the image. Impoverished we make amends, we pay deeper attention: invited, forced even, to abandon linear thought. Bachelard writes:

The voyage into distant worlds of the imaginary truly conducts a dynamic psyche once if it takes the shape of a voyage into the land of the infinite. In the realm of the imagination, every immanence takes on transcendence. *The very law of poetic expression is to go beyond thought.*<sup>577</sup>

My own states, of altered consciousness, of *reverie* when making the image read across to viewers: inviting them to participate in my state of being (consciousness) when making the picture; a state beyond thought; a state of transcendence. Bachelard writes:

If, in our reveries soft light and joyful motion really produce blue motion, a blue wing, a blue bird; then conversely something somber and heavy will cluster around images of night birds [...].

For a well-dynamised aerial imagination, everything that rises becomes awakened and evolved into being. Conversely, everything that falls is dispersed into empty darkness and becomes part of the void. *Valorisation determines the nature of being.* This being one of the great principles of the Imaginary.<sup>578</sup>

During the period of my Alder Altar ritual, I seemed to develop a *spiritual lucidity* which remains with me. *The Daily Flowers* and *The Trees* writings and *The Bled Travelogue* consolidated this.

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<sup>574</sup> Bachelard, G. 2000; 94.

<sup>575</sup> The overlap between worlds—phenomenology and quantum mechanics—shows up in the psychology of perception and imagination. The discipline of *Action-Phenomenology* emerged for me partly in response to frustration with therapies of a conventional psychotherapeutic nature (whilst at the same time I fully acknowledge the benefits that I have derived from these). Frustration spawned by two experiences: firstly that in my experience very few psychotherapeutic therapies get much below the surface (thereby missing a trick); and, in finding for myself that more aesthetic, and arguably more profound, remedies are available when attuning to the phenomenal worlds.

<sup>576</sup> Moran, D. 2000; 124 emphasis mine.

<sup>577</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014b; 79.

<sup>578</sup> Bachelard, G. 2014b; 74 emphasis in original.

The *Via Arbora* as practice subsequently developed into the nascent, blended, theory and method which I term *Action-Phenomenology*.<sup>579</sup> This *spiritual lucidity* enables me to work with the perceived (*seen*) and to engage with more intrinsic energies of the dreamed (*imaginal*). Sensitised, I noticed that a reciprocal exchange of energies is involved: resonance; reverberation: '*This body of light does not come from an exterior body. It is born at the very centre of our dreaming imagination*'.<sup>580</sup> In *Action-Phenomenology* the external real is subsumed, amplified, re-energised: as *essences, atmospheres*.

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<sup>579</sup> I am now of the view that *Action-Phenomenology* is as least as much a field—a framing—as it is a method, a practice or a theory.

<sup>580</sup> Bachelard, G. 2011; 119.



Untitled (dream-horse). Long Mynd, 2020.

## Meditation (4): *After-worlds*

If an artist were to admit that he was uncertain as to what part of the content of his work answered to life and what part to art, and was perhaps even uncertain as to precisely where the boundary between them lay, *we would probably consider him incompetent.*<sup>581</sup>

Just as one cannot *fly into flying*, it is not possible to *photograph into photographing*; thought and preparation are required, initially. Making a photograph is to insert a discontinuity into a flow. Or, as discussed, apparent flow. (In this *photographic* instance, flow of time being a construction that allows us to turn up on time, and helps us attend to other, earthly, matters.) As Bachelard writes: '*Time endures only through invention.*'<sup>582</sup> Switching between modes of knowing and expressing has been a constant, often draining, challenge for me throughout the writing of this dissertation. I have endeavoured to offer the necessary academic voice for the academy—sometimes, often, against my better judgement, in order to 'fit the bill'—to write something that looks, feels and smells like a standard doctoral output, whatever that is. *The Post-Conventional* has hovered around, occasionally been indulged in. But rarely, I feel, have I managed to hit the sweet spot of a conjoined *Atelier* and *Academy*. Husserl's experience is resonant of my experience of tensions in the examination process:

And perhaps some of the fault lies with me. I was handicapped by the inner conviction that he, having become firmly entrenched in his way of looking at things, and having established a firm system of concepts and arguments, was no longer flexible enough to be able to understand the necessity of the changes in his basic intuitions which had been so compelling to me.<sup>583</sup>

I am given to wonder what it takes to be *considered competent* in this arena? Often in my method I have played at, sometimes indulged in, *incompetence*. Who could say that the image on the preceding page is one of *competence*, or that it even alludes to *competence of process*? It is a quality of experimentation that such works as I make, hang on the edge of failure. Yet in doing so, I aver that deeper layers of knowing are indicated—modes of questioning. Lescure writes of Bachelard:

'A metaphysician he was, no doubt; and his work is indeed a metaphysics of being, but one that paves the way to living research, more than to knowledge per se—to a mode of questioning more than to an answer. It retains the necessary pinch of possibility within the coherence of rational thought, so that it *may not be enclosed within a scholarly definition where the clearest reason at times lets itself be undone.*'<sup>584</sup>

Admittedly, I have often *escaped* the prevalent wisdoms of *scholarly definition*. Perhaps it boils down to whether imagination can be knowledge and images new ways of knowing? *Quality* being, as we have seen, difficult to define. *Quality of knowing*, however, might be different, imaginal perhaps?

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<sup>581</sup> Szarkowski, J. in Eggleston, W. 2002; 5 emphasis mine.

<sup>582</sup> Bachelard, G. 2013; 49.

<sup>583</sup> Husserl, E. in Goldsmith, J. & Laks, B. 2020.

<sup>584</sup> Lescure, J. in Bachelard, G. 2013; 65 emphasis mine.

Rovelli writes of the work of Roger Penrose: '*But science, even the best science, can also originate this way — from the heartfelt rejection of a future that is too boring to countenance [and that] the best ideas can be, and indeed often have been, the fruit of wholly irrational intuitions, almost of a vague empathy of the nature of things.*'<sup>585</sup>

What making this work has given me, even, especially, the extra work in response to examiner feedback, is a renewed sense of being: a sentience that is confident to make *bad* photographs, to experiment with writing, and with epistemological paradigms, and yet *still* be happy to claim that part of the *knowing* is the *heartfelt rejection of a future too boring to countenance*.

I write this in grim weeks: of the second wave of the Covid pandemic; of governmental and societal dysfunction; of deep ecological crises. And yet I allow myself—even within the urban dystopias that enfold around my life as a truck driver in the industrialised food chain—to be arrested, by datum points of beauty that hold within them qualities of an epiphany.

Perhaps my quest has not been to dissolve the space between *The Academy* and *The Atelier* after all?

Rather—in the instant—to resolve the tensions between the *rational* and the *intuitive*?

The light doesn't care, or disappear, it keeps on moving, somewhere.

But in that instant—when I resonate with a flower, or a road, or a sky—the light and me, and whatever is pulling me are one: '*a reality confined to the instant and suspended between two voids.*'<sup>586</sup>

This is my practice, my competence.

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<sup>585</sup> Rovelli 2020; 162-163.

<sup>586</sup> Bachelard, G. 2013; 6.



Untitled (wave cloud). Long Mynd, 2020.

## Epilogue: *when we cease to understand*

*Reflect: what is happening inwardly, outwardly? Pause: observe, listen, assimilate.*

What happened? What did I See?

*Iterate: What do you want to send into the world? What happens (or doesn't) when you do?*

Last week I took a photo of a lenticular cloud from underneath. You can't see its lens shape.

Imagine it anyway, from above: as though we're in a sailplane, which we could be. Maybe at 10,000 feet or so, in smooth lift, soaring in the sunshine; though it is already dusk on the purple ground. Yesterday I went flying, not in a sailplane. I will be flying again tomorrow. I had nearly forgotten the joy, buried for nearly 2 years in thesis submission; which is kind of missing the point.

*May I take you flying with me?*

Gaston says that I may, but that:<sup>587</sup>

'he who would learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance: one cannot *fly* into *flying*.'<sup>588</sup>

Gaston also says:

For the *material imagination*, flight is not a technique to be discovered, it is a matter to be transmuted. It is the fundamental basis for the transmutation of all values. Our *terrestrial* being must become *aerial*. Then it will make the whole earth *light*. Our own earth, within us, will be 'the light one'.<sup>589</sup>

*I am flying.*

*I am flying with you.*

*I am flying with you: We are flying.*

*Isn't that phenomenal?*

*Isn't that a phenomenal act?*

As our *terrestrial* beings become *aerial*, in our *material imaginations* we become *Light*.

Becoming *Light*, we *unfold* as *Action-Phenomenologists*.

*This is Action-Phenomenology.*

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<sup>587</sup> *Action-Phenomenology* is playful, especially with convention.

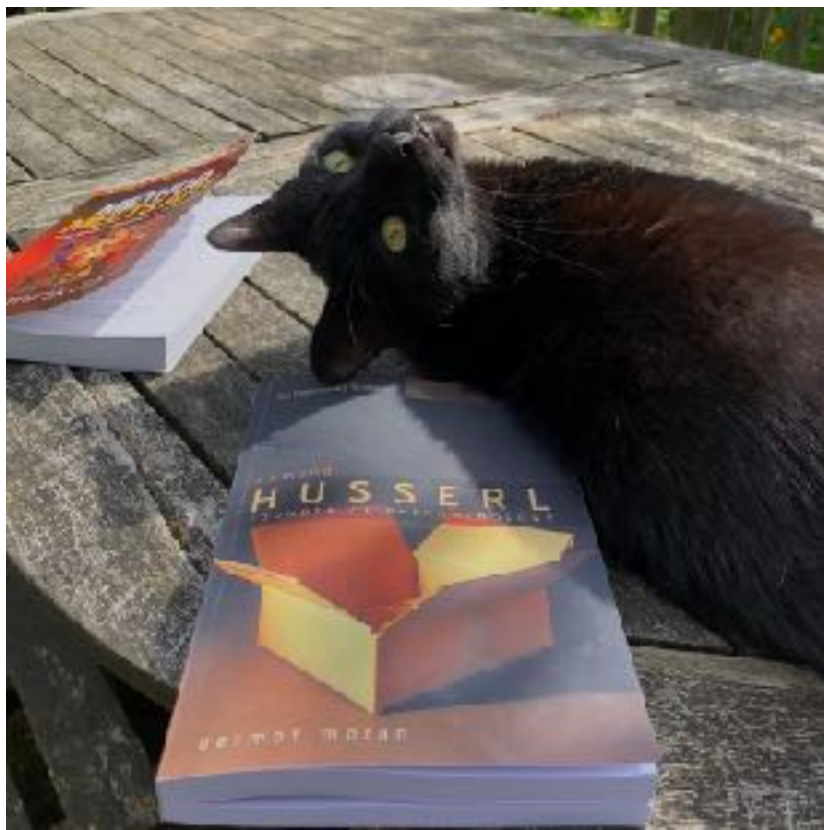
<sup>588</sup> Bachelard, G. 2011; 143.

<sup>589</sup> Bachelard, G. 2011; 142.

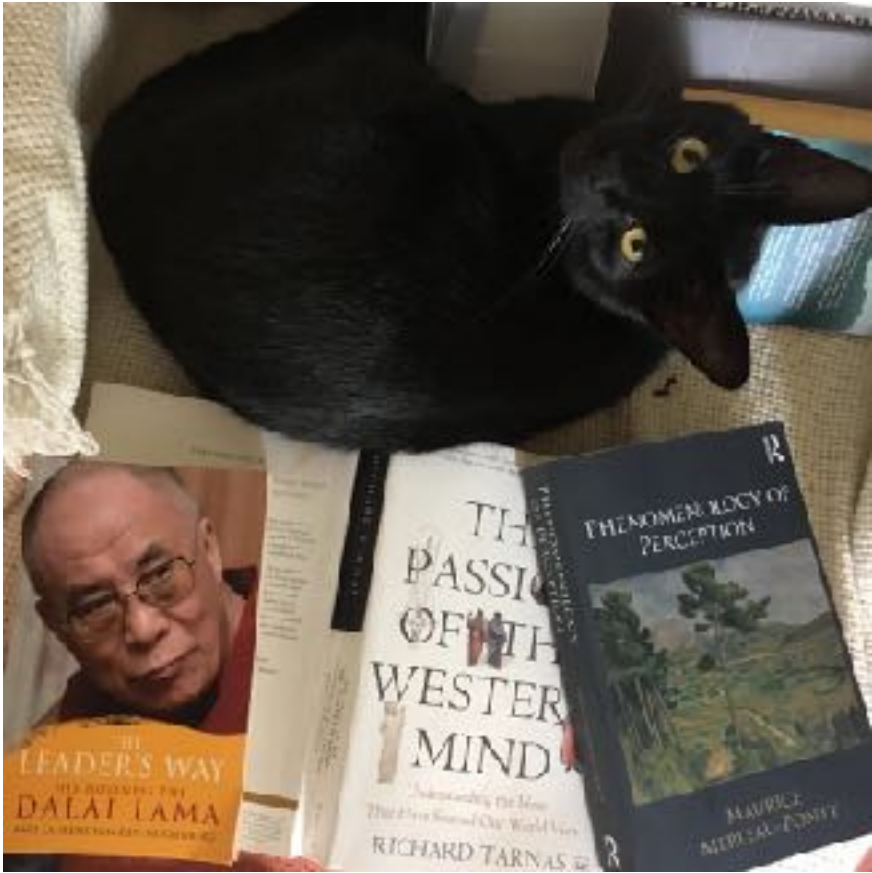




Untitled (Covid-scape). Wolverhampton, 2020.



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<sup>590</sup> \*\* Denotes additional entry following further feedback from examiners.

<sup>591</sup> \* Denotes additional entry since viva.

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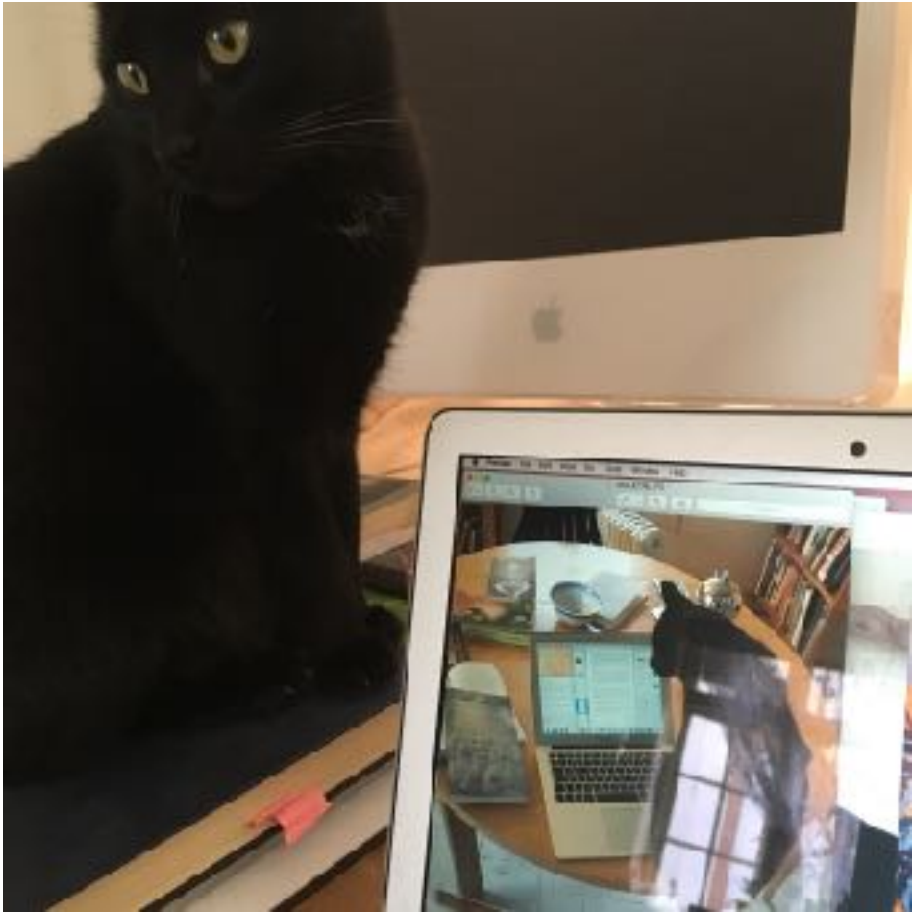
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**Appendices**



## Appendix 1. *Poems*

### The Rapper

'You are perfect the way you are and there is always room for improvement.' Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

In our tale now  
I take a bow,  
relieved from the ships prow  
and into the heart of the matter  
meet the rapper:  
never happier.

Though the Captain  
sacked me  
never been more relaxed me  
could have hit him with an axe, he  
ducked: I'm fucked.

So I'm here as your interlocutor  
prosecutor,  
happy insectocutor  
ready to get into your computers;  
ignoring those refuters  
telling stories  
not working for Reuters:  
no William Tell  
but hell

I need to  
Tell of *The Buffoon*  
*The Charlatan, The Guard* and  
gold doubloons  
that we came to rely upon  
when sailing in *Leviathan*:  
not whaling  
but pirating,  
a fighting  
psychic prison ship:  
strange relationship

I worked a good while at  
keeping flat  
keeping it all under my hat  
ignoring those twats.  
But in the end it go to much for me  
now I'm free  
and happy.

Had to deal with *The Buffoon*  
real chimp, like  
a baboon, no room  
soon, for his ego  
in his room:  
perhaps I'm his doom?

Made also life hard  
for a git called *The Guard-*  
a bit of an idiot  
a real twit but  
instead of lying:  
in my dreams he's dying.

Then we come to *Captain Charlatan*  
needs taking off by men  
in white coats; putting in  
a padded van  
the way he ran-  
that educational sweat  
box  
like a fox: Killing,  
and in the killings thrilling,  
all while billing  
the poor:  
then showing them the door.

And what of dudes at HR?  
Really far  
from what all the books in this hood  
say they should  
do with their good  
do-gooder hearts.  
Instead they stand  
on the sidelines wringing hands:  
Perhaps go off, form a band?

Last but one we come to *The Overseer*  
they tell me he's in a closet:  
but lost his deposit-  
really mean:  
taking out his repressions,  
in appraisal sessions.

Making lies  
-should be selling fries-  
too fat for ties  
he wears young clothes  
too young for those bones:  
Bright, but not intelligent  
one bent on destruction  
not construction.  
Always late for meetings  
giving beatings  
makes a mess  
causes stress  
bless  
NO! CURSE:  
you're the worst.

And last we come to me  
pilot, biker, snapper: now rapper  
and see-er  
into the heart  
of the matter:  
Into what comes from  
this land of hatters  
lives in tatters:  
not words that flatter:  
I keep dreaming of the sea  
and running away - me  
and the HR lady  
Stockholm syndrome? May-be.  
Free now we  
make our own ways  
I reflect on the past days  
and one day in the future  
when I may.....



## Performance Review

'He's lazy, and stupid.' Dr G, and Professor B, 2008

'He's neither lazy, nor stupid - he's doing an MBA and if you pair aren't careful the university will end up in court.' JG, Principle Lecturer, 2008.

Hey you -  
with queer fear-  
remember the days  
hearing when you  
hewed a scabby performance  
review, from the maze  
of bureau-speak  
generated by those  
HR freaks (undisclosed)

Hey, truth  
directorate -  
Deniable Ops 3 (version 2.8 onwards)  
-telling your version, a blind immersion  
in the unholy creaks  
oppressing the meek  
in a bleak, soul-free  
and simple: character assassination.

Hey, you fucker  
with your sweaty  
bald head and arse puckering  
through this thread of fiction  
in your tremulous diction,  
you squirming little twerp  
-small warped factional  
part, of a fractured person.

Hey, HR  
wankers, you lot  
should have been bankers  
for all the good you do  
when helping to shoot  
twats like this fucker  
to where they belong:  
in the gutter.

Hey, target  
now you'd best forget  
this snivelling toad  
along with his loads  
of coded regrets and  
life disappointments,  
and losing his ointment:  
on low-challenge road.

Hey, employer  
wakey-wakey, off the beer  
and the cooking sherry.  
Time to get real, to stop  
making merry; to use your experience  
take responsibility  
make a difference:  
stop thinking pounds and pence.

Now, then  
Leviathan society, do you want  
a variety of creative workers?  
Or a bunch of jobs worth shirkers?  
Like this firkin idiot yob,  
tryin to end a career, splot:  
While the government gazes  
firmly at the crazy paving:  
  
and the 'management' they install.

While held  
in the thrall, of the appalling  
man with no clothes,  
and a red shiny nose.  
The future is quite hairy:  
best pray to the tooth fairy-  
for all the damn good  
that will happen in this nation:

When a performance review  
becomes pure character assassination.

for AW, (and JS and KA) PS 18.06.14

## The Buffoon

'He's the biggest mistake we ever made.' Professor 'K', Pro Vice-Chancellor

*'I went to Oxford you know'*  
Yes, you already said Dean, can we...?  
*'Les is so good you know'*  
Oh really? REALLY?  
I first met your fawning  
intemperate style  
one fine October morning  
it had been a while  
since I found myself ever  
in quite such a place  
quaffing your water  
and minding my place,

*'I went to Oxford you know'*  
yes, I think you already...  
your clothes a bit foolish  
your face is quite red.  
I'd already been warned  
by your bumbling guile  
your ridiculous jackets  
and hair in a pile.  
And just now I'm starting to worry  
and wonder and fluster a bit -  
is it true what they say after all  
- you're a bit of a twit?

*'I went to Oxford you know'*  
Yes, I think you...  
So it was you who sent my mate  
lets call him Dave  
off to Bangkok  
for a bit of a rave  
to sell dodgy courses  
to poor third-world folk.  
And on the way back  
to drop by reception  
and pick up a package  
I trust no deception?

A package of stuff  
though we'll never know  
whether it was full of  
weed, or money, or blow.  
It went into Dave's pack  
whilst on his way home  
and during a stopover  
your cover was blown  
cos Dave's pack was raided  
by people unknown.  
The 'money'  
went missing: your cover blown.

*'I went to Oxford you know.'*  
Yes Dean, I think...  
You gave us a lecture  
on strategy  
now that was a laugh.  
I was doing an MBA  
and expected a graph  
or something that showed  
even something small -  
that you knew of what you were speaking  
to that mighty hall.  
But ho no instead  
you mounted a high horse  
and goaded and patronised  
and gave quite an insight  
-there for all to see-  
that if you knew fuck all  
twasn't about strategy.

*'I went to Oxford you know.'*  
Yes Dean, I...  
You gave me a grilling  
when I'd had the gall to complain  
of bullying and harassment,  
so putting the blame  
back into my court  
again for all to see,  
and then a written warning -  
in spite of my plea.

*'I went to Oxford you know.'*

Yes D...

When I was down at clearing  
you came in the room  
waving your hands-  
to give us a boon??  
And strutting and stalking  
and talking bullshit  
I was given to wonder  
Is this bloke a git?  
but one of my colleagues,  
wiser than I,

Told me you were marked out:  
not quite so fly.

'Our biggest mistake'  
is not quite the thing  
that gives one to dance,  
- reputation enhanced -  
and thrill bounce and bobble  
and make the birds sing.  
So it's starting to seem  
that you're on the wobble  
not quite the dream..

*'I went to Oxford you know.'*

Yes...

So many years on  
You've cost a good mill  
and all of your followers  
are turning to jelly  
cos' you're not a leader  
though you've been on the telly.  
So now we all see  
as plain as the day  
that you're just an idiot  
- or so they say.

They also say worse  
which I can't repeat  
so I'll end my verse  
(though not quite replete).  
I'll finish by saying  
what every one thinks:

'Please quit your job  
before we're all seeing shrinks'  
Please bugger off now  
make a real contribution  
to Higher Education,  
and that institution:

Please jump off a bridge  
or under train:  
For OUR YOUNG ARE BLIGHTED UNDER YOUR REIGN.

PS 6.01.14

## **you're only supposed**

You're only supposed..  
is not a closed remark  
but one that lights a spark:  
in the dark of the nav lights  
as we fight our way  
out of the dark.

You're only supposed to..  
invites an input from  
someone who knows  
that through  
extra effort  
we find retorts  
and extra blows.

You're only supposed to blow..  
-yes, we know-  
but with out new tools  
we'd look bloody fools  
following ALL the rules;  
just for show.

You're only supposed to blow the..  
indicates a lack of fuss  
as we get back on the bus  
not seeming too non-plussed  
or dreaming that our mission  
could cause a spark, an ignition.

You're only supposed to blow the bloody..  
Do I look like one who wears a hoody?  
my boots are cracked and very muddy  
my life is hacked  
but if I should see  
you in the wet, you have my mac, free.

You're only supposed to blow the bloody doors..  
You're trying to make new rules, a cause  
if you are late then we could pause  
and they will wipe you over the floors-  
you'd prefer to be walking on the moors  
-not talking of us fools, of course.

You're only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!  
Is not the language of a toff  
but drop a match in my palm I might  
light a poem from its charcoal,  
and drop it through the letterbox of this hole  
then might, at last, being true to my soul:

Use these gelignite words,  
and break a mould.

PS 12.06.14



## PTSD

This poetical holding, which involves taking the poetic attitude out of the library and into the clinic, leads more deeply into the body and its pain than do measurements and univocal, purely physical interpretations. But it doesn't necessarily offer clarity. Clarity is not one of the gifts of poetry. On the other hand, poetry does provide depth, insight, wisdom, language, and music. We simply don't think about these qualities much when faced with illness.

From *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore (p. 162)

For a while I have  
thought to write of  
a long fight for me:  
that of a struggle, with PTSD.

Post, as in after  
but may be during, too  
with little laughter,  
most lightness taboo.

Trauma, as and drama  
without the good lines;  
the cure being harm-  
free, space and no fine.

Stress, as in diss  
with no obvious cause;  
the pain being to miss  
life: all on pause.

Disorder, as in drunk and  
without the good fun;  
of reeling and good feelings  
'bout the good team what won.

Flow, interrupted  
and all closeness too;  
intimacy disrupted:  
numb, in a zoo.

Cure, as in 'pro'  
is not at all real:  
I get on my bike,  
eating good meals.

After, as in math  
is not really clear -  
we just want to be normal, bathe  
and feel cheer.

On, as in going  
this wretched head curse:  
some days not knowing;  
some days, worse.

Shakes, as in hippy  
decline with the years:  
the triggers are dippy,  
illogical, fears.

Off, as in fuck  
this dormant malaise;  
one day with luck  
will be seen just as a phase.

Cause, as in fight-good  
Is now my propellent:  
microscope on the blood  
of 'leaders' repellent.

Winners, as in curse  
is now back to you:  
as you lie on the radio,  
I turn the air blue.

Lost, as in space,  
I write and I find,  
that words, bikes and planes,  
now sooth my mind.

Soon, as in back  
I'll stand at your door:  
posing big questions:  
while you sit  
and shit, on the floor.



a biro-ironic adaptation of truth:  
but no Iliad, lad.

Still, a fiction with function,  
formed for management consumption  
only the grey-white ceiling tiles  
witnessing his wiles:  
as the Grooming Room plies  
its trade in grey lies:

A guile-pile of floor tiles  
claggy with miles of mendacity  
of this ilk -plus the aroma of split milk-  
and biscuit crumbs:  
Seated, neat, cheap teflon trousers  
encasing K's bum, to capacity.

The Grooming Room windows  
keep out most of the din  
from below in the street  
as the pedestrian's feet  
fleet over the pavement:  
the faux civility of cavemen, within.

'There is no case against you'  
said K, one day, in a plaintive  
exclamation - while the plaintiff's  
relief is palpable - and out there  
in the Grooming Room's chair:  
K sweats - runs fingers through hair.

Then the bets were on me  
as we sweep into the lee  
of the Grooming Room's  
gleeful ambience  
and keeping balance: the faith  
and a confident gait

That I still belonged  
as we hit the final furlong  
and I lapped for the last time  
through those doors, crossed the line  
with a legal riposte  
to the Grooming Room's chicane.

And in the slow lane  
I became eased, left my fear  
as K, and the Overseer  
repaired to without, out of earshot  
for 25 minutes, and the Grooming Room's limits  
all now became clear, along with my lot:

HR don't have rooms  
one truth that's reliable;  
but when mounting an operation  
that they need to be deniable  
it's easier to fry their victims  
when they can't see the sky

Or anything much without:  
so abusers can prey on your doubts  
And remove any succour  
so if you really want to fuck em  
then when nobody's looking  
HR can do worse than hooking

The abused and the victims  
into the Grooming Room's walls;  
Grey-white ceilings, magnolia walls,  
brown floors. And then, while still able  
finish the abuse, and the abused  
on the grey laminate table.

After, when the abused are away  
or fleeing,  
before the room is next free  
it's easy for HR to stay:

pause,

reflect,

and wipe off any  
incriminating

extraneous

HR DNA.

## Wonga-Gongs: an ode to the miss-selling of student finance

The Vice Chancellors said:

'Come here my boy  
don't buy a new toy  
or get a proper job;  
forget the joy of  
being a lounge lizard , or slob-  
instead make a break  
learn to be on the take  
or write a new song  
what can possible go wrong  
if you sign up for  
a Uni-Wonga-Gong?'

'Come here you loonies  
and sing to our tune  
we'll flog you a place  
sign up for a our deal  
at our Uni (not ace):  
you pretend to study, and we  
give you the pretend degree  
of your longing:  
what could possibly go wrong  
with a Uni-Wonga-Gong?'

'Do you smell a rat?  
Why, now your name's in the hat?  
Oh what a shame  
you didn't predict that  
if your name isn't picked  
even though your boxes are ticked  
our conscience isn't pricked  
though your future is lame  
a lend-lease degree not worth the name-  
or the trouble  
(a good one costs at least double)  
so please, tell us what's wrong  
with our Wonga Gongs?'

5-10 years later

The former students said:

'We'll tell you what's wrong  
with our Wonga Gongs  
we signed up with a thrill  
and act of faith hope and will;  
we paid up front for your 'degree'  
with plenty of glee  
and incurred a great debt  
mortgaged our self respect  
coughed up our moola  
to play at your hoopla  
yet still have no prospects  
a detail you neglected to tell us  
for your Wonga-Gongs are worthless  
or worse.'

'So what should we do?  
Cos you did us wrong;  
you dismissed our misspellings  
and other educational wrongs;  
you weren't serious in telling  
that we'd have more chances when mis-selling  
your gongs with brief sideways glances  
and the nation is poorer  
and your baliffs are at our doors  
extracting Wonga from us poor.  
Tell you what we suggest  
if we're really so blessed:  
you put your kinder  
in these Wongaland bins.'

The former VC's said:

'Nothing is wrong  
now we've got our Wonga Gongs  
that was the plan of our song  
as we strung you lot along  
because you don't really belong  
in the cognoscenti throng;  
and our Wonga-Gongs were all free  
(if not for you then for me)  
from our knighthoods to CBE's.  
So we thank you Wonga hordes  
for our seats in the Lords.  
Though our Gongs are from Wonga  
we still think we belong  
because as ever you fools  
there are two kinds of song:  
those hymns of us, the blessed;  
and for you, the oppressed:

Twas ever thus  
(before you start to cuss)  
so we hold the power  
and you pay interest by the hour  
and ongoing subscription to our cause...

(PS The baliffs are just outside your door')

PS 4.08.14



### Shafted: a love song

'When we speak of an individual we speak of her presence. Presence is the way a person's individuality comes towards you. Presence is the soul texture of a person. When we speak of this presence in relation to a group of people, we refer to it as an atmosphere or ethos. The ethos of a work place is a very subtle group presence. It is difficult to describe or analyse an ethos; yet you immediately sense its power and effect. Where the ethos is positive, wonderful things can happen. It is a joy to come to work because the atmosphere comes out to meet you, and it is a happy atmosphere. It is caring, kind and creative.

From *Anam Cara*, by John O'Donohue

Hello,  
my name is H,  
and I give you fair warning  
that my mood is quite thorny:  
cos I've been shafted,  
from behind, this morning;  
-while not feeling horny.

I work  
for a club  
(mainly for love)  
and do my best,  
-taking very few rests-  
(and lots of crap from above)  
to do a great job:  
in spite of those pests.

My job  
is complex  
covers all sorts of bases;  
from cleaning the bogs-  
to ordering ball races:  
(Or should I say did,  
Cos I found my P45  
taped to one toilet lid).

This place  
is crackers  
driving me nuts:  
I was busting my knackers  
and then doing more:  
so they stuck a broom up my arse  
and had me cleaning the floor.

The work  
kept increasing  
in incremental amounts:  
then they added brain surgery,  
and doing accounts.

The fools  
kept on  
inserting a few tools  
and adding new roles;  
but my patience was waning,  
and anyway -  
I'd run out of holes.

But when  
it comes to grafting  
they'll do  
well to find better  
(perhaps a robot,  
with more holes-  
a real go getter?)

So with  
a brush up me arse  
and implements in every orifice;  
I shouted 'enough'  
I'm quitting this office.

'We didn't  
expect that'  
said my noble employers.  
'How sad', I said  
and contacted my lawyers.

I loved  
my job, and  
coming to work  
but could take no more  
of dealing with these berks.

And so  
now I'm off,  
I'm taking a hike;  
I'm cashing my payoff,  
and getting on my bike.

One thing  
is for sure  
at the end of this tale  
to round of this story  
with which I regale:

Although I've  
been shafted  
-and taken from behind-  
you really need to know  
just what's on my mind:

I may not  
have been perfect  
but I did my best  
and most other humans  
would have done a lot less:

So I'll  
be making more money  
for another firm (a clue),  
and enjoying my life  
while they all squirm;  
and lose.

Because you  
see that's the problem  
with the old place:  
not shortage of free space  
in staff holes and orifices;  
but a lack of common sense,  
and deft grace:

emanating  
from 'head office'.

for HT (and HAC)

PS 17.07.14

## Buried light

I had an image  
as we gathered  
tonight,  
in a liminal space  
of the burial of light.

In the past  
I have buried  
love  
and bad thoughts  
in a liminal space,  
perhaps more than I ought.

Invoking the light  
can be hard,  
a risk:  
but burying it no  
answer - to your love,  
with a fist.

I had an image  
This morning  
of you in the  
dawn:  
as we buried the light  
last night  
on the lawn.

You buried light  
too, not staying bright;  
helping me  
(though, not as  
much as  
you might).

Do you bury light  
now, as we journey  
away?  
Or do you think  
like me,  
in a different way?

Yesterday my light  
was unburied  
exhumed  
(or renewed):  
Will I  
bury it again, for another  
like you?

When our light hurts  
us, by burning too  
bright:  
Then why do we bury it,  
more than we might?

Last night we gathered  
to bury the  
light:  
but burying sadness  
doesn't help our plight.

Burying light now  
means more than  
it used:  
but to carry on burying  
is a form of abuse.

Last night we  
met up for  
one  
final rite: to gather  
at dusk, and bury our light.

Tomorrow, is a  
new day with  
hope  
(or come what might):

Will we still meet  
in the gloaming  
to bury  
our light?

Then I lost my voice...

We drew noises;  
We wrote;  
We saw each other,  
deeply:  
My soul wrote to yours  
a poem, on *seeing* you.  
Then I lost my voice...  
Again.

Against the refrain  
of your gentle questioning  
'I can't speak,  
I can't talk about it',  
I said, as you led me,  
gently, back to the world.

There was I,  
a tumbling, toppling  
gyro: A Gyre falcon  
without control  
of its wings.

There were you,  
sitting, composed;  
inquisitive (with a little concern)  
'*Not even in this space?*'  
you said.

We left that space  
in a shake of hands-  
while the outcome of the  
waving of the wand  
of the Priestess  
said:

'Come to the ritual  
this evening,  
at dusk:  
We will walk the maze;  
We will face the water-gods:  
For it is of that which we are made'.

We went to to the ritual,  
separately, and walked the maze,  
with the briefest touch,  
And later we stood,  
aligned, in the circle  
of Scots pines:

When the light  
was lit upon the ground;  
and the sounds: of the  
sky; and the chant;  
and the wheel of the  
kites:

*And the rites  
were read, as the ground  
around the gentle  
light between us said:  
'come, this is a  
different world now.'*

*So, the ground could speak,  
and the kites could shriek,  
and the candle sputter;  
and me? I  
couldn't utter a word  
across the space between us:*

*I had lost my voice.*

Then, in the night  
I wrote a poem: *Buried Light*.  
Later  
You came, and said:  
'Do you still want to talk about  
it, at coffee time?'

Relieved, I said 'yes'  
but felt both dumb,  
and numb.

I did not trust my voice,  
but now that another  
Poem had  
visited me, just before dawn:  
My confidence in the one  
drawn earlier  
began to return.

You sat, your gaze  
quizzical, with slight concern  
said (un-spokenly, quietly):

*'Whatever is,  
is alright'  
'Whatever is,  
is alright...'*

Then the words  
began to alight on my  
tongue, (that often wrong organ  
that lives  
in the hole in the  
front of my head):

'That writing we did'  
I said, (as my brain and insides  
fried themselves  
in those ashes of the  
ritual space, in the trees).

'That writing we did..  
it came out... as a love poem'  
.....  
'Cool', you said, with a calm  
mischievous smile;  
while all the time my head  
is fleeing, or wanting too:

I read out  
to you, my poem  
'When I see you'  
(now I remember little  
of your graceful  
response). Instead



I read your repose

which said:

*'I'm here',*

*'Don't worry'*

*'Don't lose your*

*voice, over me..'*

Later

I read my poem

*Burying Light*

out to the whole room,

as your dipped head

Bled sunlight:

And the silence

afterwards

Boomed.

Then,

your last *'Hello'*

and your *'Thank you'*

became my

*'Hello-Good bye',*

and my

*'Thank you'-*

as I touched your shoulder,

lightly;

and I turned

and left you.

Off -

on a new quest:

to re-find my lost voice...

PS 18.07.15

Lingen

## Boundary layer

I was flying along  
Low  
On a wing (and a prayer)  
The whole world below  
Seemingly unfair  
Then, with a glance I found  
Myself,  
I was caught in your stare:  
A molecule, caught,  
In your boundary layer.

The boundary layer  
Is a funny old thing  
The layer of air  
That sticks to a wing  
Sometimes it's laminar  
(goes with the flow)  
Sometimes it's turbulent  
(more above than below)  
But this molecule this time  
Was caught by your stare:  
A molecule caught,  
In your boundary layer.

Your boundary layer  
Seems quite smooth  
While mine is rough  
Which could be an illusion  
I accept sure enough.  
Whatever the wing slows  
It's angle increases  
From your boundary layer  
There seems no release  
But one thing I think  
As we're approaching  
The stall:  
in your boundary layer  
This molecule could fall.

The wing comes into  
Land,  
with something  
In hand, (though not enough  
Height for a whole marching band)  
When us molecules separated  
To go round the wing  
(No need to worry, it's an aeronautical  
thing),

This molecule breathed  
Such a sigh of relief  
It's journey was shorter  
(having gone underneath)  
However my relief was unfounded  
As your molecule went faster  
The whole long way round  
So, as we're approaching the ground

And the wing slows right down:  
I still find myself  
Caught,  
In your boundary layer.

PS 19.07.15

## Art-Full Knowing

I came to a meeting  
at a college of art  
there were plenty of greetings  
(and boring farts)  
on the agenda were budgets  
(plus an ego or two)  
so I did some life drawing:  
like you would in a zoo.

The sandwiches were curly  
and the time warp was bent  
but for me as an artist  
this was heaven sent;  
I thought: I'll do some drawing  
just to pass the time-  
and so I made some pictures  
not thinking it a crime.

I drew the H.O.D  
plus his best mates  
and then drew all those  
who just pitched up late  
and then drew the teapot  
plus some piles of paper,  
thinking: if I get in the details-  
the egos can come later'.

Then I drew the jokers  
and some stuff that was near  
and had another cuppa  
(just wishing it was beer).  
And sharpened my 9B pencil  
getting into to it now:  
started playing with characters,  
and their furrowed brows.

And I did another drawing  
- playing the fool -  
and was promptly suspended  
for breaking the rules:  
'no drawing in meetings  
at this institution,  
we need to hold discipline,  
not aid revolution'.

The registered post came,  
from some bod in HR  
who's common sense  
was at home, preserved, in a jar.  
It said: 'you're going to be sacked  
unless you are able  
to justify drawing,  
at this art school's tables'.

I consulted the rule book  
went through line by line  
of drawing there was nothing  
to merit a fine,  
or even a bollocking,  
or chat with the boss:  
the art school allows drawing:  
'blimey, they've lost.'

So now when in meetings  
I always get out my pen  
to look like I'm paying attention  
to egos, and then  
I start doing what they need to  
(but don't really do lots):

I put pencil  
to paper  
and start joining  
the dots...

## Reaching

Reaching  
Out to you  
Is one of those things  
I do, without  
Knowing why,  
Or who, or what  
The reaching does?

Reaching  
Toward the flight  
Traces the journey  
My soul makes-  
Moving by  
And through soul  
Spaces, while  
Ground, water, light  
And sky  
Merge, at the margins:  
Evoking 'why?'

Reaching  
Implies a result too.  
Yet who would  
Find this of  
The reaching  
That we do  
Between the layers  
Of who we are,  
And who we are  
Becoming in this new  
World, beneath  
The sky:

Where love,  
And hope,  
Are not so easily  
Denied?

**Direct-Debit Debbie (from Tenbury Wells) part 1: a love song**

You came to me in springtime  
when there was flowering  
of Daffodils, Forsythia, Tulips  
and Bluebells.

Saying to me: you needed help  
(it was clear you were unwell)  
*'You've come to the right place'*  
I said (because money has a smell)  
*'I'm Direct-Debit Debbie, (from Tenbury Wells)'*

You told me a story,  
of your chap: one from hell;  
A waster; a scoundrel; a loser  
And, oh well; your folks didn't like him;  
Your cat wouldn't tell.

I said (because money has a smell)  
*'I'll sort it, strike fear in him,  
boot him out, have him gone:  
I'm Direct-Debit Debbie:  
he's not the one.'*

*'Don't bother with counselling  
of therapy, or other kinds of help;  
don't both talking to him, or the cat,  
at least not till he's gone to hell...'*

*'Oh, and if you could give me your bank details  
it would be just as well:  
not for nothing am I called  
Direct-Debit Debbie, (of Tenbury Wells)'*

You may have depression, anxiety  
be on chemicals, but with my plan  
in place —'tis beyond ecumenical—  
I'll find a variety of ploys schemes and ruses  
To make HIS lawyers blow all their fuses.

*'Oh, and if you could give me your bank details  
it would be just as well:  
not for nothing am I called  
Direct-Debit Debbie, (of Tenbury Wells)'*

*'He has PTSD you say,  
that's good we can confuse him:  
-we won't do mediation, or healing-  
we'll give him a good bruising,  
threaten him with court then,  
he'll be unwell',  
said Direct-Debit Debbie, (from Tenbury Wells).*

*I know you're not well either,  
and stress keeps you unwell:  
I'll up the dose of procedures  
threats, ultimatums and spells:  
Depleted uranium has nothing on me  
when it comes to shells,  
-and dispensing them freely-  
(*'Whats that? 'Mental health'?*)  
Says the lawyer from hell:  
Direct-Debit Debbie, (from Tenbury Wells).*

*No matter that he supports you,  
that he loves you freely,  
no matter that you both love each other  
-it's not part of my deal-  
No matter about your home (to me its just property)*

*No matter about Yosser  
(get another from the cattery)  
No matter about your garden,  
Or the stream, or planting trees;*

*No matter about health,  
or creating healing:  
My specialities: money-disease;  
fear; and stealth, will have him reeling.*

(cont...)



*'Oh, and if you could give me your bank details  
it would be just as well:  
not for nothing am I called  
Direct-Debit Debbie, (of Tenbury Wells)'*

Please don't speak to him either  
or return his calls:  
Get him to put stuff in writing  
(so we can have his balls),

Please don't be nice to him  
or send him mixed messages:  
cover your love;  
cook you own sausages.

Should you need any support  
help, coaching or sentiments  
be sure I'll always be here for you  
(250 guineas per hour, plus disbursements)

*'Oh, and if you could give me your bank details  
it would be just as well:  
not for nothing am I called  
Direct Debit Debbie, (of Tenbury Wells)'*

When we're all done  
And the bills are all paid;  
We've given all the grief  
He's homeless,  
And your folks day is made;  
You'll cancel the DD  
I'll be on my way  
Your home will be history  
-So will he be, glad to say-

I'll be gone,  
a bad memory—just a hole  
in your money: cos'  
once off the payroll,  
see I'm done;  
(no I'm not being funny)

(cont...)

You may be sad:  
You'll have lost two best friends:  
The one you paid in guineas  
(to God knows what ends)

Plus that ole bugger who stuck with  
you, throughout thick and thin:  
lose, or win;  
the times good, the bad;  
the 'around the bend'

The question is:  
When it comes to the reckoning;  
-that time when the bell tolls-

Will it be your lost matey who's shafted you...

... or Direct Debit Debbie,  
(from Tenbury Wells)...?

For SB, and DDD  
29 March, 2017

**Direct Debit Debbie (from Tenbury Wells) part 2: A requiem for a Toxic Lawyer's client**

*Bong.*

*Bong.*

*Bong.*

It was springtime a year ago;  
the weather was fine  
since then I've taken your money;  
Though you've committed no crime.

If you don't see a purpose  
to my hefty fees;  
The answer is simple:  
I want World War Three.

He offered what you ask for  
and then offered more  
(though he wouldn't throw the cat in)  
We've wiped the floor.

*But tell him we're not playing  
That we don't want peace  
Because I'm making hay here  
(Just think of my fees).*

He's offered to talk  
He's offered to pay  
He's offered to help you  
get well come what may.

He's offered to buy you out  
He's offered to sell  
He's offered to renovate  
(And I know you're unwell)

*But tell him we're not playing  
That we don't want peace:  
Because I'm making hay here  
(Just think of my fees).*

He's created new healing  
A whole different way  
Of being and feeling  
Of spending your days

He's given you art  
and poetry and love  
He's given support,  
But please god above:

*Just tell him we're not playing  
That we don't want peace:  
Because I'm making hay here  
(Just think of my fees).*

You see I have a mission  
One that can't possibly go wrong  
And to which I alluded  
In my earlier song:

Your folks want him out  
They want him gone  
And as they're my sponsors  
They can do no wrong:

*So tell him we're not playing  
That we don't want peace:  
Because I'm making hay here  
(Just think of my fees).*

You know this stinks;  
And doesn't sit well-  
It keeps you awake  
Makes you more unwell;

That the ends are all wrong  
losing your cat; and  
your shirt and your home-  
Oh, and him his throng.

*But please tell him we're not playing  
That we don't want peace:  
Because I'm making hay here  
(Just think of my fees).*

My angle is unclear too  
Apart from the grind  
Because I've my own issues  
(I think that you'll find)

A hidden agenda  
That underpins my spells  
Due to my own situation  
Down in Tenbury Wells

*So tell him we're not playing  
That we don't want peace:  
Because I'm making hay here  
(Just think of my fees).*

I'm Debbie Direct  
A new kind of concept  
A bonfire of vanities  
That keep me erect:

I charge for making wars  
(When there could be peace)  
Then add VAT and disbursements  
(to keep my mind at ease)

*So tell him we're not playing  
That we don't want peace:  
Because I'm making hay here  
(Just think of my fees).*

I charge for creating shit  
Plus more for the clean-up;  
I charge for each stamp and phone-call  
- even for my frosty demeanour.

I charge for the misery  
I charge for my time  
I charge for the issues  
(Though they're mostly mine)

I give advice that's not wanted  
Or even particularly wise:  
Because more than anything,  
I need to stoke those fires.

*So tell him we're not playing  
That we don't want peace:  
Because I'm making hay here  
(Just think of my fees).*

I may be fucking your life  
So that I can repair mine:  
And go on a world cruise  
(leaving you behind)

While sailing down under  
To find that happiness I seek  
At least I can think of jobs done;  
Of oppressing the meek;

The clients I've fucked over  
(along with their buddies)  
Proving at least: that  
Not all criminals wear hoodies.

Because if there's one place  
I'd like to take you  
(One with no retreat)  
The business-model-destination

That all others beats:  
A lovely earthly paradise  
Particularly chic  
And in demand

(Reserved for all my best clients  
Who pay for the DD Brand):

*My name's Direct-Debit-Debbie:  
my brand is my game  
The exclusive destination  
Reflects my brand name*

*At least in this one aspect  
It is particularly unique:*

*(I'll always lead you,  
and need you,*

*And love you)*

*And then I'll leave you:*

*Well*

*Up*

*Shit*

*Creek.*

PS 28.5.17

*For SB and DDD*

**Direct-Debit Debbie (from Tenbury Wells) part 3: Did you ever...? A letter to a blind watch-mender.**

Dear Debbie,

Did you ever try to fix something  
with inappropriate tools:  
Say like making a cake out of marmite  
(Instead of raspberry fool)?

Did you ever wear the wrong clothes  
or just do the wrong job  
and end up in the wrong situation  
Feeling a bit of a nob?

*Did you ever try and fix a watch  
With your baseball bat:  
wearing welding goggles,  
And site boots, plus your hard hat?*

Did you ever make someone ill  
While trying to make them well  
Like the new Harold Shipman  
(Of Tenbury Wells)?

Did you ever try brain surgery  
With an adjustable spanner  
Or other tomfoolery  
Aligned with your manner?

Did you ever try and blow up  
An inflatable yacht  
Using a corkscrew  
(Because that's all you'd got)?

*Did you ever try and fix a watch  
With your baseball bat:  
wearing welding goggles,  
And site boots, plus your hard hat?*

Did you ever try and build  
A hot air balloon  
Using cast iron  
(Or an old weaving loom)?



Did you ever create  
a beautiful vase,  
or do you always operate  
Like a creature from Mars?

Do you ever make anything  
(Apart from piles of shit)  
Like painting or music,  
Or even a little

Happiness, or love,  
or random good stuff  
or healing, or feeling  
Or anything of worth?

Do you get your kicks  
from making clients ill,  
from extracting fear  
From those potions you distill?

*Did you ever try and fix a watch  
With your baseball bat:  
Wearing welding goggles,  
And site boots, plus your hard hat?*

If you answered 'no'  
to any of the above  
then why the fuck are you  
Using the law, in a matter of love?

Why are you threatening  
With harm and abuse?  
When as healing and resolution:  
It's absolutely fuck all use?

As a one-trick pony  
I've seen better (and worse)  
But maybe if you could now only  
Change tools, or gear, or clothes?

Then something may happen,  
not like a train-crash  
that brings about healing  
(and not us all in a rash)?

So put away that baseball bat,  
the corkscrew, the spade and the hoe,  
the marmite, cast iron,  
That old weaving-loom. Yo.

Because we're trying to create  
and to heal here,  
We're needing more room  
And not hate, or fear.

So you're not much use  
Like all the tools above:  
Taken out of context  
You do more harm than good.

*Did you ever try and fix a watch  
With your baseball bat:  
Wearing welding goggles,  
And site boots, plus your hard hat?*

I thought not,  
So go away and practice  
And leave us alone  
Go do damage elsewhere

Like a poisoned Gnome.  
Go create havoc  
With your base-ball bat;  
Go make cakes with marmite

Go find a problem that needs you  
Because this home doesn't  
Like mending watches with strange tools  
You may really want to – but shouldn't.

Stop beng a fool;  
Go somewhere appropriate:

To your one-trick

Only, one-trick pony

Baseball-bat game...

Then leave us:

Without the burden

Of your ineptitude,

Your fears and

Your shame.

PS 1.6.17  
For SB and DDD

**Dancing with Debbie: playing by Debbie's rules part 4: a post-mortem**

I hired you  
In good faith  
I trusted you  
To rule

Now I'm disappointed  
And feeling  
A a fool

You have lots  
Of books  
And  
Letters after  
Your name

You sold me  
An innovative  
solution:  
*The Direct Debit Debbie*  
*Video game.*

The rules (laws)  
Are quite simple  
(What Can possibly  
Go wrong?)  
Flawless, undimpled:  
Direct-Debit  
Debbie's  
'New' song.

Rule one:  
You pay lots of money  
(then pay me more)

Rule two:  
I find this so funny  
That I roll round the floor

Rule three:

Speaking of flaws

(and I know that I shouldn't)

Would you please sign this disclaimer?

(I can't imagine why you wouldn't)

Rule four:

I have the defendant

In my sights

(as you can see)

So, just give me

More money,

And then you'll be free.

Rule five:

My strategy

May seem dicey

Involving great risk:

Do not listen to detractors

(they're taking the piss)

Rule six:

Taking the piss

Is of course

No stranger of mine

(Look, at the best of my clients,

they own gold mines)\*

Rule seven:

If feeling queasy

At this stage of the game

Just withdraw,

Cut your losses

(Just don't mention

My name).

Rule eight:

But you won't because

You're gullible,

(Or vulnerable,

to the world),

So keep paying

Me money

Then I'll keep my word.

Rule nine:  
My track record  
Is impeccable  
My integrity  
Likewise: so  
Please sign my disclaimer  
*'No Cheating' 'No Lies'*

Rule ten:  
(Now we know  
In reality  
That rule nine  
Is not true:  
But for all above rules,  
Rule nine is the glue).

Rule eleven:  
So my strategy didn't  
Work out like I said  
That it would:  
But you've only paid in  
Guineas (so don't  
expect blood)

Rule twelve:  
My opponents  
Respect me  
They all think that  
I'm great  
(I almost believe them,  
or am starting to, of late)\*\*

Rule thirteen:  
*'Why's rule twelve  
true (you ask)?'  
'I'm confused  
and upset'*

Rule fourteen:  
Oh that one is easy:  
I'm emptying your accounts  
(and I've not finished yet)!

Rule fifteen:  
When your accounts  
Are all emptied  
(apart from the odd groat)  
I'll bugger off  
Pull the drawbridge  
(after crossing the moat).

Rule sixteen:  
When I've pulled  
the drawbridge  
(and you're feeling  
a tit), there are  
consolations  
tho you're in the shit:

Eg:

\*Six:  
Those gold mines  
I mentioned: they've  
All changed hands.

And

\*\*Twelve:  
'The defendant'  
you exclaim 'he can't believe  
his luck'  
'Why should I worry?' says I  
Oh... 'outcome?'

That's easy:

... I don't give a fuck.

[for S, and DDD 16.2.18]

## The Tenbury Rent Girl (part 5): a blessing

I live in a town  
On the edges of nowhere  
In my dressing gown  
I frown at my hair

Awake in the morning  
I find I'm alone  
As each day is dawning  
I yearn for a home

My life is a strange one  
With many ups, and downs  
I look in the mirror  
And measure my frown

Because in each situation  
I find myself in  
The sheer desperation  
Overlays my grin

I have no real depths  
(Or indeed shallows)  
Right through to the core  
I find that I'm hollow

So what's my situation?  
What's the grit in my pearl?  
Well at least I've found my vocation:  
The Tenbury Rent-Girl

I used to be a lawyer  
Of quite some repute;  
My unusual brand:  
Losing disputes

Not just the toughies  
Or the uncertain  
But even the bankers  
Where my opponents cried 'curtains'



My bosses were Shysters  
(As lawyers often are)  
When they eventually fired me  
They also took my car

So I live by the river  
In an old caravan  
In the winter I shivered  
In the summer I swam

But I find myself happier  
Less out of my depth  
Now when I fuck people over  
It's less of a quest

My mind is much clearer;  
My soul is much less;  
But each day I find  
That I'm blessed

I'm becoming renewed;  
I was never really a lawyer  
My career got skewed:  
I swapped chambers

For cottage; the law for S&M  
and after each frottage  
I return to my den:

I'm the new sensation  
Of Tenbury town;  
I'm the Tenbury Rent Girl:

... I take a bow.

PS 12.7.18(For DDD & SB)

## The WineBar Republican

In my home town  
I like to go out,  
hold forth, in Winebars  
Pubs and Forums;  
Where my news hold great weight  
And no-one gets bored;  
I'm a WineBar Republican:  
Please open you doors.

I drink with the best  
I drink with the worst  
I read the Sun and the Mail;  
Then turn into verse  
My identity is clear  
My purpose is true:  
I'm a WineBar Republican;  
I share my views.

Knowledge isn't my strong point  
(My opinions are)  
With my dogma and prejudice  
I prop up the bar.  
Complex situations my particular  
Ouvre: simple miscalculations;  
Solutions delivered;  
I'm a WineBar Republican:  
Hold your misgivings.

The audience is enthralled  
With my simple refrain  
(though some are appalled  
They hide their disdain).  
This country once proud  
Had so much to gain  
From bigotry aloud:  
I'm living your pain.

My worries are simple  
-more simple than yours-  
My anxious amplifications  
Will mess with your heads  
(and the rest of society).  
The image that keeps me going;  
keeps me really alive:  
Is a WineBar Republic  
(opens at 5).

In this Utopia, the paradise  
We voice our dreams:  
Of riddance of foreigners  
-and their devious schemes:  
Sod GDP, And the NHS:  
get back on the boat  
Accept our blessings:  
*We're WineBar republicans:*  
*And we're not messing.*

If down the road  
Our country should flounder  
At least then we'll be certain  
Twas due to those bounders:  
Those old Johnny Foreigners  
Those fair weather friends  
With language and skin colours  
Of various blends:  
The rise to the challenge  
Of serving our nation  
(Like their forefathers  
Who died in the attempt)

*Cry: 'We're off and you're screwed  
(though you don't know it yet)  
Keep your WineBar republic;  
Your hell in triplicate.  
Keep you racism and shit jobs  
Keep the good ones too  
We're done with being treated  
Like inmates of a Zoo.'*

*'Your WineBar Republic  
Is an outmoded delusion  
Bourne of austerity  
And national confusion:  
Good luck with that project  
Good luck with your fears  
Good luck with self-destruction  
And drinking your beers.'*

*'Good luck with your hangover  
After SUCH a good night  
'Twas a really good bender  
Oh dear me  
You're puking in the gutter  
Shaking with DT's'  
Sweating and wondering  
'Was that really me?'*

*Your WineBar republic  
-it makes us all laugh-  
A political strategy; so aware  
So alive:*

The WineBar Republic:

Re-opens at 5.

PS 18.12.18

For GB and EU

## Appendix 2.

### **Experimental writings:** The Trees

#### Prologue

**The Smatcher.** October 2016: *The Smatcher was around a twenty mile ride from Dom's bike stop. I led, the Vet, on his far more powerful bike, ran behind. On a bike this is the more difficult. We rolled out west to Kington, along the A44, and stopped for fuel on the outskirts. I noticed that the side-stand on the Vet's bike didn't cut out his ignition, that he had a bit of trouble at low speeds and assessing parking - something I've noticed is common on well trained but relatively novice riders. I felt like I needed to watch out for him, an odd emotion for such a larger man, whom I'd known for less than an hour. We remounted and rode on to The Smatcher.*

*The Smatcher is a hill, with a track up one side, and multiple smaller tracks through the forest. One of these is used annually by the Vintage Sports Car Club for a hill climb in the Welsh trial. We parked at the Old Station Caravan Park cafe - a place where I'd been with our group on the first Jolly. I was feeling a bit sad, at S having cancelled the weekend, at there being no more Jolly's, at S not being here at the trial 'because her parents don't want her to see me'.*

*I focused instead on the Vet, who seemed glad of my company, in a quietly appreciative kind of way. We walked up the hill, slowly. He had kosher biking boots on. I rode in Timberlands, never having got on with biking boots, either for biking or for walking around in. The Vet told me that he also has Gulf War Syndrome, and so is liable to fall over, as the sheathing of his nerves is being eroded. I reckoned if he fell on me it would be like being under a tree. We found a place to watch. He found a fellow 4WD off-roader to chat to about Landrover parts. Time whiled away.*

*On the way down he told me about his divorce, how PTSD had ruined his marriage, how he'd now found someone new via the internet. It sounded like she worked for GCHQ or similar, and that she looked after him. I pondered my own possible impending homelessness, and the ways in which my illness had contributed to my situation; the ways Sarah's illness and the up-stream causes had contributed too.*

*Riding back to Presteigne after waving bye to the Vet, these thoughts caused me to feel lonely, isolated, and a bit queasy. I mused on antidotes: to the PTSD; to S's anxiety and Depression; to the familial control and narcissism that I was starting to suspect underlay this illness.*

*I was left feeling a bit helpless: How might my presence change things for the better, for both of us, rather than making matters worse. I still had no answers 24 hours later, when the PTSD flare-up hit me full on.*

## The Trees #1

**Saturdays.** *August, a Saturday; that Saturday in August was the day that the Convolvulus flower on the apple tree sucked me outdoors just after 8am to photograph it; was the day that I really noticed the quality of light echoing those days at the altar; was the day me and Yosser had slated to listen to the test match from Edgbaston; was also the day that, just after nine, the Gofer from the Toxic Lawyer pitched up, replete in crocs and shorts, looking like an extra from Carry on Camping. 'Evil spirits can't cross flowing water,' my brother had written to me in the spring. Well, somehow, this fucker had, and he didn't smell like a healer.*

*It was the day too, that I rumbled the narcissist in the mix; the day too, that dispelling my anger and confusion and perturbation, I split, and stacked, the rest of the logs from the alder tree that I had felled on good Friday: While Yosser hung out in the shade of my motorbike, listening to the cricket; I think that knew I was upset.*

*December, a Saturday: New Year's Eve in 2016 fell on a Saturday. The day before, whilst on a dusk walk, my inquiry had slid off the table, and onto the floor: it wasn't an inquiry into becoming whole at all, but into the magical journeys on the way. I'd Skyped Kathy, got my head straight about the whole thing, then, as part of my writing ritual, ended the day with a dusk walk along the Lime Brook valley towards the ruined abbey, turning back, as usual, just before Mary Bedford's small holding. Also, as usual, about a hundred yards from the East boundary of Archers Ford, I called Yosser. I hear his mewling and we meet on the altar. By this time it is virtually dark. The other night he'd perched on the altar next to me on the eastern end, and stayed until I'd said 'time to go and get tea Yos' - when he'd got up and led the way across the stream; we'd even got to do a bit of Jinn chasing.*

*Not today: He went and hung out in the shadows of the remaining alder boughs, on the opposite bank. When I came across, by padding through the stream, he headed straight for the back door, as though he knew that we were in for a celebration. I had thought I'd walk to the pub for a pint. I started cooking, chicken curry. There were fireworks outside, distant. I called Yosser, in case he got spooked. I had a bath, Yosser had hunkered down on the fleece blanket on the sofa.*

*Waiting for the rice to cook, I cracked open a beer and lit a fire with logs from the alder tree. Sitting by the wood burner, opposite the sofa, supping beer, it suddenly came to me; all that we'd been though since this time last year, when I'd been in Doha, unaware of what was about to befall me; life could be worse. On the sofa opposite came snoring: for once I seemed to have agreement, at least from a cat called Yosser.*

## The Trees #2

**Culling:** *The trees were the first thing that I attended to when we moved in to Archers Ford. I had ordered a number of rare breed fruit trees from a scheme run by the council. Then, when first suspended from my job on the Leviathan, I bought a chainsaw and started felling some of the existing out of place trees. The fruit trees I heeled in, between the house and the stream, where they stayed for two or three years; all becoming buried by felled trees for a while; some dying, some becoming deformed. Those deformations pertain to this day, serving as testaments to the deformity of organisational pathology. There were five survivors from an original ten fruit trees: four apples and one damson. None of the pear trees made it. Two of the apple trees are in the rear garden, the remainder in the front. During my first suspension from The Leviathan, I started felling trees, mainly soft woods, Junipers and the like. We then hired some pros, to fell seven large trees, six of which were hiding the stream. The last one, a Douglas Fir, I wasn't sure about. We felled it anyway. There were fifty-two rings; it had been planted in the year of my birth. I still, on occasion, feel sad about felling that tree. Archers Ford is on the northern edge of an apple growing area. There were three old apple trees in the garden: one was rotted in the middle, so I felled it early on; one fell over in about 2013, I propped it up and cut the end off; and one is still growing, though with dead bits and in need of some serious attention.*

*In 2014 I bought five apple trees for S for her birthday, and Smiffy bought one too. Two went in the front garden, near to three of the surviving rare-breed trees. One we planted in the rear garden on Good Friday of 2016. One was the one that the Convolvulus was displaying it wares on, that day when the gopher from the toxic lawyer showed up; it isn't doing too well, and needs transplanting from the front garden to the rear. In the rear garden there is also one of two the original survivors from the rare-breed trees: an apple tree, that was broken the year that the sheep got under the bridge and forded the stream into the garden. (When Jenny—who can listen to trees—connected to its voice was saying: 'fuck you', apparently.) This is now the fuck-you tree, with which I identify, intimately. In these trees, and in trees that I have not yet mentioned, I find friends and fellow conspirators in transgressive acts. Even the felled trees are (literally) fuel to the fire: we have had no central heating since 2011; the wood burning stove being the main heat source.*

*We have never run out of wood to burn, though we have come close. Similarly I have never had as much wood in wood store as I would like. Why not? It is now February 2017, and I have four tasks planned for the garden this month: to do some logging; to trim third side of the beach hedge; to fell some more trees for next winter's fuel; and to buy, and plant, some more trees: Scots pines; and maybe a cedar to replace the one that was not well placed, but which I also regret cutting down.*

### The Trees #3

**The Realm:** *The second time that the Toxic Lawyer's Gopher turned up he wasn't wearing crocs and shorts.*

*I nearly didn't recognise him; apart from his bailiff's bearing. Wearing instead those slippery pointy smart shoes—much preferred of estate agents, bank clerks, and, it seems, lawyer's gophers—he had slithered down the drive. He claimed because it was too icy for his car. It was January, it had been minus 8 the night before. Even Yosser hadn't bothered to venture out: maybe the Jinns had given the Gopher's angel the all clear nod?*

*Whichever, his calling winded me.*

*The winding was reminiscent of one I experienced at about age fourteen, when I'd been walking back from school with Woody, and was tapped on my shoulder. On turning around, a character called Pip Burnell hit me full on in the stomach. When I fell to the ground he sat upon me and started beating me. He wanted money too, a shilling. I rather suspected this fucker was after, and charging, a fair bit more for his services. And, even in the cold, he still didn't smell like a healer.*

*I had spent the week coming down, or trying to, from my progression viva, not too successfully as it happens. This fucker turning up knocked me back off kilter, which, presumably, was the plan; I felt betrayed, utterly.*

*Caring for someone with anxiety and depression is a tough gig at the best of time; being in recovery from PTSD myself had not been making it any easier; but I had been making progress. Communications with S had been improving. I had written my way through Christmas. S had bought me an oak tree, and made a lovely image on a box.*

*And now, team World War 3 from Tenbury had put paid to the Christmas truce.*

*I needed to make some plans: to re-connect to my realm; to try and secure it; to still carry on helping S. And I needed a plan B—to find another realm—at least for me, and probably Yosser too.*

*When mulling this the following day, on a walk up Harley's Mountain, one word kept springing to mind: Jura.*



## The Trees #4

**Normality:** *There are times now when I feel normal. I feel my old self again; those times when I feel competent and able to deal with stuff. These are welcome, if elusive.*

*Those times aren't times when I'm dealing with abstractions from a place of overwhelm; or times when I'm dealing with the likes of the Gopher from the Toxic Lawyer*

*Rather they are times like my ride to Bled and back; times like the walk up Harley's Mountain; like the walk along Lime brook to the Lugg and up around by Kinsham Hall and Noisy Hall and back through Lingen Valet wood.*

*They are times like the February afternoon and following morning when me and S spent planting trees in the garden of Archers Ford.*

*I bought the trees as an offering to the gods, from a place of overwhelm. I bought the trees because I thought that I may soon no longer be a part of life at Archers Ford: the overwhelmers will have overwhelmed me.*

*Planting trees in our garden, like riding bikes and flying planes, is second nature to me. In my immediately post school life, and other times too, I have planted literally thousands. Planting fruit trees on a relatively balmy Sunday morning in February, I re-found that bit of myself that could lift the turf intact; dig the hole; plant and firm the soil around the tree; and stake and tie, and apply rabbit guard.*

*The oak tree we planted separately the day before, along with a bird that Yosser had killed. The Scots pines have yet to be planted, as S ran out of time. So have the dog roses and honeysuckle destined for the hedgerows.*

*There is care and maintenance and felling to do too: I pruned the fruit trees on that Sunday morning; now I plan to fell some trees for firewood next winter. There are two softwoods (Spruce), a Hazel, and an Alder tree by the stream: next to the one that I felled last Good Friday and which became an altar for forty days. And that now serves as a bridge for Yosser—and for me, when I'm feeling brave. The trees—those that I plant, those that I prune, those that I fell—lend me their courage and their insights. This angled bravery I may need one day, if I am to bid farewell for ever, to our garden at Archers Ford.*

*Planting trees is my response to visits from the Gopher from the Toxic Lawyer: It is an act of love, an act of normality.*

## The Trees #5

**Clearing space:** *By the time that March arrived, almost suddenly and unexpectedly, it was time also to clear some space in the garden of Archers Ford for the new trees. It was a week when I'd finished the first chapter of my thesis; the week when my mind had started to become re-entangled in trauma—via the writing; and, it was the week when I felt an inward shift towards a letting go of outcomes: I didn't want to leave Archers Ford, but if I really had to, then so be it.*

*On the first Thursday of March I went for a walk of nearly 7 miles, ending up at The Royal George.*

*The next day, Friday, I took the chainsaw to be sharpened, and also bought a spare long chain, in anticipation of the felling. That day I had my supervision call, and made another difficult call, and I started feeling better.*

*By Saturday I was ready to start work with the saw.*

*The Beech hedge—between the rear lawn and what is becoming the orchard—has been a three year project. It had become overgrown. The first year I sawed off the rear face, last year the top. This year it was the turn of the front face of the hedge, along with the rest of the top. It didn't take long, it had been bugging me all winter.*

*Then I started on the Rhododendrons; they were a tougher proposition: interwoven as they were by bramble—also with a Honeysuckle at the narrow end of the bed—which would have otherwise been my way in.*

*Me and S cleared a lot of space that weekend, S bundling up the brash and the cuttings, me doing the sawing, Yosser looking on, encouragingly, and with curiosity.*

*We planted a winter flowering Cherry, and two Plum trees, and another Oak.*

## The Trees #6

**Planting:** *That weekend with the trees; sorting the garden at Archers Ford; mucking about in the garden, with Yosser looking on, was good for us, good for S. Time flies, we work as a team, S arrived looking like shit, and leaves looking healthy.*

*I bought more trees: two Plum trees, an Oak, a Winter-flowering Cherry, and some more Honeysuckle. We got most of it in, but didn't get to the Scots Pines, or onto transplanting the two Apple trees that need to move, or the self-setting Hawthorn. I transplanted a self-setting Ash, and I finished the three year project of cutting back the Beech hedge.*

*We decided to plant some wild meadow flowers too.*

*The past year—the loneliness, confusion, stress and upset of the previous—receded. In this recession came the realisation of how much the situation of dealing with S in this health, and life, crises was taking its toll on me. Now, in the garden with the trees, it was different.*

*As S left, I suggested / requested that the Toxic lawyer be put on hold, pending my putting arrangements in place to cover my slice of the house; and, that we aim to get her to art school by September. I felt both uplifted, and drained. The moon was out. Yosser was mooning around on S's bed. I had energy now, to deal with the logistics and negotiations: of the company sell off, of covering the house costs; of moving the plane; of moving back into employment.*

*The next day I drove to RAF Brize Norton. I hadn't been there since that summer of 1972, when the trip had skewed me 'career' decision. Now it was to chat about a job. The hedgerows were alive with flowering cherry: I vowed to get some more for Archers Ford, another two or three, at least. I had a lot on my mind, but was handling it. Executive functioning seemed to be returning.*

*On the drive to Brize I picked up a missed call. And then the next day a message: I needed to move the plane, by the weekend, when the weather was predicted to turn, thus rendering the necessary move impossible. The only day possible was Friday. I felt the old pressures building up again, the weekend planting trees far away.*

*All was well however: I managed to get the plane out of the hangar; it started readily after months of idleness; there seemed to be odd things happening with the oil pressure indication—but that happened sometimes, especially after aeros. I took off, and headed off for the five minute flight, towards Sleep; picking up a basic service from RAF Shawbury, just in case.*

*Then three things happened, in quick succession: the oil pressure dropped to zero; the engine started vibrating; then the engine quit altogether*

## The Trees #7

**The Crash:** *The plane crash provided a bit of an operating system reset. Once I'd stopped wincing when standing, and the bruises went down, I was able to come off the paracetamol. The plane was bugged, however.*

*Yosser was very good about it, as were others; the post-crash period became a magical time. My executive functioning returned, I felled two more trees. One, a Spruce, about 35 years old, plus another bough of the Alder that I'd felled the year before on good Friday. For a while there were two bridges across the stream for Yosser to choose from.*

*The other thing that happened, a week after the crash, was that the Gopher from the Toxic Lawyer turned up. It was a Saturday. A week after the crash I was in the kitchen at Archers Ford making tea. There was a knock on the window. I leapt: The Gopher is a PTSD trigger. I asked him in. He gave me another letter to put with all of the others that I hadn't opened, but had recently retrieved from the Tree with no Name, just in case.*

*He looked around and said: 'It's really nice here. It's really nice.' Then he looked me in the eye and said: 'If I were you I'd stay here.' I asked his name: 'Bob'. I thanked him and bought him into the art room and showed him pictures of the crash and a part of the plane. I told him that I loved S and she loved, me, that we'd both been ill, and that I fully intended to stay there; and that her parents were a large part of the problem. He indicated that he had heard as much too. It seems that I'd been wrong about Bob-the-Gopher. He is a healer after all.*

*Not so the Toxic Lawyer, who wrote the letter.*

*Cutting down the two trees over Easter weekend was healing; working with trees—whether planting or chopping—is healing; in the same way that making photographs at the altar was, or walking up Harley's Mountain, or the motorbike trip and travelogue*

*A month later, over the May bank holiday weekend, I finished stacking most of the logs. I was feeling confused upset and a bit ill again. S had been the week before, arriving while I was stacking logs; and stopped over; and left, with me and Yosser feeling bereft. We had planted Honeysuckle. Yosser was crying when S came (though she didn't notice). After she left, and over that bank holiday weekend I had an epiphany: This can't go on: for Yosser's sake as much as anything.*

*Me and Yosser needed a plan. And Boundaries: Direct Debit Debbie—The Toxic Lawyer—had given me an idea.*

## The Trees #8

**Writing:** *When I work writing, and in and with the trees, Yosser likes to hang out and to help, or at least to observe.*

*Having had it decided by Direct Debit Debbie the Toxic Lawyer that me and Yosser would no longer have a home at Archers Ford—and as a consequence much, if any, contact with S—we decided we needed a plan.*

*The states of flux in S's health and her own lack of self-care; the mood shifts and swings; the likelihood of our becoming homeless; these were all taking their toll. I had asked S to consider whether or not she wanted us in our life: The continued engagement of—and attention being paid to—Debbie suggested not: We were less important than Debbie, and money, it seemed.*

*And planting trees was getting us so far, but not far enough.*

*The need for me to take care of Yosser and his feelings; to take care of both of us; to quit Archers Ford for good; came in late May. It was a morning when I had sprung out of bed with the intent of calling Dave the Window maker. I had just sold my company. Katherine had called from Spain and we spoke of consulting opportunities and rates.*

*I was feeling closer than ever to a solution to our financial difficulties.*

*Then I got an email from Christine: S has been advised not to negotiate, and to go to court instead. I felt sick, angry, upset, confused. Winded.*

*Yosser and me were going to lose our home, and S a lot of money, completely unnecessarily.*

*Then, hanging out in the garden with Y doing some work to finish a chapter, I had it.*

*I looked at Yosser, and he looked at me. A radical solution was required, and there was only one thing for it: To re-commence the Daily Flowers.*

*By the look on Yosser's face, I could tell that he was in agreement.*

## The Trees #9

**The Ford:** *On the second bank holiday in May, me and Yosser resolved to clear the hard track to the stream that comprised the exit to the ford, the old way into our home, prior to circa 1972. This way had been clear and useable, when we first moved in 10 years ago. Now, with the passing of time, a part filled ambition to turn it into a large log store (which didn't get past the first layer of logs), the way had become cluttered; with litter from the overhanging trees; some part-felled shrubs; an inter-weave of bramble; and now the odd nascent tree. Hazels will be among the first to reclaim brown-field sites post apocalypse, it seems.*

*I tugged at old logs and brambles and shovelled and forked the decomposing litter. Yosser sat, like a sphinx, part-observing, but with feigned disinterest. Occasionally we would get up and do one of his lolloping growly runs that we call his 'fly-bys' . I have no idea why he does them. Perhaps he sensed the need of deeper involvement than his sphinx mode was managing to convey. Whatever, it was good to have him along.*

*At one point my senses became overwhelmed with anger at the involvement of Direct-Debit Debbie, The Toxic Lawyer, in our situation. That without knowing us, or our side of the story, she was trying to make us homeless, when there was no need. It did not make sense. Me and Yosser took time out, and wrote two poems, on two consecutive days. We also sent out a Daily Flower email and wrote a blog post. All of these were crossing the boundary—into the land of toxicity. It was like I imagine re-entry to Chernobyl to be. Another post-apocalyptic zone; a similar set of feelings.*

*The we went back to our shambles and the brambles and forest litter that was spawning new life—and left to its own devices a new forest—we and started to feel: our way back into soul space; connected to each other; connected to our home more deeply, and seeing the tree-creepers and coal-tits and the yawning possibilities ahead, we found blessing. We found opening up of this boundary to be a healing one: crossing a stream of awareness. We even think we may have found a new way forward, when all had seemed helpless, in our starting to open this gateway to the stream, and the old ford. We had found a different way to enter, to leave, to keep our home. We had unburied an older, deeper connection: to rootedness.*

*Moreover, we had addressed the Direct Debit Debbie problem, in the only way feasible: by writing poems in our breaks. By Yosser's demeanour as I wrote and read I could tell we were on to something: Yosser was on side; he loathes Direct-Debit Debbie, and all that she stands for, at least as much as I do.*

*Soon, and with our new way open, me and Yosser would be able to file the Debbie problem neatly where it belongs: under 'Past'.*

## The Trees #10

**Crazy Wisdom (1):** *I returned from Ashridge a day early, to find Yosser waiting for me on driveway. It was around 10.30pm. Yosser was strangely, blackly, luminescent—and welcoming—in the gloaming. He had been very glum as I left the day before. It seemed that I'd been away for longer than 36 hours. The Ashridge trip had been strange, good overall, but—a bit like re-visiting a previous life—the ghosts of the final ADOC 4 workshop stalked Brindley. I was very glad to get back home to my cat.*

*The next day I awoke sweating, and in a bit of a funk: I could have sworn that I'd heard a knock at the door, which never bodes well at The Ford these days. I heard clanking, then a car door shut, but not drive off. Eventually S went and made tea. Nothing. Then, later, I got up and went outside and checked my car for wheel clamps and bailiffs stickers. Nothing. Later still, S and me went for a walk—one that I'd wanted to take her on back in March, when she was visiting The Ford more regularly. Now, in mid June, we picnicked and walked our way to the magical valley that runs from Kinsham, and is joined by our stream. Yosser came part of the way with us, then peeled off after a hundred yards or so to attend to his own business, and to await our return.*

*The Lugg was low, and I showed S the beach where I stop; at the apex of the out and return route. We slowed; time slowed; S went into Soul mode—seemingly returning from the fractured illness space with which she had arrived at the Ford three days earlier. S went on plucking stones from the water of the Lugg and making pictures on her iPad. Time stood still. Things became just a little bit magical. A fly fisherman splashed his way upstream. I'd been dozing on bank, recovering, kind of: from exhaustion; incipient illness; and from the faux terror of the panic attack experienced that morning.*

*The fisherman splashed upstream to S, then beyond, Then he returned with an American crayfish for S. We were in a time-warp. I'd forgotten a beer date; S had forgotten her troubles. Why couldn't we enter this zone more often, more readily—and in a way that would address the malaise pervading our lives? It seemed more of a potential cure-all than Toxic Debbie. Eventually, we wandered back the three miles to the Ford, with S stopping occasionally, to photograph flowers. It seemed to be catching. As we approached The Ford, Yosser emerged from the hedge adjacent to the Crazy Wisdom tree, a place that he likes to hang out with me.*

*I sat down with him and gave him some fuss. S remarked on how different with him I was than when he first pitched up at The Ford; when I'd continually brushed him off. I apologised to him, sincerely. He seemed to understand. S wept. We went indoors and ate pasta. I slept, like a cat, with no demonic bailiff spirits pervading my dreams. Peace seemed to be returning to The Ford, with Yosser as its conduit.*

## The Trees #11

**Crazy Wisdom (2):** *Me and Yosser had had a bit of a week, so we repaired to the Crazy Wisdom tree, to slouch by the stream listen to the cricket. It was the first day of the first test match of the summer. Yosser likes listening to the cricket, and eating ice cream. He likes the Crazy Wisdom tree too: a fallen oak, hollowed out so that we can use it as a bridge, about a hundred yards downstream from The Ford. On this day I passed an assessment drive for a trucking company; two days after I had found out that me an Yosser would be leaving the Realm of the Ford.*

*This day Yosser was tardy in following me to the Crazy Wisdom Tree. He had been very solicitous and concerned upon finding out we were to become homeless; he was very upset too: I could see this, read it, in his whole body. He likes living at The Ford with me, and roaming around his Realm. Yosser was definitely not his old self, he'd lost his verve and sparkle. So had I.*

*For a few weeks, we had been playing with creating and curating the sacred: specifically the window ledge that faces north; that overlooks the Alder Altar. This playing has been a bit like having a mini-altar in the house; we get up (when the mood and the light take us), we make pictures, usually just after sun up. Yosser likes to get involved—to the point where he has knocked the flowers over a couple of times—I think he doesn't really get why I pay them so much attention; or attend to them before attending to his breakfast.*

*Whatever, those moments—after dawn but before the day gets going—are very precious, sacred, to us; especially so now that our time at The Ford is limited. Sacred times indeed.*

*I had been laying next to the stream by the Crazy Wisdom tree for around half an hour before Yosser deigned to follow me out. I heard his mewling from the other side of the stream, caught a brief glimpse of him as he entered the hollowed Crazy Wisdom Tree, then just the tip of his tail. He came and hunkered down, initially by me, and then in the shade; as Root passed first his joint century, then his Century, then his 150. We started to feel a bit better. I told Yosser that we would find somewhere just as nice in Scotland. He gave me one of his funny looks: I'm not sure that he believed me; I'm not sure that I believe me either.*

*Later, when I came back from the pub in Presteigne Yosser was on the drive, waiting. I let him in and gave him some of his new biscuits, and the ice-cream bowl to lick out. The light in the kitchen, and on our mini-altar was stunning pre-sunset soft gold. I made some pictures. Yosser joined in. It seemed like a little epiphany, in a distinctly non-epiphanic week. Maybe the gods were trying to tell us something; maybe Yosser's scepticism is misplaced; maybe we are going to be okay, after all.*



## The Trees #13

**Mistletoe:** *In July I fell through a hole in time and re-became a truck driver, after a 36 year layoff. This put paid to me and Yosser listening to the cricket, and to pretty much anything else for the next four months. I did almost no gardening. Not much biking; not much flying; not much photography; few magical journeys; little interaction with Direct-Debit Debbie; very few walks. Drifting backwards and forwards through time; no writing: returning each day to Yosser and Archers Ford: more than a haven; more than a quest: my (our) staying there started to feel like a crusade. My peregrinations in the trucks had become a part of the scenery, as had my long absences—firstly during the day, then at nights. Yosser became—more than ever—guardian of the realm of Archers Ford.*

*I became more whole: feeling like a proper working man for the first time in years, maybe decades: my confidence improved (due largely to the—not insignificant—task of navigating trucks around the country, and partly to my debit card working again: I could buy things with clear conscience for the first time in years; I could pay bills). The traumas and post-traumas of the Leviathan years receded; I re-engaged, very tentatively at first, with flying: having nearly died in the same kind of plane in March; plus the differing performance and flying environment, was the cause of some trepidation, which at times bordered on ineptitude. For a while I wondered whether I was going to have to give up on flying. Then it came back, due, in part I think to the truck driving.*

*Other things receded too: primarily my overt engagement with ADOC; my fears around Direct-Debit Debbie; my fear of losing S; of leaving Archers Ford. While all along—and due to trucking for a living—my sense of connection and possible connections here strengthened. I resolved to split those logs at weekends, from the trees felled in the spring and stacked the day that I heard of Thomas's illness; of Annemiek's situation. But they would remain un-split. Then in late September I went to start splitting, but the axe had gone missing. I bought a new axe. I split some wood one Sunday before departing for a night shift. Yosser helped. I stacked wood around the stove. Having agreed out of court to the transfer to S that neither of us wanted, spitting and stacking wood seemed to be a complete waste of time.*

*I found another ritual, photographing an Alder tree 2 miles downstream from our realm; more pointlessness. Then S came for the weekend. We lit fires. I showed S the walk to the Alder tree. It was late afternoon, the riverbank was in shade. We moved to a Blackthorn in the sun. It had Mistletoe. S made pictures of the Mistletoe. I sat in the sun. We ate our picnic. In the late afternoon November sunshine, underneath the Blackthorn and Mistletoe, a scintilla of normality returned. We walked back along Lime brook to Archers Ford, where we lit a fire: not with the newly split logs, but those from the Alder, felled in Good Friday, 18 months before.*

## The Trees #14

**The Old Boiler Room:** *Trucking had been full on for weeks, latterly at nights. Yosser had been patient: with the unusual hours and long absences; with two unforeseen nights away; then with my rolling home just before—occasionally after—daybreak. I would walk in from the village, so as not to leave my car on the drive and give an indication that I was in. Sometimes Yosser would meet me on the old track—a little black hole in the big darkness—mewling to greet me.*

*One Wednesday I was laid off by a text message, picked up on my walk to the Alder tree by River Lugg near Kinsham. I was instantly both upset (I was enjoying the camaraderie of the night-trunkers) and relieved; I realised that I had become profoundly bone-tired. A succession of 50-60hour weeks; disrupted sleep patterns; only one full day (Saturday) off—had all taken their toll. I needed a rest. I was able to catch up and catch my breath; to re-connect with Yosser and Archers Ford; to tend to our home; to re-start the long overdue task of splitting logs. Since the court hearing—when the will of Direct-Debit Debbie, the toxic lawyer had prevailed—my and Yosser's time at Archers Ford seemed to be limited. Best make the most of it.*

*The old boiler room is at the East end of the house. It had a slightly larger than cat sized window, and so is Yosser's entrance to our home. In the weeks before S's meeting Direct-Debit Debbie we had been clearing this space; removing the old boiler and tiles and starting to paint. Then Debbie poisoned our situation; S left and became more ill; the old boiler room became unkempt, accumulating bits of kindling and old newspapers in the log baskets. It remained half painted. There were spiders webs on the larger window; an abandoned Hi-Fi bought with my first months salary from the Leviathan; an emergency bed for Yosser; screws from our previous efforts; one layer of white paint over the former green. It smelt, and was, abandoned. It also leaked cold air into the living room due to removed paneling—the point of entry being behind Yosser's chair. The room was redolent of, and a metaphor for, the toxicity, damage and havoc wreaked on our home by Debbie. Work to do indeed.*

*Starting on the Saturday with a clear out, and vacuum, on Sunday I blocked the gap in the wall behind Yosser's chair. He tested this out by staying put, whilst I started splitting logs from this years crop. The manual dexterity, and the physical effort of splitting felt to be healing—dispelling my anxieties around being propelled from this space. Becoming dark, Yosser came outside, overseeing the splitting. The time came to stack. I started with the last of the logs in the external store—the Alder felled on the day following Debbie's intrusion into our lives. These logs had 'healing' written through their middle like a stick of rock—just as Debbie had 'insecure narcissist' written though hers. The difference being, these logs have a place here, as last year's premier cru. Now they form the bottom layer of the new log store.*

*And Yosser snoozes in a draft free zone; as we both await the outcome of events we enjoy the healing warmth from burning the logs, now stored in the old boiler room.*

## The Trees #15

**Connections:** *With the onset of winter, the trees reward me for my attention by keeping me warm, and exercised. It is late November and already we have the first snows, and some hard frosts.*

*At the same time I feel the pain—at times physical—of the separation: from the trees; from the space; and the wrench that it will be for Yosser too.*

*In the nights I cruise around dystopian distribution centres of the Midlands and South Wales; in the early hours, sometimes just before dawn, I return to the realm of the Ford; to the trees and wood fires; to Yosser the sentinel, relieving him from his vigil.*

*For the first part of days I collapse into exhausted sleep, usually waking around mid day. If it is a day off, then I leave home around 8am, usually for Kington, where I have breakfast and write. Always Yosser is around as I return. His only demands are be to be fed around 2 hours before daybreak (this he may waive if I'm really out of it). And to be fussed; sometimes leaving him is a real wrench.*

*Most days when I am not working on the trucks, I spend an hour, sometimes two, splitting wood. Yosser finds this activity very engaging, being fascinated by the splitting; he is attentive—in a sometimes very risky for a feline spectator—manner. We do this around dusk; it has become our ritual; our act of faith; a confirmation of belonging and connection; our prayer.*

*The trucking plays a part here too, with its own rituals mantras and disciplines: picking up a text from the agency; turning up, loading card into tachograph; inevitably inserting a manual entry to cover work done since the previous insertion; finding and hitching trailer; then off to Derby/Manchester/Birmingham/Loughborough/Chepstow/Newport—those kind of places. And yet they are non-places too: dystopian in their similarities; as different and divided from the realities of life at The Ford with Yosser is as its possible to be.*

*When at night I return in the pre-dawn cold, it is as though I fell into my life from the space that is so visible and close; the realm of the Milky Way; a cosmos that so connects this life with Yosser in the realm of the ford, to other realms, yet to be connected to, and explored.*

*A cosmos that reveals and exposes our vulnerabilities; that oversees our futures; that connects us to other worlds. Wherever these may lay.*

## The Trees #16

*Yule: It had been a strange week. Days spent writing in the mornings—for the first time in several months. A bit of time with Yosser by the Crazy Wisdom Tree. Then afternoons, and into the early hours, spent driving around in the dark. Some coaching of S, by iMessage, about her HR lady, and other matters.*

*Then came Saturday. I returned home to Yosser in the early hours—3am—and set about creating a feast; one of us even had a beer.*

*Come the morning it was clear that I needed to start making something of the house for the forthcoming pagan festival: we needed more light, more heat, and some greenery in the house. And some paint for the door and Yosser's Lodge. There were still toxic vibes hanging around, maybe a tree and a wreath and paint would disperse them.*

*I headed north to the garage at Craven Arms, to pick up the recently serviced chainsaw, then south, to Dom's bike stop on the A44. Dom's used to be a nursery, and it was good to see the trees and wreaths arrayed; the lights in the woods in the gathering gloom. We had a natter, drank tea, and I loaded the tree and the wreath, then headed into Leominster, get paint, and more lights, at B&Q.*

*Up early on the Sunday, I had a Skype at 7.30 with Craig, and one at 9.00 with Mike. Both calls were wonderful, inspiring; speaking across the miles—to Australia, then Switzerland—helped me: to re-connect to the doctoral process; to gain perspective on mine and Yosser's predicament: namely imminent homelessness. We spoke in the calls of resilience; of agency, and community, me feeling fairly divorced from either. Yosser slept though, soundly; his gentle wheezy snoring forming a background to two fascinating, helpful and stimulating conversations. Then, miraculously, as I made a bacon sandwich, Yosser was instantly alert and awake, more stimulated, apparently, than during the preceding discussions.*

*I emptied the car of the tree and the wreath; and of the paint and the lights. The tree was hauled into the back garden. The wreath hung on the back door, the first for some years.*

*In the afternoon I went to an organised tree walk around Hergest, but returned early, wanting to re-connect with Yosser, and The Ford. Yosser was there to welcome me. The wreath had a presence on the door. The tree was hidden in the garden, for a future day.*

*Both of those bits of greenery started to make a difference to how I felt: maybe little community, and even less agency, yet. Rather they serve as a demarcation of a territory beyond agency, and community: that of an act of faith.*

## The Trees #17

**Chainsaw:** *One of the first things that I bought after moving in to Archers Ford was a chainsaw, a Husqvarna 340. I'd just had it serviced and it struck me it was now 10 years old: I'd bought it during my first suspension from The Leviathan. We're old friends. I'd had it serviced in the week that I started seriously re-engaging with my writing; it needed some use. I was particularly keen to get into the stream, and continue cutting up an Alder log, started earlier in the summer, when the chain had become blunt; I had lost my sharpness too: I had a break from logging, and from writing. I went off to drive trucks.*

*Now, in early December, I was regaining my writing legs, my doctoral mojo; and I had started working with the felled trees again. I had decided to create a book for S, of the trees series and the art underlaying my doctoral chapter on identity. My chats with Mike and Craig were fresh; I had a renewed sense of agency, and activism: my writings and photography, my accounts of the trees and my relationship with Yosser, and my photos of the same, were proving affective for some, at least. Making this work made me feel better too in my situation of apparent powerlessness: limbo. Me and Yosser were awaiting a visit from S to discuss the search a holistic solution to our predicament. Limbo. An invitation to write.*

*Mostly I write way from the Ford, in neutral public spaces: a bookshop cafe; a local hotel; a brewery. This day I was in the brewery, I picked up a call from Michele; I exchanged ideas with Mike by WhatsApp; both were very encouraging. I began to feel power seeping back inwards. We spoke of Direct-Debit Debbie, her narcissism, her role in this unfolding catastrophe. I made a good start on organising my stories into a more coherent whole. Then, my phone rang with a local number. It was Direct-Debit Debbie herself, chasing paperwork. I was both non-plussed, and non committal—beyond agreeing to sort it out following my chat with S at the weekend. She rang off. I was left feeling both sick, and shaking; not due to anything she said, or even her manner. This ran deeper; the caustic effect upon my soul of a narcissistic presence: no wonder S had become, and remained, ill. Shaken, and shaking, I left to return to the Ford, and to Yosser, to regain my equilibrium, to ground myself. Yosser came to welcome me, eventually—he hadn't expected me to be back so early. Neither had I. Over the fence and into the stream with the chainsaw. I started it on the log that was the Alder Altar felled the day after Debbie had come into our lives by proxy. I waded to the log downstream and recommenced slicing it, allowing the water to flow once more unimpeded by the secondary log. The stresses from my unexpected encounter with Debbie's toxicity receded, somewhat. Yosser looked on, from a distance the chainsaw apparently less appealing to a cat than a splitting axe, or Debbie.*

*We went inside: to make tea; to regain our composure; to ground; to dry out: to light a fire in the wood-stove to purge ourselves: of Debbie; those illnesses that follow her round—her toxic shadow—apparent even as darkness gathered over the stream next to Archers Ford. In writing our story, and logging, a sharpness was returning, and not just to a 10 year old chainsaw.*

## The Trees #18

**Snow (driving):** *In the first few winters after we moved in to Archers Ford (in those days it was just me and S, no Yosser; I was anti cats), there were some hard winters: the one when I was suspended from The Leviathan for 13 weeks; the one where I tried to do their bidding, driving a 1000 miles a week, often through snow, until I was finally fired. The day that letter came—the 3rd, 3 years from the date of my first suspension—there had been a goodish snowfall, and the track to Archers Ford had become barely passable.*

*Wetherby: Now, driving back from Yorkshire in driving snow, I was travelling through a land of reminders; of those pre-dawn trips down to The Leviathan in a futile attempt to satiate incompetent managers; and earlier trips, in the winter of '79 / 80, from Hinckley to Chester-le-Street, carrying beds for Bullens; double-heading (2 drivers). That's how I learned the tricks of the HGV driving trade, watching others. It was different then: frozen washer bottles ineffective windscreen wipers, heaters that didn't heat; occasionally engines that wouldn't start without lighting fires underneath; all different now. Except, driving articulated lorries over snow on a motorway in the dark hasn't seemed to change much, apart from being warm whilst doing it.*

*Eventually, descending to the plains around Derby the temperature gauge showed an increase from +1 (snow gathering on the m-way and not dispersing) through +2 (snow settling and dispersing) to +3 (snow melting on contact). Passing Derby, I was in the clear: it had taken 5 hours 10 minutes to get to Wakefield; I had 4 hours 50 max to get back, and that only by extending my time by an hour.*

*Tamworth: I hit a wall of fatigue and was falling asleep. I hit the slip road to the services, and the bed in the back (another improvement since the '79 Fondness). Set the alarm for half an hour—even with extending the driving time, I was at risk of infringing the 15 Hr max per day, again an extension—from 12 hours. Waking at 02.35, I had under two hours to clock off. Even 30 minutes sleep had made a big difference, and I arrived back in Hereford, thankfully clear of snow, at 03.55. Fuelling up and dropping the unroadworthy trailer outside the engineers shed, and doing paperwork took me to just past 04.30; I popped my card out of the tacho with a few mins to go, giving the firm a few extra mins. Back into the old Audi, and I was driving as though I had a few pints on board; a combination of adrenaline; relief; and fatigue caught up with me. I was really glad to meet Yosser as I fell in through the door at 05.30, after a 15hr shift, and into bed, exhausted.*

*The next morning my room was full of light; there had been a smattering of snow. That night there was even more. S turned up. On the Saturday I could still drive out of the Ford, and went to Presteigne for a weekly shop, relaxing, letting go of the week. Then, as I crossed the High Street looking for S, there, crossing the road towards me, was Direct Debit Debbie: What the fuck was she doing here?*

## The Trees #19

**Snow (Cayman):** *The shock of bumping into Debbie was attenuated by meeting S; doing a bit of shopping. I was mystified: Presteigne is well off Debbie's patch; S had not mentioned having to meet her (but then why would she)? Was I being paranoid? Debbie was with 2 goons, hanging out by a large snow white 4WD Porsche.*

*After S had left to meet a colleague I went into a Christmas market in the assembly rooms. Debbie followed me in. I pretended to engage with a pottery stall. Debbie stood behind me, facing away, pretending to do something in her handbag; or surreptitiously reading text messages. I left the assembly rooms and hung around outside, by a book stall, just to see what happened next.*

*Nothing.*

*Flustered, a bit shaky, I returned along the High Street to my car, past the Porsche. One of the goons detached himself and went into a shop.*

*Back at my car I mulled the situation: drive past the Porsche; return to Archers Ford; go another way; head to Kington and think? I chose the latter, and sent WhatsApp message to Mike.*

*In the event, after shopping in Kington, I returned to the realm of the Ford. I needed to re-connect, to ground myself.*

*Splitting logs with Yosser did the trick; arriving back at the Ford he was pleased to see me; we split logs; I made some notes; lit a fire; paused; breathed.*

*Home flowed back into me, and as the dark gathered I reflected on Debbie, and the way she affected me; has affected the delicate ecology of our home.*

*Questions arose: What is she here for? What was she doing in Presteigne? What does she tell me about my own shadow, my own shit?*

*And: Were those wide wheel tracks in the snow left by her 4WD Porsche?*

*And—Is her car named after the place she goes on her cruises; the place where she keeps her money, or a lethal-at-both-ends lizard: Cayman?*

## The Trees #20

**Snow (Angels):** *That night we talked through my notes and questions; my situation, and our respective situations; of possible paths; of the emergence of holistic solutions. I made no mention of having bumped into Debbie. Overnight it snowed again; heavily. More heavily than either S or I could remember.*

*On Sunday I had a Skype with Mike scheduled. S took her car up the track and into the village. I thought I'd try and get mine to the end of the track in the 15 minutes before my 9am call. It got stuck half way. Oh for those snow tyres that I nearly had put on two weeks ago. I retreated indoors and had a chat to Mike who was in Istanbul. We were shorter than usual, due to constraints at his end.*

*The me and S went and dug my car out; for a while we were a team again. Returning to the Ford S and I started to chat, I told her about my flat becoming vacant; that I may not have to leave the area. She seemed relieved, joyful even: that me and Yosser would be on hand; and not leaving her in the lurch prescribed by Debbie and her band.*

*I went into the garden and retrieved the Christmas tree from the snow. S decorated it with the fluctuating-coloured lights that I'd bought from B&Q: Archers Ford became transformed.*

*And still it snowed. I prepared roast beef as S got ready to leave for Chester. We continued our chat; I realised I'd worked through my curiosities, bar one:*

*'What was Direct-Debit Debbie doing in Presteigne yesterday?'*

*S was genuinely flummoxed: 'Why didn't you tell me?' she said, confused. Good question.*

*Later: As dusk fell it became colder; I walked into the village with S, carrying her bag; not wanting her to go; to continue her punishing schedule, especially in view of the weather. It was becoming colder again; the snow was still falling, and gathering on the road northwards, towards Chester.*

*Back indoors Yosser hunkered down on S's bed, I cranked up the wood-burner, poured a beer. Then, after I was sure that S had passed the point of no return, I returned a call to a friend. I had been on the phone for some minutes when the door opened: 'Hellooo' said S, as she used to intone of old. She had returned to the Ford; the road north had become impassable.*

*The next day it was brilliant sunshine, with snow over a foot deep. Enchantment had returned to the ford too; S took time out before hitting the road; Yosser gazed at the scene through the art room window-perplexed by the snow, and by us-as S led the way, and we made snow-angels.*



## The Trees #21

**Inverted spins (1 entries):** Monday. *A week had passed since the big snowfall. A week of finding that I need snow tyres to live at the Ford this winter; the first since Leviathan days; of re-orientation of practice; of mulling at least partial relocation to Church Stretton; of wondering about Yosser and how he would cope; of re-listening to my conversations with Mike, the recordings subtly, but distinctly, different from my recollection.*

*And a week of wondering what it would be like to be in the Ford after the 18th, when ownership (i.e. debt) would have transferred entirely to S, and Yosser and I would be illegals; squatters. In that sense at least, my tenure had become on a par with Yosser's: that of uninvited guest.*

*A week on from creating the snow-angels, I found myself in another unusual and potentially disorientating situation: Upside down, 6000ft over the M50 west of Tewkesbury, showing Roger how his students will put him into an inverted spin whilst he's teaching them stall turns, and what he might do to rectify the situation.*

*The day had started simply enough; I'd called in Debbie HQ in Tenbury Wells to sign some transfer papers for the Ford. In Debbie's office—probably the very same in which my and S and Yosser's fate had been sealed the day before Good Friday 18 months before—we sat opposite each other. D asked me to confirm that I'd moved out, and that I had no reason to return. I replied in the affirmative, trying not to imagine Yosser's 'what about my tea' face, as I perjured myself in the cause of being an activist for justice, if no the law.*

*My sense is that Yosser would get the principle, if no the detail, just so long as I did return and feed him: Something that I had failed to do on two occasions over the past 18 months (due to running out of hours when trucking), and nearly one other, the day when I came close to death in the plane crash.*

*All of that, even, especially the crash, seemed to collapse into the distance as me and R entered repeated inverted auto rotations: in order to get the symptoms of onset; and the recovery actions, at least more familiar, if not yet off pat. (When you're in an inverted spin, the how did we get into this situation is of more philosophical and academic, than practical interest.)*

*Moreover, with familiarity this 'emergency' was acquiring something else; something of the quality of fun; of adventure: within the apparent furore lay something fascinating; curious: we were embarked on a magical journey.*

## The Trees #22

### **Inverted spins (2 recoveries):**

*Earlier that Monday, between my meeting with Debbie, and this meeting of a different kind; between me and R and the laws of aerodynamics: I had taken time out to fly for fun.*

*The plane was over fuelled for a 2 up spinning sortie, I needed to burn some off to reduce the weight and move the C of G forward. The only sequence I'd had to hand was one penned by S, in the days before her illness and my resurgent PTS, when I was working on a Display Authorisation. I'd stuck it in the cockpit, climbed above the murk, and hacked my way through it: for the second time in seven days I'd remembered how to have pure fun.*

*On that flight I'd had to follow the M5 from Tewkesbury in order to stand a chance of finding the airfield in the murk. This recovery to the airfield was easier, and as fuel started to run low, and R's acquired the knack of ignoring the disorientation became apparent in his recoveries, we returned to the airfield from over Newent.*

*Back at the Ford evening both me and Yosser collapsed in front of the wood-burner, knackered: The long Saturday-night-Sunday-morning trucking trip to Yorkshire; the meeting with Direct-Debit-Debbie; the fun aerobatic sortie in murky weather; then the inverted spins sortie over a wintry watery still partly snowy Gloucestershire having caught up with one of us, at least.*

*The next day we awoke in a home that was no longer ours, fugitives, squatters.*

*In a weird way, it felt no different. No more, or less our home: No more, no less confusing and disorientating than the past 18 months.*

*No more or less confusing and disorientating than those repeated inverted spins: than Gloucestershire observed, rotating above our heads, from the open front cockpit of an aerobatic biplane in winter.*

*Within repeated disorientations and apparent loss of control, patterns emerged; where there are patterns there are alignments with power possible: Within these self-generated self inflicted emergencies, one element of power had begun gradually to return to me: that of agency.*

## The Trees #23

### Detox:

*At the turn of the year I found myself coming off two consecutive long shifts on the trucks, first: Hereford-Thatcham-Southampton-Thatcham-Hereford—three trailer swaps and one unload in the pouring rain at night; punctuated by one pause for nutrition—my first McD's for over 20 years; second: Hereford-Wakefield-Hereford, starting 9 hours 30 after the last, finishing on New Year's Eve. I'd worked 29 hours 45 mins out of 39 hours 30 mins as I pulled out from the Cyder Mills, breathing a sigh and looking forward to home, and to seeing S—I picked up a message, S wasn't coming; I was gutted; exhausted; depleted.*

*Back home Yosser greeted me and we started clearing space again; later we walked the garden for the last time in '17, with Y doing a particularly spectacular Jinn chasing run up the Scots pine.*

*Over the next days those rainy long shifts caught up with me; as did those weeks and months of hassle and toxicity occasioned by Debbie; I drifted in and out of a catatonic fever—chilled to the bone, yet sweating profusely. Some nights changing base layer and t-shirt twice. And in the mornings calm, and zero-zero energy. It was like being in a strangers body. Everything moved in slow motion; had layers of unreality; dreaming when awake; awake when dreaming: Daylight the only discernible waypoint in the blurry delirium. I mostly turned the phone off. Nobody called anyway.*

*I could get up to make tea and eat fruit, and, towards the end, to make some chicken noodle soup. I think it was this soup that started my gradual revival, my coming to senses within this blurry distant dusty dystopian world of half-truths.*

*During the nights the cricket from Australia provided a backdrop; as did Yosser's accompanying snores. I became glad that S was not there; I would have been no company; I had wanted to clear more space; I could not remember feeling so ill and out of it for years.*

*After nearly a week I felt ready to face the world again, ready to take on the new year, its challenges and possibilities. None of us could go on like this.*

*I ventured out; the ford was pulling me back; I could not bear to reconnect my email and phone.*

*I feel that I have hit a wall; held between the need to re-connect and to completely detach and detox.*

## The Trees #24

### The Call:

*It was late January in the New Year when Katherine called me from a cafe in Madrid. We hadn't spoken for a couple of months. Since then me and Yosser had been requested to leave the Realm of the Ford; I had taken him to one of my old haunts, a ground floor flat on the edge of the Long Mynd: we were on a new magical journey, not the one we had planned.*

*It was good to speak to K, straight off she asked me a question about Imagoes:*

*'Is the Imago an Ally, or an Adversary?'*

*Ouf*

*'I think that it can be both' I said, without really knowing why.*

*Then I went on, expanding as I thought:*

*'A repressed Imago may be an Adversary, but I think that it's more of a Disrupter.'*

*We spoke for longer, probably our longest call to date, about theses, about the primal self, about how to begin to tackle Bateson; and K's new job, and my and Yosser's new living arrangements.*

*After we'd finished I started to write; firstly this story; then some insights into Imagos, in the form of text messages.*

*Some hours later, I sit in my chair, in a flat on the edge of the Long Mynd—a relic from a previous life—and start to write again; about how my being here is reflective: of my theory my Imagos; my identity.*

*As I write, Yosser sits on the window ledge of the South facing window, then makes a move to the West one as I type these words; reflecting, thinking, dreaming, of lord knows what. I hope and pray, that at least part of his Imago is still present in the Realm of the Ford, like mine is...*

## The Trees #25

### The MD:

*Mid-February; I was coming off a 15 hour shift to Wakefield and back; it had been a long one, usually is; my last time was the weekend before New Year.*

*Then I'd got the flu, big time. I didn't work for six weeks; which had been good for my writing, but less good for cashflow.*

*Then Yosser and me relocated to The Court: a flat in an Edwardian building in an Edwardian town, a bit over half an hour north of the Realm of the Ford. I'd been worried about Y: how he would take to relocation; whether he would try and return to the Realm of the Ford; how he would take to the local cats (he does not play well with others). My misgivings were misplaced, he'd settled in fine. But now I'd left him overnight. The shift had taken long time. I was knackered, having slept for precisely 45 minutes in the past 24 hours; plus doing the shift. Plus the drive to work: It was getting dark as I'd driven to work, now it was light again. Trailer dropped, curtain undone, unit refuelled, AdBlu added, unit parked, paperwork done.*

*Then, when I least expected it, I was bounced: assailed by a Minor Deity that had emerged from behind a computer screen in the back office: The MD's opening gambit, after establishing my name, was to ask why it had taken me so long, with an accusatory tone and body language. From there the conversation went downhill: the MD would ask a question, in a tone where it was evident that he already knew the answer. I would answer. He wouldn't hear, because he wasn't listening. Repeat. Then, having informed me that I wouldn't be paid for the whole shift, or used by them again, the MD popped back into the box from whence it had emerged; even more quickly than it had appeared. I was shaken, sickened, confused, angry, upset, frozen; all signs of early onset of a PTSD event. I needed to get out of there before things unravelled further. There was only one place to go: To return to The Realm of the Ford: what a shame that Yosser wasn't with me.*

*I parked away from the Realm, and returned along the stream, pausing at the Crazy Wisdom Tree. I was there for around an hour. I took some pictures of Snowdrops that overlooked the Alder Altar; I returned to myself; my Imagos reintegrated: The Disrupter came out of his lair. Not for the first time this week, nor the last. Why so? Now The Disrupter had two jobs on his plate: to deal with the MD; and, not least, to re-engage with Direct-Debit Debbie, who's latest endeavours and incompetence had put the whole Realm of the Ford at risk.*

*But first I had to get back to The Court to feed Yosser. Then to have a much needed beer, over which I would refine strategy for the next deployments of The Disrupter.*

## The Trees #26

### Yosser-land 1:

*Mid-February, later that week; I was still winded, firstly by the MD, then by a brief conversation I'd had with S on the same day. Direct-Debit Debbie had fucked up. The Ford may well have to be sold. I didn't even say 'what did I tell you?' - but was still first in line for the blame.*

*That pause at the Ford had helped, immensely: a restorative place for a wounded Disrupter. I'd felt that me and Yosser needed a break. I asked if he'd like a trip to the Ford; he gave me one of his funny looks. We'd poled down on the Saturday morning. Yosser in full flow with a blues and twos howl; he doesn't travel well.*

*Arriving back in his Realm, I took him in through the south-facing door to the garden. He moseyed out of his cat basket, looking incredulous. A brief sniff around, then he made straight for the small window to the old boiler room. It was as though we'd never left. I opened the doors; it was sunny; Yosser took to his garden like a lord of the land.*

*I sat on a retaining wall with a cup of tea; Yosser came and insisted on claiming a place on my sloping lap. He nuzzled me repeatedly, looking into my eyes, weeping slightly, as though saying 'Thank-you for bringing me back home. Thank-you.' We planted the remainder of S's trees from last birthday. It had been a year; we'd been awaiting a return visit, that had never happened. Yosser was strutting around the garden as I planted, as though he'd never been away.*

*On the Sunday we did logging. No sun, Yosser stayed indoors. Warm, welcome physical work, after writing. A Skype call to Mike, then back into the basket for more blues and twos on the way home in the dark. We'd had a great birthday weekend for S, even though she wasn't there and didn't bother to turn up for her birthday tea. Early to bed. The next day, when I awoke, Yosser was nowhere to be seen. He was hiding behind the sofa, having been out in the night. Clearly he was ill.*

*Later—after cashing in a fifty euro note left over from the Bled trip for a down payment at the vets—I was invited in for tea by P, a neighbour of old. We spoke of our lives over the past 20 years since I'd lived at The Court; P spoke of her exit from the NHS, and her antipathy to her boss. I asked how she'd dealt with it. 'I Hexed him' she said. 'Hexed?' I queried.*

*P gave me a strange look: 'I'm a witch. If people cross me I Hex them. Bad things happen. So is C' (another neighbour). She gave examples, which, combined with that gaze, told me she wasn't kidding. Me and Yosser better watch our step.*

## The Trees #27

### The Letter:

*April, a Tuesday: I'd managed to have a week when I did some long walks, including Caradoc summit again, and a Sunday lunchtime walk past Caer Caradoc, to The Royal Oak at Cardington. It used to be my local in my previous life, this was the first visit in over 15 years.*

*It was the week in which I'd disposed of my Leica's: in a complex deal that released cash for a bike that would do a return trip to Slovenia two up; and also facilitate more writing time. Then I'd changed my mind. Then I'd found out that the Leica's had gone, and felt relieved. A week of letting go; letting come. I'd applied for a trucking job—having given up on the agency—to enable further writing time and fund the post submission Slovenia trip post submission. I couldn't afford to run out of cash again, as I had repeatedly of recent months. I'd spent some time reflecting on the ways I was finding juggling these demands—the possibilities of pleasing of disappointing others—stressful. Minor actions towards uncertain outcomes seemed to alleviate this; even the disappointment of losing the Leica's; the possibility of losing the bike, and thus the putative Slovenia trip; the job application; a random act of kindness: And the walks.*

*This Tuesday I'd been for the umpteenth time slated to move the plane from Wellesbourne to White Waltham to have new radios fitted. And for the umpteenth time the weather was out of my limits for transit flying VFR in the Pitts. And I'd run out of both milk and breakfast making materials. Thought the weather was even out of my limits for walking, the 7 minute walk in the rain into town was bearable. The Double yolked egg and bacon breakfast more so. Then a cappuccino in G&G coffee while reading Jung. It even felt like I was working, but not well.*

*I stepped out of G&G coffee, and Howard pulled up. H is a retired orthopaedic surgeon in the James Robertson-Justice mould: ex Bart's; flyer, golfer, sailor. Good cook and sommelier. In an instant I flipped to day off mode; taking a trip with him to Sleaford airfield to help with some maintenance. Becoming into the maybe of the present moment rather than must do active. We had a grand day, I helped wax the wings and reassemble the cockpit; we spoke of his sailing exploits; I updated re S and DDD. We went for a pint and a sandwich. Pragmatic, practical, fixing, maintaining: paradoxically blowing this day, was healing, as was reconnecting with H. He gave me a lift home, dropping me off at teatime. We agreed to reconvene our curry nights—cut short by my trucking.*

*Entering the Court, there was an envelope on my mat in the hallway, ominous, marked: 'Please Do Not Ignore This Letter'. Direct-Debit fucking Debbie. There was only one thing for it, me and Yosser needed to get to The Ford, comply with the injunction: deposit the envelope in The Magic Bird Box, and soonish.*

## The Trees #28

### Yosser-land 2:

*April: After yet more snow; me and Yosser pitched up at the Ford. I'd been one more time;—the week before—cleared the chimney blockage and felled two more Alder trees.*

*Now S was there, on two weeks leave, only she'd been working again, overdoing what she refers to as 'The Black Crow' (workaholism). When I arrived there was a pigeon on the drive, dead, looking like it had exploded; a profusion of light feathers in the darkness.*

*The week was spent clearing space; throwing away; packing up; and some walking and fun stuff too. I'd paused the writing, had been reading avidly. K pinged her thesis draft too, which I read on the second Saturday afternoon.*

*Given that I hadn't and don't want to leave The Ford, clearing space felt energising; like the necessary precursor to the next thing. (Only nobody knows what the next thing is—with the possible exception of Yosser).*



## The Trees #29

### The Trip:

*May, a Friday. It had been a bit of a week: me and Yosser had gone back to The Ford to help with the clear-out; old papers were burned; on the Tuesday I'd gone by train to White Waltham to pick up the Pitts, then flown to Wellesbourne, then to Gloucester, then drove back to The Ford. Wednesday I returned to The Court, and slept.*

*Now, Friday, I'd returned to London for the first time since the day before Good Friday 2016, and S's meeting with Direct-Debit Debbie, the toxic lawyer.*

*Convening at City Lit for Inexpert2018, even the cast was the same as my previous trip. Yet I had changed, in some ways profoundly: m certainties had been disrupted: by S's illness; by the ensuing separation, and not least, by the interventions of Direct-Debit Debbie in our situation. At the same time, I have to acknowledge that I have much to thank Debbie for: The Alder Altar; The Daily flowers; my shifted relationship with Yosser; The Bled trip; my current trajectory of inquiry; my experimental writings. Oh, and losing my home; and reengaging with poetry: via quartet of poems; written to help apprehend and process Debbie's machinations.*

*We're in a theatre, a hundred of us. The vibe is good. The trumpeter who had each break had started playing in January, largely tutored via utube videos; the art were failures, curated by a non-curator; the experiments were random, lovely.*

*I made photos and tweets, having been appointed social media correspondent.*

*On a whim, I entered the lottery for a 10 minute spot, and 'won'. I had a stage. For the first time in over two years I was back in the realm of performative practice. I told the story, in brief; of the Altar and Yosser and The Flowers and Bled and Direct-Debit Debbie and the four poems.*

*The read one—the first in the series: it felt weird and great, and, oddly, slightly nauseating; all at the same time.*

*Then, afterwards, many people came to congratulate and thank me. Suddenly those far of days in the stream and the walks with Yosser, and the writings and pictures all seemed to come together. There had been a shift: in connecting with that audience, via the articulation of my experiences, there had been a shift: towards integration.*

*Me and Yosser may not have been wasting our time, after all.*

## The Trees #30

### The Rescue:

2018: May, a Friday before bank holiday. *It had been another bit of a week: I'd had a chest infection for over a week since returning from The Ford. Yet I'd needed to fly; in order to get current, and to fly with SJ, a new customer; and, not least, to fly with an examiner in order to revalidate my Flying Instructors rating, to be done every three years. And there was this thesis writing to get on with too. I'd been biting off more than I could chew.*

*The previous Saturday's flying had gone well: I'd knocked some of my own rust off, and SJ proved to be an interesting chap, who works in R&D on an under-the-radar project developing electric aircraft elsewhere on the airfield. By Sunday I was banjaxed, the chest infection having got the better of me. So I had the day off. Monday, drive to Gloucester, depart Gloucester airport at 09.10, land at Wellesbourne at 09.30, have chat to examiner; nice chap, ex-Concorde pilot that I'd flown with 6 years previously. That all went well, apart from the new radio failing towards the end of the sortie. Back to Glos and the radio worked fine again as I rolled and hesitation rolled my way back; weaving between the building towering cumulus that portended thundery showers. Back on the ground I re-hydrated and washed the plane in the sunshine.*

*As the week rolled on chest infection receded and I found my way back into thesis writing. Then the weather broke, and by Friday I'd decided that The Ford would have to wait, and writing take precedence. I walked into town for breakfast and cat food and a bit of ginger for the beef curry I'd made the day before. Back home by 10.00 and Yosser had let himself out. I sat down and wrote, and became heavily involved in the nuances of the healing factors of creative process. And still it rained. I called Yosser for his lunch. No response, which was very unusual, but not unheard of. The cricket bowled on on the radio and I half reflected while writing on the way Yosser likes to listen to the cricket too. Then, late afternoon, after around 5 hours, my writing tank ran dry. I came up for air, having just written of Yosser.*

*Suddenly, horridly, presciently, I was gripped by a sense of dread, something being wrong: Yosser was in trouble. I walked out of the french windows into the rain in my anorak, calling, feeling he may be stuck in one of the old wartime buildings that edge The Court. No joy. Then along the drive and onto the road, again no joy. Into Rectory Meadow: no joy, but I thought I'd heard a faint mewling; difficult to discern among the sound of falling rain on leaves. Into the big garden of Tiger Hall, the mewling faded, back towards the entrance, it increased: Yosser had got himself invisibly stuck, in a large Lime tree.*

*A long scrabble ensued as I climbed the tree; eventually managing to hoik a very soggy, sodden and sorry Yosser out, onto the high garden wall; eventually onto the ground. Traumatized and wet, we made our way to The Court; at least one of us reflecting on the perils of biting off more than is readily chewable. And on the wisdom of paying attention to dread.*

## The Trees #31

### **Yew:**

2019, May. *Me and Yosser hadn't been back to The Ford for some time. But there was work to do on one of the trees, this time by the professionals. The Yew tree by his hatch at the East end of the building needed pruning, in preparation for works to be done rebuilding the chimney.*

*We hung out for a couple of days, chopping wood, writing, re-acclimatising, taking pictures of flowers. Chasing Jinns.*

*Alan, the tree surgeon, was due on the Friday. Me and Yosser were primed to supply teas and biscuits, and, when the job was done, some of Julian's cyder. The tree gang rolled up, Alan, and his two assistants: one a recently qualified tree surgeon, one a recently retired close protection body-guard. And Alan's dog, an aged Staffordshire Bull Terrier.<sup>592</sup> A lovely bunch, I gave them teas, and then went about my business. Yosser had disappeared. No matter. Must be the dog.*

*When the guys had finished, they gathered for ciders just as it started to drizzle. I had a conversation with Alan about trees and inter-species communication; starting warily, in case he thought me to be nuts. He got it straight away, and we chatted about the Tudge book-The Secret Life of Trees-and what we might learn from trees ('to slow the fuck up'), and from other species.*

*Then Yosser turned up, warily at first. The dog was back in Alan's van.*

*I remarked to Alan about Yosser's prolonged absence: 'Oh, he was in the very top of the Yew tree when we arrived; I thought he was a crows nest, and we had to bring him down.'*

*When the tree gang had gone I reflected; on our conversations, and upon Yosser's behaviour. I had never seen him in that tree before at all, let alone at the top of it. Strange behaviour, even for him. The only possible conclusion being, that, in his own way, it seemed that Yosser had been trying to protect the tree. So I looked him in the eye, and asked him straight.*

*Yosser returned my gaze, unflinching; giving me one of his penetrating funny looks.*

*That'll be it then.*

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<sup>592</sup> Yosser has two breeds of dog which he prefers to provoke: Staffordshire Bull Terriers, and Alsations. I have no idea why.

### Appendix 3. *Writing the soul*: workshop glimpses

#### G1:

Something has shifted between me and my father; not that he knows it, I think!

Something has shifted between me and my father; I wonder if he knows it?  
Should I tell him?

#### G2:

old newspaper -  
transistor radio -  
glass jars for Jams-  
dust dancing in the ray  
of light...  
As if I saved myself  
from danger, survived  
stepping into an  
unknown land  
breathing its  
air in, returning  
a bit different.

#### G3:

I am in a liminal space  
It is my margin and where I  
Can unload the pressure of having to  
be on thing or another. I am not one  
thing or another. I am afraid of being one  
thing or another because that would mean that  
I am not something else, ..., which I am.

#### G4:

Who am I bringing  
to all of you here?

My old fears, or defeats, or  
the ghosts that haunt me?  
How powerful and plentiful they are.  
How eager they are to come out and play.

And how strong is laughter and love,  
how joyful is touch  
when a deep breath opens up space  
for the ghosts to dance.

**G5:**

"Him", written it now feels harsh for I  
see him differently now - or was I seeing  
him differently before he died - standing at the  
top of a building overlooking the M5 - looking out  
at the traffic. "Dad, how are you", I say into  
the phone & in the silence there is  
"What is it like to be dying?"  
"To be honest I feel a burden  
lifting, I don't have to go to the office any more."  
"I feel ready." There were a few real conversations like that before he  
died - a seeing past - but back then, back on  
that foggy November evening  
he was still a scary monster, "my scary monster."

**G6:**

"In those days I often  
dreamed of being able to  
fly. It wasn't without effort:  
I really had to 'flap' my arms  
up and down, faster and faster,  
really give it all and then,  
only when I tried my most,  
when I really thought I could  
not only give any more, not try any  
harder, only then I would ride  
up to the sky, leaving the  
danger behind me."

**G7:**

The memory coming back -  
is how after my mother and sister's death  
the week after their car accident,  
I came back to my piano lesson  
and didn't play.  
For some months - I believe it between January and  
the summer - I didn't play.  
I simply went to my piano teacher, had my  
toastie and chocolate, and went back to  
school.  
It wasn't spoken about, although this may  
more be a loss of memory which I suffer from thinking  
back of this time. But a friend of the  
family remembers how the teacher let them know.

**G8:**

We struggle  
in our own private hells  
touching our souls  
only for fleeting moments.

You wait for me to save you with my love  
I wait for you to save me with your grace

and we swirl around, twisted in our longing  
and belonging, tethered to our own rocks  
in our own hells, knowing in our hearts  
love will set us free.

Shackled in our own chains  
I reach out to you  
as you do too  
desperately trying  
to reach each other  
our fingers  
on the verge of touching.

**G9:**

Bladen - B for short - is a slight  
Whiskery old man with bright eyes, but  
terrible teeth. He's wearing clothes that  
were sewn in for the winter, but never  
shaken off or ?????? out when the  
days started to lengthen. He's full  
of mischief - half-wise - half-fool  
- a laugh like a rusty saw scraped  
over cans in a pile

He's on bike and came up a hill  
Where there are goats but no other  
people. The goat bells clinkle  
clankle.

B: Hey you in there  
- Silence  
B: You there (louder)  
Clink Clank  
B: You there - I know you are there - come  
out - or at least speak.  
- Clink - Clank  
B: I have something for you... a silk  
Voice: Go away - who are you - I'm not  
here - Its just the goats playing tricks on you...

**G10:**

Your feet

Little feet they were, round and juicy, always dangling from your short chair. Your feet now? Well at least they are attractive feet, strong and graceful despite their almost visible aroma.

Even you might turn me in or at the least look at me sternly if I was to sit and worship at your feet. They were once mine, you see, my tiny playthings, there for my hands to knead and my nose to smell and they never failed to dry a tear, bring a smile and a grateful moment.

**G11:**

I can't do this

Please

Not tonight

But it is time

**G12:**

Rain spots the prayer book page  
The mumbled Kaddish  
A tree, an earth pile, a  
spade, the thud of soil  
on the wooded lid  
The coffin. We turn to leave  
My nephew lingers, I look back  
seeing him, staring down into his  
grandfather's grave, further puzzled  
by who he was, who he is.

**G13:**

Go on the left again, he says.

And I know. His cheek has been brushed by that out  
of shape air.

And now he's just making sure he felt what he felt.

Just making sure.

The noose is tightening.

**G14:**

if I touch you lightly,  
with a hint of my caring,  
will you recoil? think me  
inappropriate? transgressive?  
Dangerous?

We practice the "Great Restraint"  
living in a wound that yet  
nourishes us.  
In a somewhere, we will meet  
finally, kiss.

The heart thus  
consummated we will go beyond  
mere desiring and, finally free  
begin the work.

**G15:**

I always want to change, move, walk  
away. There is an impatience in me that  
comes when things don't goh way I want them  
to go. When I meet disappointments, failures,  
criticism, negative feedback, my first reaction  
is always: let's quit, run away, get out of here.

This I don't like, I don't tolerate, I don't  
longer want to be part of.

Why do I run away?  
Did I run away?

**G16:**

ON DEALING WITH THE MESSINESS OF REJECTION

I OFFER you my HELP  
And try my best to WOW!  
But you say "NO THANKS" and  
"WE'RE ALL SET FOR NOW"

You like me alright  
you are impressed with my CV But  
Do you realise it's just my "paperwork"  
It isn't really ME!  
So back to square one. I'll keep  
looking with POSITIVE PROJECTION  
IN SECRET, HOPE THAT REACHING  
OUT WON'T CAUSE ME MORE  
REJECTION!



**G17:**

Wholly giving, wholly taking,  
no counting of cost.

How I am and how you are  
I can tell and you can tell  
Though neither of us know  
Needing what we were  
And how it used to be  
As well as each other differently.

Is it possible to fall in love  
again and anew?

**G18:**

Since the inset of her marital  
issues which had no fault to me, she cut  
all lines of communication with me.

I felt jilted and betrayed. I felt lonely without  
the sisterhood bond we shared, Her absence  
took a chunk in my thinking brain, this is someone we  
had shared loads of intimate heartfelt time together and  
supporting each other through out pains.

How dare she turn her back on me, it's been  
a heartbreaking time to go through this  
break and rejection of sisterhood.

**G19:**

The elderly black gentleman  
calmly reaches across the legs of the  
corpse to extract the chosen pack of meat from  
the fridge. Unconcerned. Death in the fridge,  
death propped up against it. Life goes on...

He looks ready to be our next client. No  
disrespect in his actions, just a quiet  
acceptance that death is part of life.  
Maybe he knows his time is not far off!

Wheezy cough. Smoker, his  
fingers are yellow.

**G20:**

I breathe deep into my chest  
and feel a pain, a gulp, a sob, an emptiness  
that has no specific place, no specific form.

At times it engulfs me, overwhelms, at others a small  
dark tenderness, a scar from a long healed wound  
the ache of a missing limb. It is the end  
of a deep breath.. a small dark space where  
I hold my loneliness and my shame.

**G21:**

Perhaps, what if:

Our shame,  
And the shame  
Of others,  
Burning;  
Un-deserved;

Is there:  
Warding off darkening  
Beings and things?

Is there:  
As a way-mark,  
On fire,  
Ablaze:

Is there  
To light  
Our trail:

Homeward?

**G22:**

I thought it was mine, yet I  
realise my body is part  
of a public real-estate....

**G23:**

I noticed it in your  
eyes, you changed,  
you stepped away in  
a world\* I could not  
follow you.

You made an effort, you showed that  
this is your biggest fear.  
The fear of disappearing as you

\*could be 'world'

## Appendix 4. *Bled*: A Travelogue

[Excerpt]

### The Idol

Someone told Uwais el-Quarni that a certain dervish sat on a tomb, dressed in a shroud and weeping.

Qarni said:

'Tell him that the method has become an idol; he must transcend the practice, for it is an obstacle.'<sup>593</sup>

Dhun-Nun

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<sup>593</sup> Shah, I. 2015(2); 217 Note: This is in the section meeting with Khidr: an 'unseen guide' of the Sufis



Untitled. Timmelsjoch pass, Austria, 2016

## Prologue: The Lake

*Just how I came to be in a business school, in Bled, Slovenia, reading a poem - one that I'd written a couple of years before, after a session with Angela, my psychologist - isn't entirely clear to this day. Given that, almost on a whim and a prayer, I had ridden my motorbike to Bled. Given that I had come there to talk about making photographs while standing in a stream at dawn for forty days (which in itself was unusual, given the context) - flashing back, to a hot, stuffy, cramped untidy office in a post '92 university, to an event that had happened six years previously, was not on the cards.*

*The day started kind of normally, by riding a borrowed bicycle around the lake at Bled, from my campsite, so that I could hang out in the foyer of a 5 star hotel for an hour waiting for Katherine and Mike to show up. We planned our whole gig on the hoof over breakfast; then I hopped on my borrowed bicycle, scooting downhill this time, to IEDC. I told Jenna, the organiser of our revised 'plan'. Given all of that, reading out my poem, Performance Review, impromptu, was kind of in the flow of things.*

*It was just like being a university teacher again. And, in a funny kind of way, the events depicted in the poem Performance Review and the other two poems that I read, were right at start of the road that led me to Bled. How I came to be reading, at 09.30 on the first Saturday of September, a poem - about institutionalised workplace abuse - and all that such phenomena can lead to. My cue? The previous presenter had done a one act play on the same theme; it would have seemed odd not to. It opens thus:*

Hey you -  
with queer fear-  
do you remember the days  
hearing when you  
hewed a scabby performance  
review, from the maze  
of bureau-speak  
generated by those  
HR freaks (undisclosed)

*It opened up quite a debate.*

*Suddenly, my being in Bled didn't seem quite so crazy, after all. Upon my return from Bled I wrote a travelogue—an elven part meditation—the middle three parts which appear here .*

The need for attachment never lessens. Most human beings simply cannot tolerate being disengaged from others for any length of time. People who cannot connect through work, friendships, or family usually find other ways of bonding, as through illnesses, lawsuits or family feuds. Anything is preferable to that god forsaken sense of irrelevance and alienation.

Bessel Van Der Kolk. From *The Body Keeps the Score: mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma* <sup>594</sup>



Untitled. Bled, Slovenia, 2016



Sunday: I meandered back to the campsite, back on the BMW for the first time in 3 days, it was baking hot, felt like a storm may be brewing. I couldn't be fagged to pack tent and move out in the heat. Instead I washed a few clothes, had an ice cream, and lay out on my thermarest, looking at maps, and plotting the way back to Lingen: first stop, Kranjska Gora, and the border between Slovenia and Italy.

That evening as the storm started to break, I supped a couple of Weizenbiers, and reflected:

If *Performance Review* had connected me so well, had resonated, what was this telling me?

Could exploring my own mental health in this way be a means of helping S, and others, (and me)?

What was the role of the bike trip—I was certain that it played a part, and that my presence, my 'space' at the conference would have been significantly different in many ways had I EasyJetted in—but how? And why?

Could the return trip hold some clues and truths?

Was, finally, a practice of connection / re-connection emerging from this *method of madness*?

## Kranjska Gora, Slovenia: finding meaning

The meaning of the work can only be realised over time (though never finished), not because the 'temporal distance' is needed for us to get the meaning of the work 'into perspective,' but because it is time which brings the new situations and contexts within which the possibility of the work's meaning can come into expression more fully so that the work 'increases in being'.

Henri Bortoft, From *Taking Appearance Seriously: the dynamic way of seeing in Goethe and European thought* <sup>595</sup>

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<sup>595</sup> Bortoft, H. 2012; 122



Untitled. Bled, Slovenia, 2016

Monday: The night before the heavens had tipped a lot of water onto my tent, it was soaking, and dirty with Slovenian soil when I packed. I just stuffed it, loosely, into a pannier, and went and paid.

By the time I'd got to Jesenice I was back into rhythm of the bike and the bike trip. I'd seen Tanur on leaving. I was at the lights, stopped. She was on the other side, crossing on foot. Unmistakable with pink dreadlocks. I tooted, she didn't notice, or respond. Conference over then, back to the road, and a different movie.

On the road to Kranjska Gora I was definitely in Eastern Europe. On the way from the Austrian border with Slovenia, and into Bled, I hadn't noticed the 'eastern-ness'—now, on the Kranjska Gora road, there was a bleakness to the architecture and street furniture not seen in Bled or Radovljica. There was an emptiness to the roads too. And a 'non-Italian' style of driving, that was relaxing.<sup>596</sup> The riding and the regular thrum of the flat twin, and the at-one-ness state induced by well over 1000 miles under the wheels in just over a week gave space for rewinding the neurones; for seeking connections: between the ride and my inquiry; between my health and the identified *Toxic Academy (Global) Inc.*; between my health and S's health, and between the poetry-written-from-trauma of the post-Leviathan period, and the more inquisitive inquiry of the *Alder Altar* and the *Daily Flowers*.

I felt there to be some missing links. Encouraged by the resonances of the Bled conference, I intended to deliberate these further, as the mountain roads unwound beneath my wheels, on the way back to Le Harvre, where I did not need to be until Thursday evening (it now being Monday). I figured that me, and the bike, and the spirit of Yosser, and the roads through the Dolomites, may reveal some answers, along with a book or two that I had with me.

### **Cortina**

My maps had got wet. I'd left them out the night before and they were soaking, unusable. At Kranjska Gora, just before the Italian border, I stopped to get some new ones. I figured that both the maps, and the fuel, would be cheaper. Kranjska Gora is a skiing town. (When I got back to England I discovered that S's parents had been staying there. We didn't cross paths. Probably just as well.) Some insights gained on the journey so far were that: S's parents don't like me; that they are controlling towards S; that they are trying to drive a wedge between us; and that S's health may well be related to this stuff. The questions for me being, how? And why?

With new dry maps, and topped off with fuel, I left Kranjska Gora—and shortly after, Slovenia—and rolled into Italy. There was an autostrada floating about in the sky above me. I stuck to the highway. After a while I was joined by a British registered bike, we wove through the mountains together. As Monday mornings went, this was a good one. The weather had improved, the roads had dried, and I thought I might hook up with the other biker when he stopped for coffee, though it wasn't to be. I'd passed him.

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<sup>596</sup> On my trip through the Dolomites it was difficult to ride defensively, due to the apparently differing laws of physics: braking distances half to a quarter, space when passing similarly reduced.. It would appear that this is a function of ego though, there were some disturbing posters of a one legged female biker at regular intervals along the road to reinforce the point.

Eventually when I stopped just after mid day, he was nowhere to be seen. Then, just as I'd finished my polenta and sausage meat, they passed. He and his pillion waved. I waved back, but they had gone.

Back on the bike, I came across a cat, sprawling in the road; in the shade, Yosser-like. It was now hot in the sun, and the cat was shade-bathing, not present to the dangers. Being present, on a bike, especially on a long trip, is a pre-requisite. Yet strangely, such presence-ing, facilitates also a special kind of mind-wandering. It is a kind of lucid dreaming, around which insights may start to occur, if encouraged.

I'd missed a turn, that was supposed to cut Cortina out altogether. So, for the second time in a week, I rolled into this town, hesitating. Whether to retrace my steps back over the pass to the South west; or to head north—still retracing—but then onto the West, along the same valley that, if followed eastwards, goes back to Slovenia. I got spat out onto a North-ish road. I stopped for fuel and ice cream, checked the map. north, then west is was. Maybe back to Timmelsjoch, maybe the Brenner, maybe the Stelvio. We'd see. The roads were unfolding like a story: maybe this way, maybe that. And when looked back upon, there is a kind of reverse engineered inevitability: A bit like dealing with trauma then.

The land or trauma is a kind of reverse-engineered, storied reality, that becomes more real than the present. The poem *Performance Review*, revisits a story. It was written, in a a pub garden in Llandrindod Wells, after seeing Angela, the psychologist that I work with. It took about 15 mis to write, and came in one hit. Being present in that story, has led me towards this one, with my body keeping the score: re-wired for persecution; ready to fire off at the clop of the post hitting the floor. Safer, by far, to be riding a bike across the alps, and pondering the resonances of mental illnesses, in organisations, and in families.

The difference being, that on a bike, in the moment, you can alter your reality. I stared to play with the idea of revisiting trauma, while riding. Including the real and present potential trauma of losing my home, and Yosser. Anxiety eluded me, which was interesting. Biking was again, proving to be grounding:

Visiting the past in therapy should only be done while people are, biologically speaking, firmly rooted in the present, and feeling as calm, safe and grounded as possible.<sup>597</sup>

This was my state when I wrote *Performance Review*. This was now my state, on my bike, flowing back to wards the Austrian border. Van Der Kolk goes on:

("Grounded" means that you can feel your butt in your chair, see the light coming through the window, feel the tension in your calves, and hear the wind stirring in the tree outside.) Being anchored in the present while revisiting the trauma opens the possibility of knowing that the terrible events belong to the past. For that to happen, the brains watchtower, cook, and timekeeper need to be online. Therapy won't work as long as people keep being pulled back into the past.<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>597</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 70

<sup>598</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 70

The road ended at a confusing roundabout, that wanted to filter me onto an autostrada/ Bahn. It was 4pm I stopped, to look at the map, in a kind of car park affair that looked like it was a service station, but wasn't. I was at the South end of the Brenner pass. It was hot. I took out my soggy camping kit to dry, which it did in about 10 minutes flat. I got myself orientated. I could still head North, towards the Austrian border, and stay off the Autobahn. It looked like I could then head east, towards the Stelvio pass, hanging on to the South side of the Tirol.

There is a deep aesthetic quality to a motorbike trip; as there is with oppression, in organisations, in families. Some dots were beginning to join up as I meandered north wards in the shadowed valley, past defences that were put there in the war to keep the allies at bay. (So the Italians were fair weather fiends of the Third Reich then?)

At the head of the valley there was an option to hang a left, before the Brenner proper. Jaufenpass. Ought to run in the general direction of the Stelvio. Let's give it a whirl. Something about the rises on this pass seemed more serious; double bends that you couldn't see all the way around; big contrast between light and shade; penetrating from the glare to the shade was impossible. I wended my way to the top, by now at one with the bike again, wondering about where I might stay.

## **Jaufenpass, Süd Tirol, Italy: a day off; reflections on journey**

All happy families are like one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

From *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy



Untitled. Jaufenpass, Italy, 2016



Evening: At the top of the pass there was a cafe, and a biker laying supine on a bench, in the lee of the strong northerly wind that was blowing. I paused, took some photos, sat briefly at the benches (this is a ski cafe). Then left. It felt all wrong, too high, too exposed. Lovely view, but not a place to pause.

I descended the south-facing side of the pass, back towards Italy, and the sunshine. A few bends down there was a gasthaus, the Alpen Rose. It had a few bikes parked outside. Still didn't feel right, I felt in need of a proper haven.

Then I passed one set back, maybe 150 yards off the pass. It looked sheltered, faced south. At the next hairpin I trundled into the overshoot, turned around and backtracked, turning right of the pass, halting under a roofed area, a perfect bike shed.

*Parlo Inglese?* I asked a bunch of young folk sat outside, they were all drinking beer, apart from the girl.

'A little', she answered in perfect english.<sup>599</sup> Then I noticed that Katya's companions were all speaking (Austrian) German. I had found a liminal space, I felt that I'd found a little bit of home—in the Italian tirol—too.

'Good'. I had found my space for pause and reflection a day early. There was a sauna next door to my room. It was my mum's eighty-eighth birthday. I called her, I was looking out over the valley that falls away to wards Merano. I was due a day off, my mum agreed, so it must be so.

I pulled some kit inside, laid out all my old maps to dry. The wet Monday morning in Slovenia seemed a different life ago. (Another quality of motorcycle journeys?)

Home. Home from home. Secure base: Refuges for organisational refugees.

The trip was becoming a becoming; and a sense-making of the becoming.

Becoming, in a strange way, more deeply connected to our home in Herefordshire; feeling less estranged from S; becoming taken seriously on the international conference circuit; re-becoming a transcontinental biker; re-becoming a maker of artefacts; re-becoming a teacher: becoming a traveling-healer. Becoming into a different kind of love, and a home-coming to self.

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<sup>599</sup> (Over the next two days I had several conversations with Katya, she rarely stumbled in English, and I recall no mistakes.)

In *The Fruitful Darkness*, Joan Halifax expresses it thus:

We go into the darkness, we seek initiation, in order to know directly how the roots of all beings are tied together: how we are related to all things, how this relationship expresses itself in terms of interdependence, and finally how all phenomena abide within one another.<sup>600</sup>

And:

[that] it is important for us to discover directly this ground of reality, this web of mutuality. The experience of interconnectedness, however one might come to discover it, changes how we perceive the world, and thereby all our relations with the phenomenal world become an expression of our extended self, a self with no boundaries.<sup>601</sup>

So why would a motorbike trip, alone through the alps, and several countries, to eastern Europe, lead to enhanced awareness of self-as-interconnected? Joan Halifax uses the term *nonduality*:

What I mean by nonduality is that we are intimately connected; in fact, we are intimate. We abide in each other. Nonduality may well be a perception and experience that is revealed only to the innocent.<sup>602</sup>

Was there an arising, or re-arising, of innocence that was taking me back to my self on these winding roads up and down mountainsides of the Süd Tirol? I spoke to my mother. It was 5th September, her birthday. She was delighted to hear from me, and encouraged me to stopover another day.

Morning, Tuesday: In the morning I picked up a note from a friend that presumed to know the state of play between me and S, but didn't. It contained advice, which I found irritating, and also way off beam. I phoned S from the balcony as the sun rose on the mountains: *nonduality* in action. I vowed to ignore further notes from that particular source. I told Katya at breakfast that I would like to stay another day.

I took *The Body Keeps the Score* into the spa. After a sauna, I started to delve: into trauma; into the self; into resonances and neurology and antidotes. Gradually, over the day, the relevance of the bike trip; the poetry-from-trauma in *Performance Review*; the photographs and glimpses of *Alder Altar* and *Daily Flowers* - coalesced into a realisation: I was coming home to what Joan Halifax refers to as: '*[a] self that is co-extensive with all phenomena—what has been called by the deep ecologists the ecological self.*'<sup>603</sup>

An underwritten part of the method started emerging too: that of engaging with both my complex PTSD, and also S's anxiety and depression: Both linked to trauma, but in our case differing life stages; differing kinds of trauma. This all started to click into place trundling back through northern Slovenia, and into the Dolomites.

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<sup>600</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 137

<sup>601</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 138 (see also 152)

<sup>602</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 150

<sup>603</sup> Halifax, J. 1993; 160

The insights gained are still tumbling through to me; like having picked a lock, and the final levers falling into place. Funny that it took a bike trip to enable it, but now, at the end of the summer of 2016, I think I might know why. A lengthy quote from Van der Kolk sets the scene:

Under ordinary circumstances the two sides of the brain work together more or less smoothly, even in people who might be said to favour one side or the other. However, having one side, or the other shut down, even temporarily, or having one side cut off entirely as sometimes happened in early brain surgery) is disabling.

Deactivation of the left hemisphere has a direct impact on the capacity to organise experience into logical sequences and to translate our shifting feelings and perceptions into words. (Broca's area, which blacks out in flashbacks, is on the left side.) Without sequencing we can't identify cause and effect, grasp the long-term effects of our actions, or create coherent plans for the future. people who are very upset sometimes say they are 'losing their minds' In technical terms they are experiencing the loss of executive functioning.

When something reminds traumatised people of the past, their right brain reacts as if the traumatic event were happening in the present. But because their left brain is not working very well, they may not be aware that they are re-experiencing and reenacting the past—they are just furious, terrified, enraged, ashamed or frozen. After the emotional storm passes, they may look for something or somebody to blame for it. They behaved the way they did because you were ten minutes late, or because you burned the potatoes, or because you "never listen to me." Of course, most of us have done this from time to time, but when we cool down, we hopefully can admit our mistake. Trauma interferes with this kind of awareness, and, over time, our research has demonstrated why.<sup>604</sup>

The trip was becoming something else too—anti-traumatic—in more ways than one. My anxieties and confidence collapse that had preceded it had evaporated; my decision making had improved, as had my resilience; communication and connectedness with S had improved: I was seeing with greater clarity. I was sleeping better, and though missing home and Yosser, feeling a greater sense of purpose that for some time. This not so linked to outcome (which was and is still unclear), but process: I was curious as to how this apparent mixture of hardship danger discomfort physical risk and indulgence was healing: Was it aesthetics, or perception, or more than the sum of these? There seemed to be something of the quality, and direction, of attention too.

Bortoft refers to the tendency to take meaning as '*finished*' meaning - what the author had in mind'. Yet evidently when I started the *Alder Altar* work, and the *Daily Flowers*, and now the Bled trip and travelogue, there was no, or very little intent at determining what kind of output or outcome there may be. In *Smelling the Flowers [part 1 wet data]* the intent was merely to generate, collate, and distribute some raw data in the form of a rough artefact, just to see what the effects might be.<sup>605</sup>

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<sup>604</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 45

<sup>605</sup> Stanley, P. 2016

One such example was this trip to Bled, to distribute pictures of flower and writings that had not been conceived of when the abstracts for the conference were written and accepted back in January 2017. Bortoft refers to this desire for resolved 'finished meaning' is to 'find ourselves unavoidably in the grip of the subject-object separation'.<sup>606</sup> I cast my mind back to my inquiry proposal<sup>607</sup> and on my return home I looked it up, (this was excerpted in turn from an earlier paper):

The ripples of events spread through the pond. Another question arises around the wisdom of a spiritual journey being undertaken by a non-religious pilgrim: yet another example of the square peg? Yet this is where I find myself drawn.

Cervantes described it well this creeping affliction: "Fear has many eyes and can see things underground."

Life occurs both below and above ground. My mind wishes to have it one way; the people who are disgusted by expressions of fear wish to have it another way. But it depends on both, as do motorcycles. (Holbrook Pearson, M. 1997; 55)

The working focus is derived, MBA style, from some kind of assumed positive business outcome. However, the more I read, reflect, write, and connect: the more I become aware that this is only part of the story. The focus becomes diffuse, a lens wide open. The alien language of aims and objectives is limiting; they may yet be used as a creative constraint, in much the same way as say, low light in photography.'

Within the broad confines of the trip to Bled, I was finding many truths collapsing into each other; including insights into my own weaknesses, culpabilities and vulnerabilities. And a degree of blindness to what was , or had been, happening under my nose. I had spent a lot of time 'seeing underground'—dealing with and reprocessing the malign forces on *The Leviathan*—that I had failed to see into matter closer at hand. Having created the looking inward / looking outward space of the *Alder Altar* had started the process. Now, on this motorcycle road trip through the mountains to and from Slovenia, I was being accorded a space for sense and space making.

In this place high up in the Dolomites I was now finding a space of both recovery—my first day off in eight days—and insight: the recovery from fatigue was lending me a level of unguarded relaxedness that now served enhanced insights. Assisted by Van Der Kolk and Bortoft. I started to make connections: between my recovery from PTSD, and S's apparent decline; between tales of her past that S has related to me, and trauma / control / depression and anxiety; between the aesthetics of motorcycling through the alps, and the aesthetics of standing in a stream making pictures of flowers, and the role of Eye Movement Desensitising and Reprogramming (EMDR) in alleviating PTSD and anxiety.

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<sup>606</sup> Bortoft, H. 2012; 94

<sup>607</sup> *Leaving Enantiodromia: an inquiry into re-connecting*. Stanley 2013; 14

Seeing deeply, and constantly re-seeing, as when navigating a mountain pass on two wheels, or in the deep awareness space of picture making seemed to be having the same effect as EMDR. I was able to reflect and delve deeply into painful matters, and retain my equilibrium. This had the effect of lending greater clarity, of being able to penetrate previously impenetrable smokescreens. My ability to perceive the realities of my situation, and the invisible forces at work, had become considerably enhanced. I was seeing through walls, if not (yet) walking through them. I felt more powerful, more confident, less like I was going round the bend.

Supporting a loved one though [mental] illness had been challenging beyond belief, as I started to see into the possible causes—including myself. I felt, perhaps erroneously, better equipped to face the challenge with renewed flexibility and energy. Ironically, on a trip through the mountains of some foreign lands by motorcycle I had found a kind of home-coming: to self; to S; to a practice as a teacher; to the underlying truths of my inquiry. To love too, maybe.

I felt more alive than of recent months, probably than since my forty dawns in the stream making the *Alder Altar* work. I was re-finding my integrity—re-integrating—at the same time as revealing the integrity of the (apparently) reckless decision to travel to Bled by motorbike. It seemed to me I was also discovering on behalf of at least one other too, whilst at the same time being wary of projecting, or constructing a convenient (for me) reality. Was this a coming into being of a method? What, exactly, is a method? Surely it would either need to be replicable, or scaleable in some way in order to be of use, to facilitate enduring change - individually, organisationally, societally? How were those dawns in the stream, and this motorcycle journey, analogous—beyond being indulgence? The link to healing, is I think to do with encountering one's resonant script: that feeling that: *'I was designed to live like this'*. My being away in foreign lands, phoning S at home, had a rightness to it. The same was true, but in different way, of the work at the *Alder Altar*. I was being true to me, and to a version of 'us', in the moment. In *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel Van Der Kolk states:

By being able to observe trauma from the calm, mindful state that the IFS<sup>608</sup> calls the Self<sup>609</sup> [...] mind and brain are in a position to integrate trauma into the very fabric of life. This is very different from traditional desensitization techniques, which are about blunting a person's response to past horrors. This is about association and integration—making a horrendous event that overwhelmed you in the past into a memory of something that happened a long time ago.<sup>610</sup>

Reflecting, high on this pass in the Italian Dolomites—I may have stumbled on, at the very least, a method: of self-medication, of recovery and healing. By coming into understanding of the decline and recovery of my own mental health, this was how I was able to gain insights: into S's condition; into the dynamics of her family; maybe too into the ways in which I could, sometimes do, help others.

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<sup>608</sup> Internal Family Systems therapy

<sup>609</sup> Van Der Kolk elucidates on the Self in chapter 17 of *The Body Keeps the Score*. I will delve further into this towards the end of this paper.

<sup>610</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 224

There were commonalities in our states: exposure to controlling people; some acquiescence and / or collaboration; a lack of ability to recognise, or to name, what was going on; trauma from protracted exposure (me); trauma from witnessing (S); trauma from childhood witnessing and events (S). A feeling of overwhelm and incomprehension (both of us at times).<sup>611</sup>

My stumbling seems to be in part into seeing / apprehending as healing, in part journey-as-healing, in part showing and telling as healing: for others too. It was becoming clear that there are second and third person dimensions to this otherwise apparently first person inquiry and quest. Perhaps I had found that I do have something of this work to offer in service of the world. And maybe, in so discovering and doing, that I have something to offer me and my loved ones too.

By the time I'd finished with the sauna, done the laundering of my base layers and a couple of shirts, and refolded my now dry maps, it was nearly lunchtime. I took Van Der Kolk, who I had nearly finished, and Bortoft, who I had barely started, to the terrace and had lunch. Yesterday's strong wind from the north was still there, I found a sheltered spot, next to a wall, and contemplated on EMDR. Another lengthy quote by Bessel Van Der Kolk helps to define the ground of inquiry:

Some psychologists have hypothesized that EMDR actually desensitizes people to the traumatic material and thus is related to exposure therapy. A more accurate description would be that it *integrates* the traumatic material. As our research showed, after EMDR people thought of trauma as a coherent event in the past, instead of experiencing sensations and images divorced from any context.

Memories evolve and change. Immediately after a memory is laid down, it undergoes a lengthy process of integration and interpretation—a process that automatically happens in the mind / brain without input from the conscious self. When the process is complete, the experience is integrated with other life events and stops having a life of its own. As we have seen, in PTSD this process fails and the memory remains stuck – undigested and raw.

Unfortunately few psychologists are taught in their training how the memory-processing system of the brain works. This omission can lead to misguided approaches to treatment. In contrast to phobias (such as spider phobia, which is based on irrational fear), post traumatic stress is the result of a fundamental reorganisation of the central nervous system based on having experienced and actual threat of annihilation, (or seeing someone else being annihilated), which reorganises self experience (as helpless) and the interpretation of reality (the entire world is a dangerous place).<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> See Friere 1996

<sup>612</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 255-256

And:

As we've seen, traumatic memories persist as split off, unmodified images, sensations and feelings. To my mind the most remarkable feature of EMDR is its apparent capacity to activate a series of unsought and seemingly unrelated sensations, emotions, images and thoughts in conjunction with the original memory. This way of assembling old information into new packages may be just the way we integrate ordinary, non traumatic day-to-day experiences.<sup>613</sup>

It seems that this is key to what why emergent practice is both about, and how it works, at least for me. Now, pausing post lunch, before moving on to Bortoft, and a more in depth exploration of seeing, I reflected on patterns of *integration / disintegration / reintegration*. On my previous trip to the Alps, just prior to buying our home in 2007, I had felt a lot more powerful and in control of my life, than on this trip, yet this had been an illusion—the bullying started on the day that I returned. The institutionalised bullying, backed from the VC downwards, and experienced for over three years, had impacted my health, and, in turn, S's health, and our finances.

The writing and, and now reading in public, of my poems—such as *Performance Review; P.T.S.D; The Grooming Room*—was both meeting people where their pain is, and being kind of healing for me too: demonstrating a 'way of assembling old information into new packages may be just the way we integrate ordinary, non traumatic day-to-day experiences.'

In that sense this trip, and the works, and the see-ing: the *Alder Altar*; the *Daily Flowers*; my earlier poetry; were—along with this day of reading and reflecting in the mountains—a re-becoming, a re-integration; of both the senses, and the intellect: hopefully, maybe, into a practice of healing for self, and for others. I was left wondering, not for the first time, how I might engage others with the practices that I was finding to be a help to me?

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<sup>613</sup> Van Der Kolk, B. 2014; 259

## Stelvio pass, Italy, Switzerland: emerging method and practice

“But that’s another land and another time,” I say. “Here life is the end and ghosts have no meaning. I believe that. I believe in all this too,” I say looking out at the darkened prairie, “although I’m not sure what it all means yet... I’m not sure of anything much these days. Maybe that’s why I talk so much.”<sup>614</sup>

Robert Pirsig. From *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: and inquiry into values*

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<sup>614</sup> Pirsig, R. 1999; 68





Untitled. Stelvio Pass, Italy 2016

Afternoon / evening: After lunch at the *Unterer Oberereggerhof*, I laid out on a bench out of the wind, and got stuck into Bortoft—in a meaningful, inquisitive, way. I had been dipping in throughout the trip, now it felt as though I have some pegs to hang his stuff on. I'd spread my maps, and my washing, out to dry: perhaps the analogy here was to do with seeing into theory, and the ways that would help both my apprehending, and my writing about it.

Thinking and living the experiences I've been talking about had been like dreaming in a land of ghosts: I had not known what the baseline of reality was. Paradoxically, dreaming my way through the mountains, to eastern Europe and back, had served to ground me within in these realities of many mirrors: my mind and spirit and body and soul and brain were on the same page, for the first time in over a year, maybe since the Sri Lanka jolly.

There had been brief sojourns to this space, during the *Alder Altar* project, but nothing so substantial and sustained as this. I felt more connected to S than we had been for over a year too; even though separated by half of Europe. Perhaps this (apparent) dichotomy was part of the sense-making? I felt more connected to myself too, perhaps due to few forces around to knock me off balance (Italian motorists excepted).

Yet I also felt as though I had awakened in the middle of a mystery play, and was expected to write the next act, without being appraised of the whole plot to date, just fragments. My conversations with Mike, both in Switzerland and in Bled, had helped. We were both lost in similar territory, it seemed. Those conversations and the Bled conference, had also helped me to locate my inquiry in terms of practice: accessing a trajectory towards the arenas organisational behaviour and leadership development, via a practice of reflective engagement with the self, self leadership, via *self-authorship*. That family politics had hove into view, was hardly surprising, now: the ghosts were playing, in front of my eyes often. Helpful in this apprehending was Bortoft's notion of *dynamic seeing*, or looking upstream.<sup>615</sup> Mike had introduced me to Carlo Stegner, and though not fully read, I had dipped into *The Fear of Insignificance* during my sojourn in Yens on the way out.

The ghosts of organisational oppression, and of family dynamics and oppression, were coming into being, during this day of sojourn, high on a pass in the Dolomites, while my bike rested in the shade. Those ghosts were starting to shimmer, perhaps chimerically, in the sunlight of the Dolomites, and in the mind of this reinvigorated rider, on a peregrination in search of the source of some mysteries: Why don't we see what is right in front of our eyes, and we know that its there, even when 'invisible'? The pangs of missing home, and Yosser, while in this earthly paradise were blowing the ballast out of my submerged curiosity; both me and the truths of how I'd been feeling, and why they were surfacing, as I considered dynamic seeing, the act of looking upstream, and I pondered the significance of the fear of insignificance, that was at play.

I looked at my - now dry - maps too, and tried, along with google maps, to plot my way to, and over the Stelvio Pass, and onwards to France, via Switzerland.

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<sup>615</sup> Bortoft, H. 2012; 25-26

With the day off, and the reflecting and writing, and first sauna since last summer in Norway, things were starting to pull into focus: The interrelationship between my illness and S's; the possible effects of previous traumas upon her, and in turn, up on me; the ways in which these reverberations of the psyche, or of the spirit are infectious: in families; in organisations. How love may both shine light into the dynamics, and at the same time be experienced as, or re-awaken, trauma.

It seemed that for a long time I had been facing being lured, latterly pressured, into living a life that wasn't mine. In part to satisfy the status anxiety of someone whom I did not know very well, and, as I realised on the day of making the *Convolvulus* flower picture, when I had what is probably my last ever occasion to speak to her. I was surprised, probably shocked, at the distaste in her voice. I distaste that had been very well covered for years. I had been absorbing, by osmosis, and via an unwitting intermediary, some wrong headed thinking, and had not seen into the situation with much acuity for a long time. <sup>616</sup>

In this arcadian corner of the Dolomites, where I claimed a space for me and my much loved bike for around forty hours, I had found life pared down to essentials: I had food, shelter, beer, somewhere to stable my bike, was able to wash myself and some clothes; to dry my clothes and maps; bathe in a jacuzzi; take a sauna; rest; call my mother on her birthday; call S at home; have some interaction with other loved ones digitally; make some photos; plan my way back to the French coast; reflect, read, reflect, make notes. In this paring down to essentials I was finding a different method - it was like a self anointing the a warrior might undertake prior to an arduous journey or other engagement. Within this paring down were emerging the truths of what I had been facing and dealing with, and some intimations of what may lay ahead.

I was surrounded by warm souls: Katya, and her husband, and the waiter, all had lovely presences: in that sense, it felt like home, and for that period it was. I wondered how this might be repeatable?<sup>617</sup> In *The Fear of Insignificance*, Carlo Strenger delineates such space with questions:

Paring down life to the essentials requires us to ask what we want our lives to be really about. Questions in midlife can be quite radical: What are my deepest concerns? What matters to me? What is my place in the world? They touch the essence of who we are and are correspondingly quite frightening. This is neither easy nor without risk. But we always need to remember that the risk of not living our lives fully carries a price tag that can be immeasurably high.<sup>618</sup>

Now, high on the scenery of the Südtirol, I wondered how I might stay on. Or return. Or whether the pass is kept clear in winter (some aren't, but according to Katya this one is). Might I come here and do some writing for say a month? I asked Kayta. She said she was sure that we could work something out. (It could be a bit

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<sup>616</sup> See Strenger, C. 2011; 146 On the training of mind and strength of soul to contain conflict and take into account complexity. I sense that those who find themselves bound, or tempted, into controlling others, are holding unresolved conflict and shame within themselves: that status anxiety is one manifestation of this; and that in my expression of freedom-in-radical-uncertainty, my presence may be upsetting and destabilising to such people.

<sup>617</sup> I had a similar sense on the way out, at Mike's place in Yens, Switzerland.

<sup>618</sup> Strenger, C. 2011; 114

more challenging by bike in the winter, I don't think my car would make it. Perhaps I could post crates of books ahead, take a few days, just travelling when light, holing up when dark / raining snowing. Maybe its just too much to pare down to essentials, too complicated.) Maybe this was just late trip accidie, my impending re-entry into life home was wanting me already have a space to escape to. Yet at this point in the trip I was finding that space occurring within me. The radical uncertainty and un-achievability, the stripping down, that this trip bought into being, were now serving me insights, on a plate: Is eight days on the road - with two or three books, several maps, and a camera phone - what it takes?

Carlo Strenger compares this *paring down to the essentials* with Csikszentmihalyi's concept of *Flow*.<sup>619</sup> I think that it is more complex than that. Sure, on a bike trip there or flow sates, and what I would term post-flow states; in paring down life to essentials flow may (if those 'essentials' include say a pair of skis, or a bike), include flow states; or it may be something other (not instead of, perhaps as well as); something more ascetic, more spiritual: more of a gateway to the soul. The benefits of such paring down could be said to be beneficial to organisational life too. In a week when I discover that universities in the UK are to be awarded Gold, Silver, or Bronze medals according to teaching quality, sigh, the paring down would seem to be a particularly pertinent and desirable quality, and contribution to overall quality. (I wish this were a joke—perceived and measured by who and for whom?) Presciently, Pirsig identified the same malaise back in the 1970s:

Up to now Phaedrus had ben compelled by the academic system to say what he wanted, even though he knew that this forced students to conform to artificial forms that destroyed their own creativity. *Students who went along with his rules were then condemned for their inability to be creative or produce a piece of work that reflected their own personal standards of what is good.*

Now that was over with. By reversing a basic rule that all things which are to be taught must first be defined, he had found a way out of all this. *He was pointing to no principle, no rule of good writing, no theory—but he was pointing to something, nevertheless, that was very real, whose reality they couldn't deny.* The vacuum that had been created by the withholding of grades was suddenly filled with the positive goal of Quality, and the whole thing fit together. Students, astonished, came by his office and said, "I used to hate English. Now I spend more tine on it than anything else." Not just one of two. Many. The whole Quality concept was beautiful. It worked. *It was that mysterious, individual, internal goal of each creative person, on the blackboard at last.*<sup>620</sup>

The paring down and entering zones of radical uncertainty, had afforded me insights too: into the malaise afflicting Higher Education on a Global scale; into my own mental health, and how that was, and still is affected by my time teaching in the HR sector; into S's health, and the relationship between that, her work, and her past. The resonances and reverberations between organisational life, and personal family life, were becoming revealed all to starkly. Revealed in this relief from the road, offered by this bastion, as the sun started to go down, it became quickly cooler, and I got my first beer, along with some crisps.

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<sup>619</sup> Strenger, C. 2011; 116-117

<sup>620</sup> Pirsig, R. 1999; 208-209 emphasis mine.

**Appendix 4. Responses to examiners: May 2020 & November 2020**

**Unfolding Imagos: An inquiry into the aesthetics of identity**



**Table of conditions:** Submitted for the Ashridge-Hult Doctorate of Professional Studies in Organisational Change.

Paul Stanley  
Church Stretton  
31 May 2020

## Conditions Table

Condition no.	Claim (where applicable)	Extra writing / insertions	Deletions / Re-edit	Page nos.
1: Provide reflexive research narrative.		Sinkers 1-4 Sinkers 5, 6&7		20-24 307, 369-370
2: Provide clear scaffolding.		Revised abstract Revised contents pages Diagram Sinkers 1-4  Prologue [ <i>ii back-story</i> ]  Addendum to introduction Updated claims	Removed from appendix 5 in original & re-edited into a prologue.	6-7 8-9 19 20-24  16-18  31-32 34
3: Provide clear explanation of choices made in curation of material & revise document for length.		Revised abstract & added notes on structure.  Sinkers 1-4 Sinkers 5 Sinkers 6&7	Edited epigraph  Introduction: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 1: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 2: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 3: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 4: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 5: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 6: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 7: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 8: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 9: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 10: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 11: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 13: edited for length & clarity.  Chapter 14: edited for length & clarity.	3-7  20-24 307 369-370  25  40  50  71  87  107  116  133  145  155  190  212  274  281

Condition no.	Claim (where applicable)	Extra writing / insertions	Deletions / Re-edit	Page no.
3: Provide clear explanation of choices made in curation of material & revise document for length.			Chapter 15: edited for length & clarity.  Coda: deleted  Epilogue: deleted	285  341-345 (in original)  346 (in original)
4: Be explicit about inquiry method.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That <i>Via Arbona</i> is a valid practice &amp; inquiry method.</li> <li>2. That <i>Action-Phenomenology</i> is a valid practice, inquiry process &amp; framework for future inquiries.</li> <li>3. That <i>4th-Person Inquiry</i> is valid practice, inquiry method &amp; framework for future inquiries.</li> <li>4. That <i>Theory</i> in action inquiry-largely moulded on social science antecedents-is ripe for updating.</li> </ol>	<p>Sinkers 1-4 Part V Light: New section Chapter 16: New chapter</p> <p>Chapter 17: New chapter</p> <p>Chapter 18: New chapter</p> <p>Chapter 19: New chapter Sinkers 5 Sinkers 6&amp;7</p>		<p>20-24 309-371 310</p> <p>335</p> <p>352</p> <p>365 307 369</p>
5: Provide readers with discussion on 2-3 most significant ideas and thinkers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That <i>Via Arbona</i> is a valid practice &amp; inquiry method.</li> <li>2. That <i>Action-Phenomenology</i> is a valid practice, inquiry process &amp; framework for future inquiries.</li> <li>3. That <i>4th-Person Inquiry</i> is valid practice, inquiry method &amp; framework for future inquiries.</li> <li>4. That <i>Theory</i> in action inquiry-largely moulded on social science antecedents-is ripe for updating. I suggest a path for merging theory with practice in inquiry that truly aspires to the state of the 'post-conventional'.</li> <li>5. Addition of references to bibliography.</li> </ol>	<p>Part V Light: New section Sinkers 5 Chapter 16: New chapter</p> <p>Chapter 17: New chapter</p> <p>Chapter 18: New chapter</p> <p>Chapter 19: New chapter Sinkers 6&amp;7</p> <p>Bibliographic extra references denoted by *</p>		<p>306 307 310</p> <p>335</p> <p>352</p> <p>365 369-370</p> <p>375-397</p>

6: Revise abstract	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Firstly working with <i>poetic-aesthetic</i> method in this way is restorative: of individual, groups societies;</li><li>2. Secondly that the framings offered In Part V <i>Light</i> are the bases for further in depth research.</li></ol>	Re-written abstract.		6
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Dear Examiners

In response to your letters of October 2019 and July 2020, and taking our interactions as a whole, I have come to understand that you have found my work hard to enter into and elusive when it comes to making connections between the premises of that work and the expectations, and the methodological conventions, of The Academy.

I have thought carefully about how to cut through the atmosphere of impenetrability whilst still preserving the fundamental qualities, of immanence, of transcendence, that I value so deeply and which I seek to offer to The Academy. Acting as guide into my own experiences and as mentor to imagined others who might be minded to make similar explorations, thus opening The Academy to this post-conventional perspective.

Consequently, it has seemed best to me to create a specific, standalone section, a "briefing" (or "de-briefing") chamber, to discuss these matters directly. In this letter, I briefly explain the content of that section and show how the content addresses both the original conditions and the subsequent commentary upon them. I have produced an additional section: *Part VI: SpaceTime*. I note at this stage that other avenues were also available, namely extra sections on both *Via Arbora* and *4th-Person Inquiry*, however in response to the specific request to elucidate *Action-Phenomenology*, this is what I have done. My hope is that the new section provides the lens needed in order to see the rest in the post-conventional terms I offer. Within the new section, I point towards my work in other parts of the paper, to aid in this navigational process.

To answer some specific criticisms contained in this second iteration of examiner feedback, and in no particular order, I would like to note the following:

**Feedback:** *'In much of my examination (and re-examination) of this dissertation, I have been drawn to the question as to whether art itself warrants a doctoral degree.'*

**Response offered:** Noted, also in addition, there is a long tradition of art warranting academic accolades, even doctoral degrees. I would draw the panel's attention to the following, gleaned from the website of the University of Sunderland:

2). A PhD programme of study that combines practical photographic work with a textual thesis. In this model the practical work is seen as a focused and integrated part of the overall methodology with which to address the 'research question'.

3). PhD by published work. This is appropriate when a student has already published (or exhibited) a significant body of work. This work needs to have been 'peer recognised' and its submission is accompanied by a much shorter text placing the work within a critical and analytical framework.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> See: <http://photography-at-sunderland.co.uk/PhD.html>

I aver that: Firstly, some of the earlier photographic work fits [3], above, especially that appearing in chapter 6, and was noted in the bibliography; Secondly, much of the work in this thesis was accepted for AoMO 2016 in Bled, AoMO 2018 in Brighton and was due to feature in a salon at AoMO 2020 in Liverpool, now postponed due to Covid, also noted in the bibliography; Thirdly, and not least, throughout the thesis, and reiterated here yet again—in my recent writing noted above, my practice is about *process*, and *quality of process*, not, necessarily, outcome in terms of artefacts, or indeed their curation.

To borrow a quote by Patricia Leavy, which appears in my recent writings, specifically: '*With respect to considering usefulness as an evaluative criterion it is important to shy away from questions like: "Is it a good piece of art?" and rather ask: "What is this piece of art good for?"*'<sup>622</sup> This suggests that my work meets or exceeds the above criteria. As well as, in my view, offering valid responses both to examiner critique, and to the criteria noted by Patricia Leavy appearing on pages 10 and 11 of *Part VI: SpaceTime*, which this letter accompanies.

**Feedback:** '*This was a difficult piece of work to re-assess. No cover letter was supplied and there was an absence of direct engagement with the Viva process itself – there was in fact very little mention of it. [...]. This preamble means that I am assessing with a partial view (I did not re-read the entire thesis); an additional request to the candidate to ask him to supply a cover note to examiners and to mark up in the text where changes occurred in chapters 1- 15 might have aided his submission.*'

**Response offered:** Point taken. In my defence, the initial conditions letter requested 'an accompanying document' which I did supply. Furthermore, the extra section—'Light'—totalled 23,000 words. Re-editing the dissertation I culled around 24,000 words from the whole. Initially—for the first 11,000 words or so—I saved the edits. I also saved the track-changes. I then came to the view that firstly, this had become so unreadable as to be a pointless exercise; and secondly, as an editor acquaintance of mine put it, 'that way lay madness'.

**Feedback:** Mindful of arguments advocating non-linear argument, in examining this dissertation I have sought to locate (hunted for) elements of an argument in unexpected locations as well as in those locations linked to a traditional dissertation.

**Response offered:** Please refer to page 7 of dissertation, first paragraph of Abstract: 'The academic vector of the inquiry—theoretical, philosophical—may be traced via the following: Introduction *On becoming*; Chapter 1 *Analogic resonances*; Chapter 5 *Invisible skeins*; Chapter 8 *Immanent disclosures*; Chapter 13 *Nam-shrub*; Chapter 15 *Flights on fictional planes*.' See also pages 10-29 inclusive of *Part VI: SpaceTime*.

**Feedback:** '*to present how the argument underlying your thesis will be built and the elements that comprise it (Condition 2) [We see the argument as comprising of propositions and evidence-based claims. In a DProf this will relate to your contribution to your practice and may include contributions for other practitioners or scholars.]*

**Response offered:** Noted. Please see pages 3-8 inclusive, plus pages 26-34 inclusive, in the attached.

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<sup>622</sup> Leavy, P. 2015; 273.

**Feedback:** *‘to go on to show your claim building making transparent the process behind it. This would include showing how choices were made in the curation of the material that you present – how poetry and imagery for example builds towards knowledge (as you define it) (Condition 3).’*

**Response offered:** Noted. Please see pages 3-8 inclusive in the attached, plus—particularly though not exclusively—pages 26-34 inclusive.

**Feedback:** *‘to recap the claim – the shift in practice and the inquiry method you have come to and the way it helps you – explaining how it relates to and arises out of what you’ve done and why that is valid. (Condition 4, Quality aspect of Condition 1).’*

**Response offered:** Noted. Please see pages 3-8 inclusive in the attached, plus, specifically, pages 30-32; and the attached supplement to the abstract.

**Feedback:** *‘to summarise how this work relates to, informs, and builds on existent literatures on action phenomenology (Condition 5) to find a way to do this that connects with the reader so they can come the ‘para-ordinary’ world and understand the epistemological integrity of it (Condition 1).’*

**Response offered:** Noted. Please see pages 10-29 of the attached. Please note also that there are no ‘existent literatures on action phenomenology’ as it is a field which I’ve discovered and a term which I have invented. Thus phenomenology is triangulated—often blended with practice—with critique from other literatures, in order to begin to delineate this field of inquiry more precisely.

**Feedback:** *‘to find a way to do this that connects with the reader so they can come the ‘para-ordinary’ world and understand the epistemological integrity of it (Condition 1).’*

**Response offered:** Noted. Please see pages 1-9 and 30-35 inclusive of the attached.

This document—*Part VI: SpaceTime*—is offered to read alongside the 2nd edition of my thesis (31 May 2020); cross reference is made in order to point to the general genesis of both my arguments and practice. I trust that what I have done answers the outstanding queries and is in accord with your broad intentions. Assuming the work passes muster I intend to insert it between my previous writing and the bibliography (p375), thereafter repaginating from the bibliography onwards, and amending the contents page accordingly. (No changes have been made to the body since edition 2, so pagination and cross referencing will work.)

In addition I attach a revision to page 7 of the June edition of the thesis, a proposed amendment to include a supplementary abstract reflective of the actuality of the dissertation: that it is now an inquiry into a new paradigm, or series of paradigms, in Action Research. Namely, in the first instance: *Action-Phenomenology*.

I hope this meets with your satisfaction.

Yours sincerely

Paul Stanley

Church Stretton, 27 November, 2020.