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UPSTREAM CONSCIOUSNESS:  
exploring artists' fieldwork  
through geomorphing, spiralling  
and co-productive ecologies

Laura Harrington

March 2022

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the University  
of Northumbria at Newcastle for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Research undertaken in the  
Faculty of Arts, Design & Social Sciences

## Abstract

This practice-based enquiry examines the ways in which artistic practice encounters and then utilises the spatio-temporal, relational, material, and embodied nature of fieldwork.

The thesis is developed predominately through my own field-based activities and artistic production within peatland landscapes in Finnish Lapland (Sápmi), Eastern Finland and at Moor House–Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve, UK research that I have conducted with and alongside other artists and scientists, supported here by a critical survey of other artists’ methods in, and approaches to, the field.

The research therefore develops, enacts and proposes practical strategies that investigate conditions in and connections between artist and field. To this end, the thesis finds value in three critical terms and approaches – *geomorphing*, *spiralling* and *co-productive ecologies*. *Geomorphing* is a practice which is reactive to material and experiential conditions; *spiralling* holds and works with indeterminate openness; and *co-productive ecologies* privilege collective actions as eventful and critical to field-based research. These methods not only position fieldwork as a situated, self-reflective and embodied practice, they also foreground ethical questions of environmental responsibility. As such, the research advances an ethos for a productive ethics of engagement, which I call *upstream consciousness*: a soft activism, potentially creating the conditions to reorientate ourselves within the current environmental crisis.

Through a practical and theoretical approach, building upon recent ecologically conscious geographical, feminist and philosophical insights, this research fosters a coming-together of bodies, temporalities, spaces and concepts, whilst also unsettling notions of established knowledge production. Informed by Doreen Massey’s notion of ‘spatio-temporal events’; Jane Bennett’s conception of enchantment and vibrant matter; and Donna Haraway’s situated and ‘response-able’ feminist thinking, the research broadens understandings of artists’ fieldwork as a discursive and creative activity of relevance to the arts, science and philosophy. In conceiving of such methods as productive and complex acts of engagement, it furthers discussion of diverse and interdisciplinary ways of knowing – and contributes to evolving discourses of more-than-human fieldwork, place-orientated thinking, and co-productive research.

In an era of increasing environmental instability, this research asks in what ways artists’ approaches might engage productively with a field in continual process, and in turn contribute to interdisciplinary and non-hierarchical understandings of particular environments. In doing so, the research contributes to contemporary epistemologies of place, landscape and related ecological thought.

## Acknowledgements

This research project is the culmination of a process that spans many years, concerning expansive field-based activities, involving many people, sites and logistics. I want to start by thanking the scientists who walked with me in Finland and at Moor House, taught me to appreciate specific environments in new ways, and helped me to see a more interconnected world: the late Matti Seppälä, Jeff Warburton, Martin Furness, John O'Reilly and Raimo Heikkillä. I am grateful for their acts of kindness and willingness to share their knowledge and understanding. Through conversations whilst travelling and observations in the field – witnessing intense curiosity, passion and dedication – they have helped me to consider a specific line of questioning that has inspired my artistic practice, a fieldwork approach and in turn the bedrock of this research. Alongside this I also want to acknowledge my osmotic teachers: the landscapes of peatland and mires and the multitude of complex interactions that shape them.

If scientists and peatlands helped to shape a practice in 'the field' then my supervisory team teased out this thinking back on dry ground. I would like to thank my supervisors Rona Lee and Ysanne Holt, who have both, in their respective practices and experiences, critically challenged and supported my research throughout. I would also like to acknowledge conversations with Mike Collier at Sunderland University and Mike Crag at Durham University. I am grateful for the sharing of their knowledge and insights in relation to this research. I would also like to thank the wider artistic and research community at Northumbria University and BxNU, who played an important part in this expansive journey. I'm particularly grateful for friendship and support from Rob Smith, Alexandra Hughes, Gayle Mickle, Jessica Wisener, Laura Sillars, Helen Collard, Lesley Guy and Verity Birt; it has been a privilege to laugh, cry and play together throughout the course of this study.

This research would not have been possible without the conversations and support of other artists. Thank you for sharing your practices and methods in the field, to Luce Choules, Simone Kenyon, Rob Smith, Lee Patterson, mirko nikolic, Ludwig Berger, Fiona MacDonald, Mark Peter Wright, Helena Hunter, Raffaella Spagna, Sara Cattin, Andrea Caretto, Meredith Root-Bernstein, Peter Evans, Polly Stanton, Marit Mihklepp, Enrico Partengo, Jo Joelson and Alison Lloyd. I am grateful to all the artists who took part in the artists' camp at Moor House to share methods and help create the work *Fieldworking*, also to all who took part in the workshop and event *Beyond Fieldwork* at BxNU and Allenheads Contemporary Arts.

The research developed from ideas into new work with an ongoing legacy due to the support and generosity of various organisations and people. Many thanks to Jenni Nurmenniemi and Juha Huuskonen for inviting me to do a residency at Helsinki International Arts Programme, providing the space and time for the seeds of this research to germinate, take root and expand in unexpected ways. I am hugely grateful to Stephen McKenzie and Jenny Bergman at Hangman Projects, Stockholm, who invited me early in the research to exhibit work made in Finland to new audiences. To Liam Slevin and all at Auxiliary Projects who invited me to expand on this work in the exhibition *Field Study* (2019), Middlesbrough. Thanks to UNIDEE, Italy, and artists Raffaella Spagna and Andrea Caretto for inviting me to take part in a truly enriching residency in the Italian Alps, and to fellow artists that made it even more so. A huge thanks to Elinor Morgan at MIMA whose invitation to exhibit work as part of *Fragile Earth: Weeds Plastic Seeds Crust* (2018), enabled me to share aspects of this research with artists, new audiences and sites. Together with Adam Pugh, their support and encouragement towards the artists' camp and associated *Fieldworking* work took an idea into a physical reality and for that I am incredibly grateful. The production of new work would not have been possible without the technical support of Sarah Bouttell and Chris Bate in relation to the filming and editing of *Fieldworking*, Sam Grant for *dissonance (ecotone)*

and Matthew Harle and Jason Revell at Northumbria University who supported me with both equipment and technical advice throughout.

In Moor House-Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve I am grateful to Natural England who manage the site for and granting permission to work and access this expansive reserve. Martin Furness has been instrumental in supporting me with practicalities and the artists' camp.

For conversations that helped me to express my messy thoughts in an academic manner, I am particularly grateful to Danny McNally, Julie Crawshaw, Tom O'Sullivan, Meredith Root-Bernstein, Michelle Hirschorn and Michelle Allen. I want to particularly thank Oliver Moss and Christo Wallers for their close reading of the text and for their feedback on such.

A sincere thanks to The Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Northumbria-Sunderland Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) consortium that has supported and funded this research. I specifically want to thank Andrea Percival within the graduate school, without whom my expansive endeavours within this research, as well as negotiating maternity leave and a pandemic, would not have felt so supported.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends. To Idris and Ada who have grown and become more patient through this process. To dad whose commitment to climate justice and environmental issues continues to inspire. To mum, Stephen, Tricia, Sharon, Tom and Lara for being there when I needed you the most. To my extended family Lisa, Ash, Aisling and Ewan whose support during this last stage has been so warming. Lastly my biggest and heartfelt thanks to Peter who not only provided care and support throughout, hummed with me at Moor House, but also helped me structure thoughts, words and ideas – this project would not have been possible without him.

## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this commentary has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted through the Faculty Ethics Committee ref number 17442 on 18/07/19.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 42, 616 words.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Harrington', with some ink bleed-through or smudging below it.

Name: Laura Harrington

Date: 18 March, 2022

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PORTFOLIO OF ARTWORK



This portfolio includes key works, experiments and projects that were developed as part of the overall research process, incorporating photographic documentation of relevant exhibitions, events and publications, as well as links to moving image and audio works online. Certain works are not included here, instead they are embedded within the body of the written thesis, positioned relevant to discussion.



## MOVING IMAGE AND AUDIO WORKS

These works and creative documents can be accessed through the following links.

To support viewing them in relation to their discussion within the thesis, a relevant page number is given below. When viewing/listening the author recommends for the reader to wear headphones.

- About a Journey* (2016, 6min, 24sec, colour, sound) p. 83  
<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/688534923>  
Password: Newcastle to utsjoki
- Palsa Curl (geomorphing #7)* (2016, 1min, 19 sec, colour, sound) p. 92  
<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/688530820>  
Password: geomorphing (palsa curl)
- Palsa Roll (geomorphing #8)* (2016, 1 min, 58 sec, colour, sound) p. 94  
<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/688528073>  
Password: geomorphing (palsa roll)
- Mire Creep (geomorphing #9)* (2016, 7 min, 2sec, colour, sound) p. 95-96  
<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/688531424>  
Password: geomorphing (mire creep)
- dissonance (ecotone)* (2021, 7min 35 sec, stereo sound) p. 136  
<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/688538662>  
Password: roughsikedissonance
- Fieldworking* (2020, 29min, 19sec, 16mm transferred to video, colour, sound) P. 117, 127-131  
<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/399877949>  
Password: LHarrington\_Fieldworking2020

## PRINTED MATTER

These works have been documented through photographs and included as part of this portfolio. The Fieldworking (publication) exists as a separate PDF file submitted as part of this thesis. As with the previous works, relevant page numbers where the works are discussed are provided below.

- Fieldworking* p. 117, 127-131  
*Cleampering* p. 124, 131-132

**GEOMORPHING**, 2016-2019

**Nothing and Nowhere**, 2016

Photographic prints, ink on paper

Exhibition at Hangmen Projects, Stockholm, in November 2016, comprising several black and white medium format photographs, ink drawings (geomorphings) and the video work *About a Journey*, 2016. The field-based research for this body of work took place during a two-month residency with HIAP in Finland. I discuss this further in Chapter 4.



**Figure 1.1:** Nothing and Nowhere, 2016. Installation view showing *geomorphings* #6, 2016. Photo by Laura Harrington.

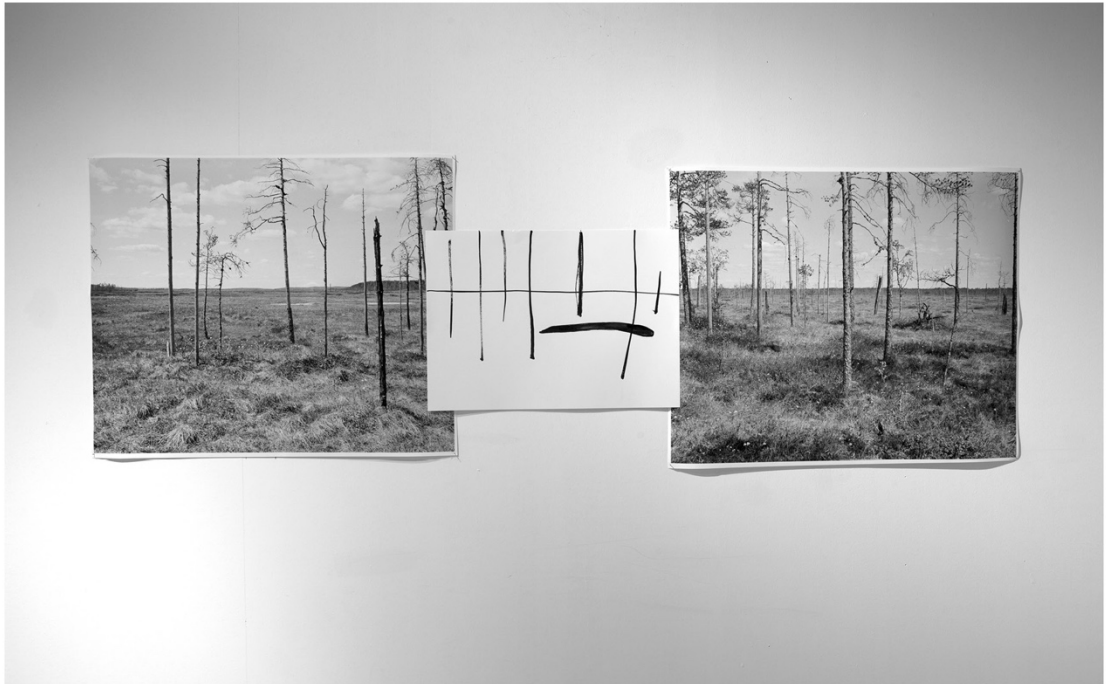


Figure 1.2 & 1.3: *Nothing and Nowhere*, 2016, installation view showing geomorphings #7. Photos by Laura Harrington.



## **Mirescape, 2019**

Six wall vinyls, black ink, video on ipod Nano, sponges

The installation *Mirescape* was exhibited at Auxilliary Project Space, Middlesborough in June 2019. The work comprised a series of wall vinyls revealing a number of distinct mire environments and black ink painted directly onto the prints and wall. Key to this installation was the positioning of a video work installed in an ipod nano and placed within two domestic sponges on the gallery floor. I discuss this work in Chapter 4.



**Figure 1.4:** Installation view of *Mirescape*, 2019 at Auxilliary Project Space, Middlesborough within the group exhibition *Field Study*, June 2019. Photo by Laura Harrington.



**Figure 1.5:** Installation view of *Mirescape*, 2019 at Auxilliary Project Space, Middlesborough and the group exhibition *Field Study*, June 2019. Photo by Laura Harrington.



**DIS/SONANCE (ECOTONE), 2021**  
Audio work, 7min 35 sec, stereo sound

With Peter Evans and recorded by Sam Grant at Moor House-Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve in August 2021. Two people, each holding a wireless microphone, position themselves within Rough Sike (a stream). Together they listen to the tone or sonic expression emitted from the flowing water at that point. They respond through humming or sounding together in an exercise of listening and responding. This work is discussed in both Chapters 5 and 6.



**Figure 1.6:** The author and Peter Evans at Rought Sike, Moor House NNR, UK, August 2021. Photo by Sam Grant.

**CLEAMBERING**, 2018-2021  
with Meredith Root-Bernstein

Our *Cleambering Manifesto* (2018) proposes a practice of somatic attention to rocks to understand and enter into a physical dialogue with the behaviour of the water and the living things it moves among in the riverbed. *Cleambering* combines the words ‘clambering’ and ‘meandering’ to point to a kinaesthetic reflective practice. I discuss this work in Chapter 6.

This work was developed collaboratively in 2018 in the Oasi Zegna, near Biella, northern Italy, during a residency, *Expanded body #2 Inhabiting Time*, with Unidee-University of Ideas at Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto.



**Figure 1.7:** Laura Harrington and Meredith Root-Bernstein reading their ‘Cleambering Manifesto’ - see appendices – at Cittadellarte, July 2018. Photo by Ludwig Berger.



**Figure 1.8:** Laura Harrington with other artists *cleambering*, river Cervo, Italy, July 2018. Photo by Ludwig Berger.



**Figure 1.9:** *Cleambling* (flip-book), 2021, 10.5mm x 7.4mm, colour, pp.68. Design by Adam Pugh. Photos by Laura Harrington.

## BEYOND FIELDWORK, 2019

A research training event/workshop organised by the author, involving two days of programmed events, (*Downstream*, 5 December & *Upstream*, 6 December) and an artists' screening and in-conversation event open to the public. With Charles Danby & Rob Smith, Jo Joelson (London Fieldworks), Laura Harrington, Simone Kenyon and Alison Lloyd, BxNU Institute and ACA (Allenheads Contemporary Arts). Film screenings and in-conversation event was held with artists Jo Joelson, Simone Kenyon, Matterlurgy and Laura Harrington, chaired by Prof Andrea Phillips.



**Figure 1.10:** Alison Lloyd, 2019. *A Slow micro-navigation between Northumberland and Durham counties to the 540m contour south of Quickcleugh Moss.* Part of *Beyond Fieldwork*, December 2019. Courtesy Alison Lloyd.



**Figure 1.11:** Participants during one of two workshops where artist Simone Kenyon drew on her movement and Feldenkrais practice to introduce engagements in bodily and sensory awareness. Part of *Beyond Fieldwork*, December 2019. Photo by Laura Harrington.

The two events were diverse in scope incorporating informal discussions, talks, workshops, walking, eating and traveling. A number of artists and academics with multiple perspectives and uses of fieldwork formed part of the events. Participants were encouraged to attend both events – one within the BxNU Institute Experimental Studio at BALTIC 39 and the other within the uplands around ACA (Allenheads Contemporary Arts). By privileging artistic practice and sensitivities, we explored an interdisciplinary way of thinking about fieldwork and how this might broaden arts research.



**Figure 1.12:** Simone Kenyon presenting and talking about her project *Into the Mountain* (2013-) at Beyond Fieldwork, BxNU Experimental Studio, December 2019. Photo by Laura Harrington



**Figure 1.13:** Jo Joelson presenting and talking about London Fieldworks project *Outlandia*, (2007-), BxNU Experimental Studio, December 2019. Photo by Laura Harrington.



**Figure 1.14:** *Beyond Fieldwork* participants at Allenheads Contemporary Art, December 2019. Photo Laura Harrington.



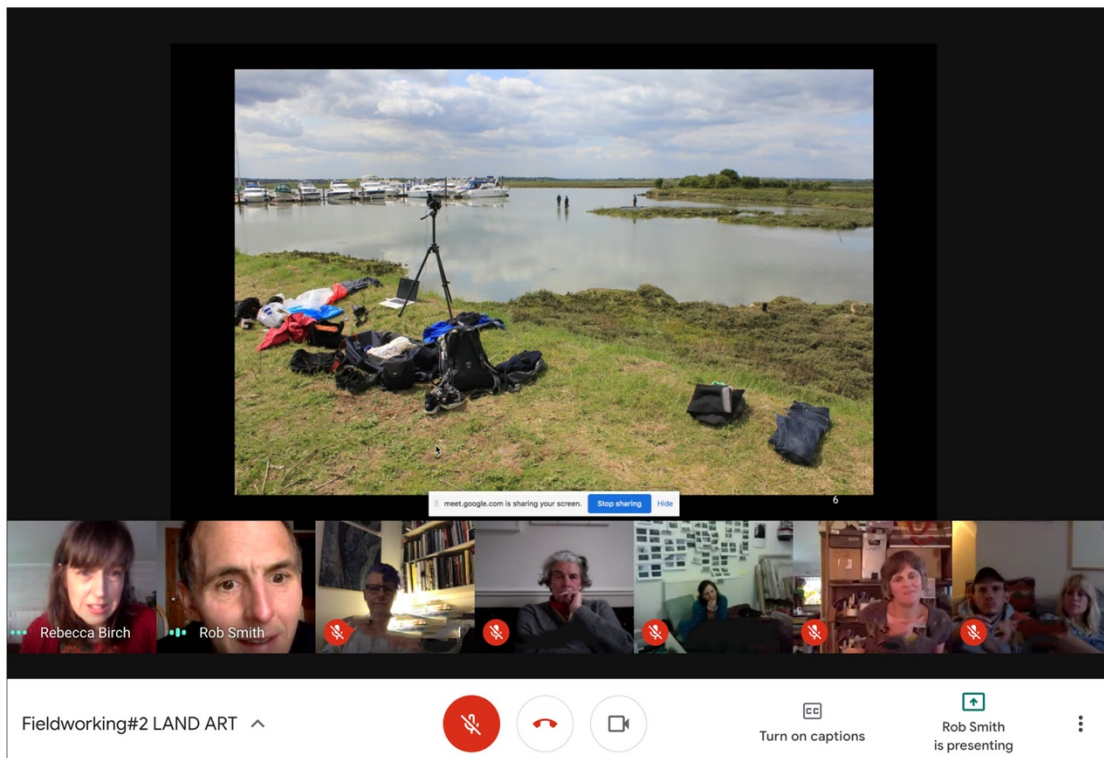
**Figure 1.15:** Participants engaging in an activity organised by DanbySmith (Charles Danby and Rob Smith) at Thorngreen lime kiln that asked what it would mean to reactivate an industrial lime kiln in what is now designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. As part of *Beyond Fieldwork*, December, 2019. Photo Laura Harrington.



## BEYOND FIELDWORK #2, 2020

### LAND ART 1969: Encounters with Fields through Broadcast with Rob Smith and Rebecca Birch

This online discursive event, as an extension of the workshop and event *Beyond Fieldwork* presented an opportunity to reflect on ideas of distance and proximity during the COVID 19 pandemic, when approaches to fieldwork have necessarily had to change and physical access to sites has been effectively denied. The discussion explored how artists practices have engaged with the medium of broadcast in relation to remote sites and ask how these approaches construct new encounters with the field. The event began with a re-transmission of Gerry Schum's 1969 television broadcast LAND ART followed by a discussion with invited artists that explored Schum's work and their own experiences streaming live video works from remote locations.



**Figure 1.16:** Screen shot of Beyond Fieldwork #2 showing artists Rebecca Birch and Rob Smith talking about their project *FieldBroadcast*. June 2020.

## FIELDWORKING, 2019-2020

This body of work (artists' camp/moving image work/public field trips/panel discussion/publication) was produced in partnership with Tyneside cinema (Projections) and MIMA (Middlesborough Institute of Modern Art)

## FIELD TRIPS AND FIELD-GUIDES, 2019

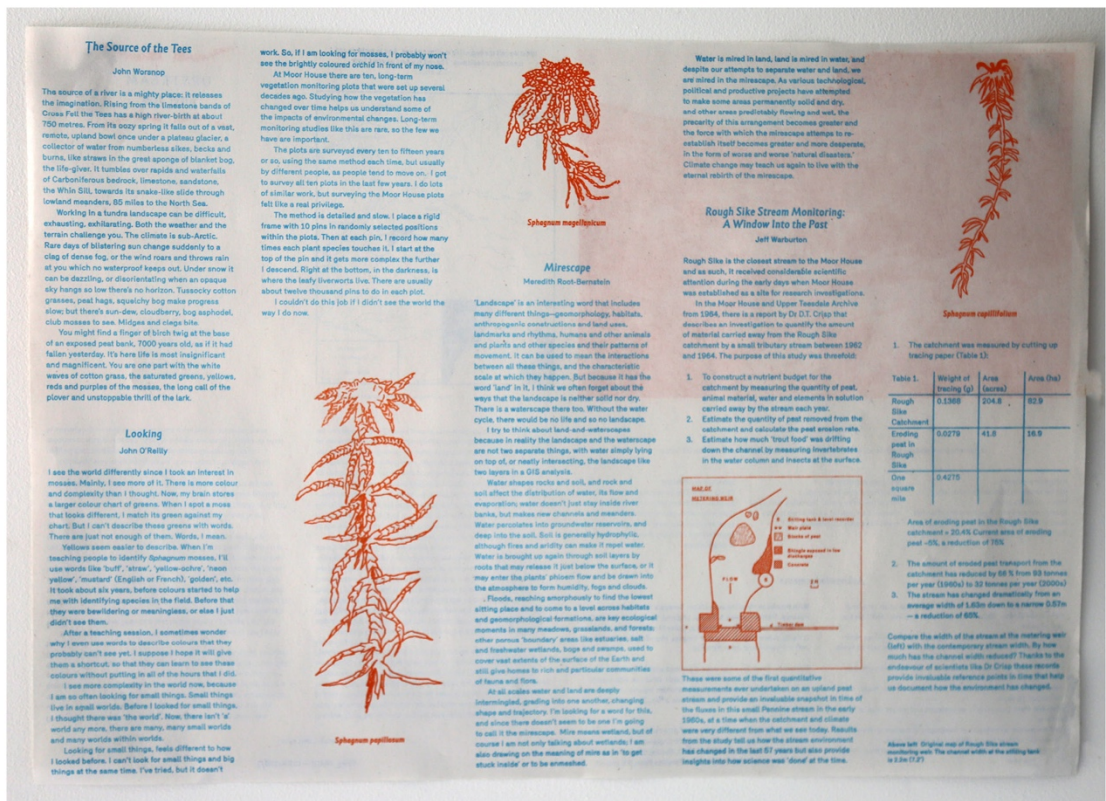
The author led two field trips – to the source of the river Tees in Upper Teesdale and to Teesmouth during summer of 2019. These events invited audiences to explore the river Tees in multiple ways. This involved initiating different partnerships and collaborations (with Natural England, Teesmouth Field Centre, Durham University, The North Pennines AONB Partnership, artists Mark Peter Wright, Emily Hesse and Miranda Tuffnell, filmmaker Warren Harrison, ecologists John O'Reilly and Meredith Root Bernstein and scientist Jeff Warburton) both through the organisation and facilitation but also through the printed matter, or 'field guides' that were produced alongside and featured a number of written texts.



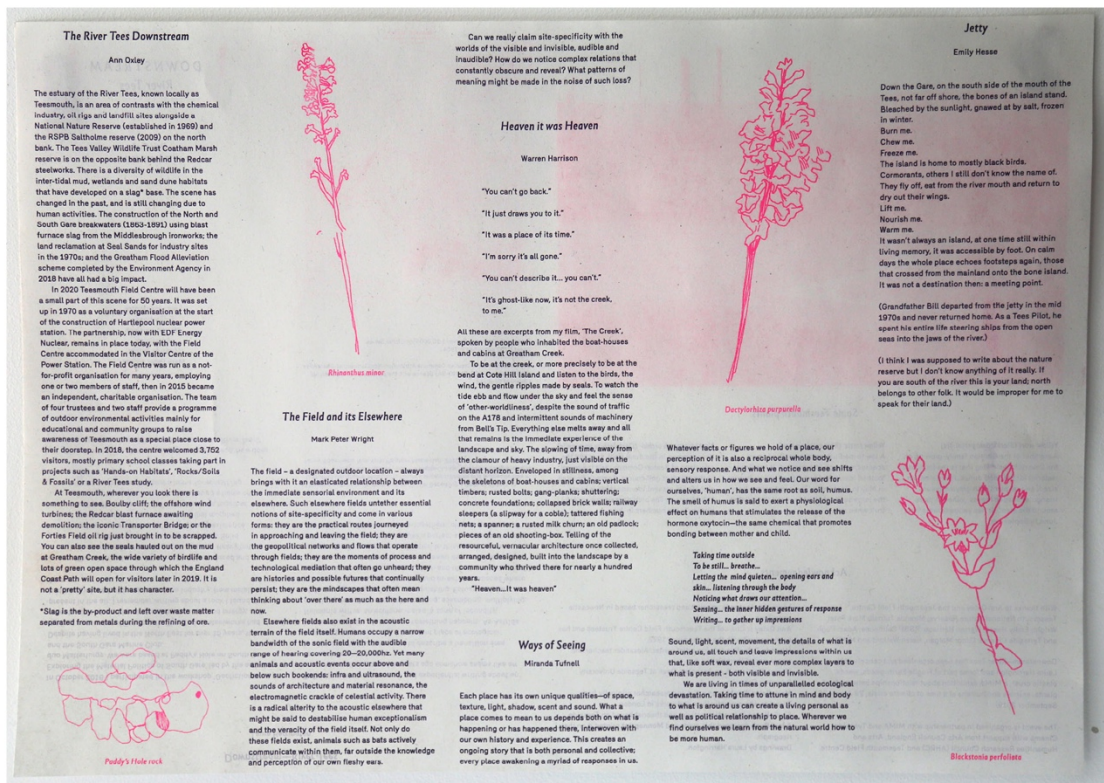
**Figure 1.17:** Martin Furness (Natural England Site Manager at Moor House NNR) talking with participants as part of the *Upstream field trip* with MIMA, July 2019.



**Figure 1.18:** Participants of *Downstream field trip* engaged in a workshop by Miranda Tuffnell at North Gare as part of the field-trip Downstream (river Tees) , collaboration with MIMA, August 2019.



**Figure 1.19: Upstream Field Guide.** Produced for *Upstream* field-trip. 42cm x 29.7cm. Risograph print. Texts by ecologist Meredith Root-Bernstein, Physical Scientist Jeff Warburton, Natural England volunteer John Worsnop and ecologist John O'Reilly. Compiled and edited by Laura Harrington.



**Figure 1.20:** *Downstream Field Guide*, produced for *Downstream* field-trip, August 2019. 42cm x 29.7cm. Risograph print. Texts by artists Emily Hesse and Mark Peter Wright, film-maker Warren Harrison, Ann Oxley of Teesmouth Field Station and choreographer Miranda Tuffnell and artist Mark Peter Wright. Compiled and edited by Laura Harrington.

**FIELDWORKING**  
**ARTISTS' CAMP, 2019**

A five-day camp at Moor House-Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve, where six artists (Ludwig Berger, Luce Choules, Simone Kenyon, Lee Patterson and Laura Harrington), an ecologist (Meredith Root-Bernstein) and two filmmakers (Chris Bate and Sarah Bouttell) came together within the context of a former scientific field station and blanket bog environment to share artistic fieldwork activities and methods. I discuss this work in Chapters 5 and 6.



**Figure 1.21:** *Fieldworking artists' camp* at Moor House NNR, August 19-25 2019. Photos by Laura Harrington.



**Figure 1.22** *Fieldworking artists' camp* artists. (L-R) Ludwig Berger, Sarah Bouttell, Simone Kenyon, Laura Harrington, Fiona MacDonald, Luce Choules, Meredith Root-Bernstein, Lisa Armour Brown (food provider) and Lee Patterson. Photo by Chris Bate.



**Figure 1.23:** *Fieldworking artists' camp* dinner for associates of Moor House NNR, 21 August 2019. Photo by Adam Pugh.

**FIELDWORKING, 2020**

16mm transferred to video, 29min, 19sec, colour, 5:1 sound

A co-commission between Tyneside Cinema (Projections) and MIMA (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art).



Figures 1.24 & 1.25: *Fieldworking*, 2020. Video stills.

On 5 September 2019 Laura Harrington organised an in-conversation event with artists from the camp, to expand thinking around relationships and encounter to place, land and living things within artistic practice. Participants included Lee Patterson, Fiona MacDonald, Simone Kenyon, curators Dr Bergit Arends and Elinor Morgan (MIMA) and chaired by cultural geographer from Teesside University Dr Danny McNally.

Laura Harrington produced a booklet to accompany the launch of the film *Fieldworking*, 2020. Edited and compiled by the author with contributions from: Elinor Morgan, Meredith RootBernstei, mirko nicolic, Danny McNally, Luce Choules, Ludwig Berger and Lee Patterson.



**Figure 1.26:** (top) insallation view of *Fieldworking*, 2020 on display as part of MIMA collection exhibition October 2021 - March 2022. Photo by: Jason Hynes. **Figure 1.27:** (bottom): *Fieldworking* publication. 54pp 9.9cm x 21cm, black and white, 54pp.



# Chapter One

## Introduction

## 1. Introduction

This thesis examines the extent to which artists' fieldwork activities can be used as creative methods and practices for knowing and better understanding particular landscapes. Drawing upon several field-based activities undertaken during the duration of this research project, I have developed a conceptual framework of three fieldwork methodologies alongside a new body of work. Through a process of practical enquiry that imagines new ethics and responsibilities, the thesis proposes that artists' field-based activities and the complex encounters involved are capable of further expanding interdisciplinary understandings of specific landscapes, and contributing to contemporary epistemologies of place, landscape and related ecological thought.

The landscapes I have sought to know and better understand in this research project are peatlands and mires. Geographer Mike Crang (2015, p.1) describes these landscapes as 'aesthetically difficult' and Dianne Meredith (2002, p.1) as 'profoundly ambiguous'; always oozing, unsettled, in tension, adrift, neither solid nor liquid. The value of peatlands environmentally cannot be underestimated. They are vast ecosystems, also known as organic wetlands, ecologically rich, important and diverse. Their significance, whilst understood by scientists for decades, is now more widely recognised by policy makers internationally.<sup>1</sup> Despite important conservation and scientific research undertaken since the 1950s (Bain et al., 2011; Moore and Bellamy, 1974)<sup>2</sup> peatlands are largely mistreated ecosystems as a result of anthropogenic systems of ecological damage, extraction and drainage. Such disruption might be perceived as a lack of knowledge and understanding around the environmental significance of peatlands, but it is intertwined with capitalist and colonial ideologies and narratives of the past. One of my aims then, has been to develop research that supports a deeper understanding of these environments, questioning whether through artistic sensibilities I could offer ways to re-enliven, amplify and transition established narratives set by many conservation and management policy makers concerning the value of peatland

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<sup>1</sup> See United Nations Environment Programme <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/peatlands-spotlight-cop26> and [www.globalpeatlands.org/](http://www.globalpeatlands.org/)

<sup>2</sup> As examples see The Finnish Peatland Society, which was established in 1949, to encourage the study and research of peat and peatlands in all aspect. <http://www.suoseura.fi/Alkuperainen/eng>

In the UK Moor House National Nature Reserve was the main UK uplands site for International Biological Programme research between 1964 and 1974. <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/monitoring-sites/moor-house-enabling-long-term-uplands-research>

In 2011 the IUCN UK commissioned an inquiry on peatlands, which in 2011 was one of the most extensive assessments of peatlands undertaken in the UK. It brought together over 300 contributors from over 50 organisations drawing on a wide range of expertise from science, policy and practice.

landscapes, and peat as a substance, as part of an effort to re-imagine alternative futures for peatlands with more lively and inclusive possibilities.<sup>3</sup>

Through an original body of work comprising audio-visual moving image, sound works, printed matter and an artists' camp the research has explored ways of working *in*, and *with* these landscapes, drawing on their ability to present situated and materially embodied experiences which reveal their complex character. Here, peatlands and peat are what feminist philosopher/scientist Donna Haraway (2003) might call a 'companion species', insofar as my relationship to them is caught up in a 'relating in significant otherness'. In this context – and following Haraway – they 'aren't surrogates for theory; they are not just here to think with. They are here to live with' (2003, p.5).

I refer to the terms landscape, environment and 'the field' interchangeably.<sup>4</sup> Whilst I appreciate the breadth of criticality that surrounds these terms, within this thesis landscapes, environments and 'fields' are not isolated sites or something separate from ourselves, but meeting places of human and non-human activities – systems of overlapping layers and complex exchanges always in motion. By focussing on field-based activities within peatland landscapes, I describe landscapes/environments/the field as heterogenous sites composed of a multitude of phenomena, materialities, processes and relations. I suggest fieldwork is a way to appreciate those movements, layers and complexities, using artistic practice as a means to form a nuanced understanding of how these might come together to create new meanings.

For clarification, I refer to the non-human in the environments in which I am operating as organic life forms, living and inanimate matter including animals, insects, plants, peat, rocks, water, snow etc, all of which shape these environments' ecology with life and purpose.<sup>5</sup> I also include the weather and climate as non-human entities and fundamental factors in these environments.<sup>6</sup> These non-humans or more-than-humans are understood as agents and phenomena that are not distant and abstracted from our experiences, but 'the very temperament of our being [...] and therefore critical to the relation between bodily movement and the formation of knowledge' (Ingold, 2010, p.122).

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<sup>3</sup> See organisations such as Re-Peat for interdisciplinary, interesting and comparable work in this area. <https://www.re-peat.earth>

See also research collective Ensayos <https://ensayostierradelfuego.net/> who are doing significant work in this area.

<sup>4</sup> For the remainder of the thesis the quotations will mostly be removed when I use 'the field' to support flow. However, I ask the reader to metaphorically keep them in place.

<sup>5</sup> For clarification I use the term non-human interchangeably with 'more-than-human' throughout the thesis.

<sup>6</sup> I refer to climate here as both temperature and seasons.

Another aim has been to utilise artistic practice to explore the interplay and dynamics of field-based activities with these specific landscapes, to seek possibilities for new thinking amidst unfolding environmental change. In doing so these acts raise important issues around how practitioners/fieldworkers self-reflexively grapple with the broader ethics and politics of their work. Artists continue to work outdoors, to discover, encounter and engage with their object of study but what are they doing when they are out there and what kind of relationships with place are they involved in? In engaging with the notion of fieldwork in more expanded terms I aim to contribute to a critical awareness of fieldwork across disciplines that goes beyond an objective approach to negotiating processes and data, towards an embodied, lively and multidisciplinary practice that is always in relation with other voices and matter.

The thesis asks how might artists' fieldwork expand contemporary understandings of the field in the wider context of ecological relations and concerns? How might artists' fieldwork explore methodologies for engaging with the qualities of complex, precarious and environmentally important landscapes? It addresses these questions through research I have conducted with and alongside other artists and scientists and via the survey of artists' methods in their approaches to the field. The written element of the thesis theoretically underpins the artworks and methodological practices developed during the research, considering the nature of peatland landscapes, geomorphic processes and the co-productive actions that enliven them through artistic practice. These methods have evolved over time, becoming more attuned to the embodied, experiential and material relations that play out in the field. These changes are reflected in the trajectory of the thesis as well as the progression in the practice.

Whilst in Western and European countries fine art practice might appear to have no clearly identifiable fieldwork tradition, practitioners in the last two decades have demonstrated increasing concern for fieldwork as subject.<sup>7</sup> This recent development could in part be a reaction to intensifying environmental concerns and a desire by artists to inform and shape their position through a heightened awareness of the physical, site-specific and lived experiences of the field. However, at the present time, when ecological thinking is especially prevalent, artists' direct engagements in this area are receiving more attention, as for example the recent project *General Ecology* (2018-) led by the Serpentine.<sup>8</sup> This is clearly welcomed but there are important considerations to take into account if this is to be more

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<sup>7</sup> I would include here London Fieldworks, Ilana Halperin, CLUI, Mark Peter Wright, Polly Stanton, FieldBroadcast, Luce Choules and Perdita Phillips – some of whom I go on to discuss in the thesis.

<sup>8</sup> See Serpentine Gallery's long-term and ongoing project 'researching complexity, more-than-humanism, climate justice and environmental balance' <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/general-ecology/>

than an exercise in public relations. Filipa Ramos (2022) asks this explicitly when asking ‘how can an ecological turn be more than a fashionable subject and become embedded in daily life’. My research and that of others referred to in this thesis have shared such concerns for a long time.

Renowned artists Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) and Robert Smithson (1938–1973) voiced environmental concerns as part of their artistic agenda but did not refer to fieldwork specifically as a subject or methodology. They have however theorised their complex acts of engagement with the natural environment within their practice. Beuys advanced the concept of an ‘energy dialogue,’ (Tisdale, 1979, p.39) in an attempt to convey the forces and energies of the natural world. Robert Smithson referred to a ‘primary process’ (Smithson, 1968, p.84) as a means of describing the experience of a direct encounter with the raw materials of the physical world. I discuss these examples further in both the critical context section and chapter 1 to draw attention to a wider ecology of artists’ field-based activities.

The thesis therefore is a methodological enquiry which, through finding micro movements of connectivity during fieldwork, illuminates small gestures of what can be possible when we allow patterns to alter, and focus to shift. A pertinent analogy here is Eirini Saratsi’s (2020) metaphor of stage lighting to think through artistic practices, referring to the process as illuminating and focussing but also a giving meaning and changing atmospheres. Fieldwork thus is not only about understanding the facts but being open to different forms of knowledge – shining light onto processes from multiple angles to create a new atmosphere and further a space new thinking.

I came to this research project with a practice based on an idea I have been developing termed *upstream consciousness*. Through relationships with upland landscapes my interest has been in connecting back to what sustains us, thinking about different ecological relations by looking to the source instead of the mouth, the cause rather than the effect, and this focus has continued to evolve during this research. Upstream I found blanket bogs, a river’s undefinable source, continuously changing geophysical processes and weathers. As I began this research, I clearly remember environmental scientist Carolyn Roberts (2016) making a case on Radio 4’s *Life Scientific* for ‘reverting to more natural conditions of rivers,’ criticising out of date thinking around dredging riverbanks and building higher flood defence walls. She emphasised the importance of ‘softer’ practices, upstream thinking, improved agricultural methods on high ground, healthy bogs, permeable surfaces, sustainable drainage systems and more joined up thinking around how to slow water as it moves downstream. This broadcast resonated with thinking that evolved from my work with the Environment Agency (EA) in 2009, where the word ‘upstream’ was employed frequently, spurring my

thoughts around sites that feel distant but are yet physically connected to us through a flow of water; around processes caught up in water flow, flooding, higher ground and our human relations to such. My residency with the EA began six months after severe floods hit Morpeth, Northumberland in September 2008. It was a sensitive time with complex community consultations taking place over different flood scheme options – the existing flood defences, including the surrounding town wall, were no longer fit for purpose. Large upstream storage options and ‘softer’ schemes such as leaky ponds were all discussed. Shifting the emphasis upstream has reoriented my approach to research. Through the different creative methods and practices developed, I now propose *upstream consciousness* as a relational ecological concept, a framework and a way of thinking that prompts us to consider how we can form ethical and responsible relationships between humans and environments.

## 1.1 Thesis structure and chapter summaries

The written element of my thesis has been organised in three main chapters (Chapters 4 – 6), each in turn exploring a distinct methodological fieldwork practice and associated artworks. The first, *geomorphing*, examines a methodology which is reactive to the material and experiential conditions of fieldwork. The second, *spiralling*, investigates an approach that holds and works with an indeterminate openness; while the third, *co-productive ecologies* privileges collective actions as eventful and critical to field-based research. Terminologically, I draw on the ‘lagg,’ ‘rand’ and ‘centre’ from the ecology of a raised bog system, gesturing towards the transitional nature of the thesis and its trajectory in relation to the development of the research. Through documentation and articulation these chapters offer varying insights into artistic approaches within fieldwork through these different frameworks by examining what it might mean to ‘practise’ in the field.

Each chapter includes reflective writing in which I articulate forms of situated learning and lived experience as they have emerged from encounters with specific places over the course of the research project. These ‘field notes’, which echo aspects of being in the field, are written with a narrative sensibility and assembled out of the anecdotal noticing and playful encounters, supporting the experimental and embodied methods I address. In doing so, I am resisting an anthropocentric perspective on fieldwork, instead paying attention to the human and non-human relations that occur in such settings, attending to them to think further about what happens in various human-field encounters.

Chapter 4: Lagg (*geomorphing*) expands understandings of artists' fieldwork, moving the focus beyond outcomes and towards processes. Discussing a specific set of interactions with several Finnish peatland landscapes I develop a new method, *geomorphing*: a situated and embodied act of responding spontaneously to what is around me. Through considering a number of artists' approaches, texts and theoretical themes, in conjunction with my own individual artistic field-based explorations, I experiment with *geomorphing* as an expanded fieldwork practice. I engage with Doreen Massey's (2005) reconceptualisation of space in relation to the geomorphological properties of the particular landscapes visited to consider a more dynamic form of engagement with the field. I then draw on Jane Bennett's vitalism to consider *geomorphing* as a lively aesthetic that acknowledges how my movements are interwoven with multiple processes as well as the spatial and temporal configurations of my surroundings.

Chapter 5: Rand (*spiralling*) continues to negotiate the unfolding relations of the field, by evolving and exploring a more nuanced methodological approach, *spiralling*; a practice that considers an openness to the indeterminate capacities of the field – an unknowing-knowing. This embodied and situated fieldwork practice recognises the non-linearity of fieldwork, emphasising a process that opens-up for the possibility of unexpected data, surprise encounters and thoughts to occur. *Spiralling* as an approach draws on Jane Bennett's (2001) writing about the micro politics of enchantment to articulate how it might support deeper attachments to the field. This is further considered through artworks by Tacita Dean (1997), London Fieldworks (2017) and theoretical discussions on situated knowledges (Donna Haraway). Lastly, I return to Bennett to consider the generative and transformative potential of spiralling.

Chapter 6: Centre (*co-productive ecologies*) moves from singular explorations in the field to examine the notion of co-production in relation to the work I have implemented with others (human and non-human). Drawing on specific artworks produced throughout the research I consider how my work with others fosters collective processes and considerations, embracing relational techniques and shifting positions. *Co-productive ecologies* is an approach that I critically frame within feminist, new materialist and posthumanist thinking. Specifically, Donna Haraway's discussion of 'response-ability,' and Rosi Braidotti's articulations of a 'bond' to prioritise ideas of coexistence, multiplicity, listening and responsibility. Further consideration is given to notions of co-productivity from a number of vantage points, such as friendship (Simon O'Sullivan), listening (Salomé Voegelin, John Cage and Jean Luc Nancy) and transduction (Tim Ingold).

The combined value of this thinking, I argue, generates outcomes that contribute to an interdisciplinary rethinking of fieldwork, artistic methods and ecological thought, suggesting a new ethics of engagement with the field.



## 1.2 Methodology

This research has synthesised practical, written and theoretical engagements via investigation and experimentation while incorporating studio work and field-based activities. It has evolved in three ways: Firstly, through an investigation of specific landscapes and their physical processes by immersion over repeated visits. This ‘developmental’ stage engaged with walking, observational and listening processes, journeys, collective working, field notes, surveys (of flora/fauna, transformation, erosion processes, weather), and observation of scientific data. Secondly, a specific idea developed and in doing so advanced the enquiry. In the third stage I produced new works either in the studio, or at times in the field itself. A reflective and intuitive approach has enabled the research to develop through cyclical processes of practice, reflection, evaluation and new works. This was an approach grounded in my previous experiences of working outdoors and across disciplines since the mid-2000s and from my formative years growing up in rural Mid Powys, Wales with no locks on the house and no boundaries in relation to where I could roam.

It was acts of fieldwork – and the complexities and the engagements involved within it – that ultimately led and shaped this enquiry. Through an immersion and experience within the field, where I was both affected and affecting what surrounded me, I became more attentive to the multifaceted process of fieldwork. This in turn evolved a practice concerned with embodied and experiential knowledge, spurring greater attentiveness to the ways in which I worked, and incorporating new techniques and approaches. These approaches did not seek to find or represent logical understandings of the complex interrelations at play between matter, landscape and bodies; rather, were motivated by finding ways into the various processes and durations that surrounded me whilst questioning the relationships between these interrelations. Questions that considered how things connect, what agencies are at play and how might I work with a situation that is in many ways ungraspable. Whilst I recognise an inherently ‘rhizomatic’ approach (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) – aligning with wider relational thinking and open-ended sensibilities within the geographies and philosophies which attempt to make connections and meanings through more dynamic, non-hierarchical and inter-relational approaches – it is important to stress that my methodologies emerged from the field, developed in those moments of noticing and listening, through direct experience as opposed to being led by theoretical consideration.

Over the last decade of working at Moor House NNR I have learnt to embrace the unknown, allowing the encounters and experiences to determine how things might unfold, attempting to let go of any control over how I practiced and engaged with the context, climate and layers of that environment. Being able to work directly in the landscape is both a privilege

and a challenge. It requires commitment, some experience and understanding of local weather, terrains, permissions for access, suitable clothing and footwear, a vehicle and enough money to get there and back safely. As such I have learnt how to operate in practical ways with the structures, disciplines, people and access requirements innate to these kinds of terrains and climates. Going to some of the sites I've worked with was far from straightforward and often required a level of planning closer to that of an expedition than a day trip.

The activities involved multiple relationships and conversations with artists, ecologists, physical scientists, cultural geographers, conservationists and site managers. The research has engaged with the field of physical geography and has developed a field-based practice that appropriates elements of that discipline's working methods. Sampling, for instance, became not a physical extraction, but a process by which I attempted to gain substance and meaning in more experiential and embodied ways.

# Chapter Two

## Critical Context: Fieldwork and ‘the field’

## **2.1 Introduction**

In the following chapter I establish the critical context for this thesis by considering the pertinent movements, philosophical concepts, artistic practices and related works that have informed its development. This research lies at the intersection of artists' field-based activities and ecological thinking, and examines how these relate to each other. Given that the discipline of art is without any distinct fieldwork tradition (Scott, 2011, p. 44), it considers the ways in which artists have engaged with 'the field' as a site where direct encounters act as catalysts for new habits and engagements.

Whilst the notion of artists' fieldwork remains an underdeveloped area of scholarly debate in contemporary art practice, there is no shortage of attention in critical theory to the nuanced ways that artists have interacted with the field. In the context of artists in the 1960s – who moved beyond studio-based object making into the landscapes – Eliza Scott (2010, p.2) has asked 'where exactly did artists go once they grabbed their jacket and faced the 'outdoor world'? In what specific manner did they treat the landscape they engaged? How did their artworks structure, and how in turn, were they structured by reactions among particular site?' (2010, p.29). It is within this vein of inquiry – reflections in relation to different modes of production, the ethics of artists fieldwork and their methodologies – that this research sits.

I begin with a brief outline of fieldwork across disciplines, before considering how an expansion of fieldwork has been theorised and addressed. I then engage with the field as a composite of different entities and interactions through aspects of geographical, philosophical, artistic and ecological thinking. Finally, I discuss the development of artists' field-based practices, and although I touch briefly on its historical underpinning, I mainly focus on artistic approaches and ideas over the last six decades (1960-2021). Complimentary to this, I consider the work of artists whose work has been especially important in shaping my research.

## **2.2 Fieldwork and 'the field' across disciplines**

Fieldwork is a practice, not a discipline (Ewing, 2011), a 'two-way encounter' (Massey, 2003, p.86), 'an artistic practice' (Gilchrist, 2017, p.80), a 'process that involves developing a kind of local expertise, an intimacy with place that creates the conditions in which to make new work' (Joelson, 2017, p.69), a 'political, personal and professional undertaking' (Hyndman, 2001, p.1), 'that brash, awkward, hit-and-run encounter of one sensibility with others' (Kumar cited in Wolf, 1996, p.6), and widely understood as a means for

investigating and collecting data outside, in environments set apart from those that we typically occupy (Lonergan and Anderson, 1988). As these examples indicate, the multiplicity of fieldwork practices are complex, diverse, varying considerably across disciplines and taking place in multiple 'fields'.

Fieldwork is a term predominantly associated with ethnography, anthropology and geography; a term which is frequently caught up in ideologies of 'exploration' and 'discovery'. As Doreen Massey (2003, p.71) articulates 'the mention of 'fieldwork' still evokes 'the idea of going out there' to address directly 'in the real world,' your chosen object of study'. The history of fieldwork within these disciplines has been investigated by a number of Anglo-European commentators (Kucklick & Kohler, 1996, Wolf, 1996, Clifford, 1997; Withers & Finnegan, 2003, Driver, 2001; 2012). Together, they have re-imagined the field, raising important issues concerning the ethics of how knowledge is produced and constituted, about whom, for whom, and under what conditions. For example, how fieldwork has been located in a long, increasingly contested tradition of Western travel practices (Clifford, 1997); interested in the hidden histories of geographical field practice and the obscured roles of indigenous people in the history of exploration (Driver, 2017); feminist encouragement of greater multiplicity and critical scrutiny of the connections between the power and location of the researcher and the products of their relating (Haraway, 1988; Wolf, 1996), and critiques of participant observation methods and the distancing of the ethnographic gaze to consider a greater exploration of embodied, emotional, affective, sensory and creative knowledges, or what Felix Driver (2002, p.268) refers to as a 'resurgence of interest in what might be called the phenomenology of fieldwork' (Rodaway, 1994; Ingold, 2000; Pink, 2007; Tsing, 2015). Anthropologist Anna Tsing (2017) describes how a form of re-imagining with the field might in part be considered as what feminist scholars have called 'strong objectivity,' that the empiricism arrived at through our situated knowledge is right up front. As Jennifer Hyndman (2001, p.1) argues, insights from fieldwork offer 'a basis for constructing accounts of processes, places and social relations'. In this regard 'fieldwork is a site to critique, deconstruct, and reconstruct a more responsible, if partial, account of what is happening in the world' (ibid.).

More recently studies have emerged in relation to more-than-human fieldwork, where knowledge-making practices are considered as shaped by their field encounters and mutually responsive with other bodies and ideas (Brice, 2017; Tsing et al., 2017; Marr et al., 2022). In this context, the recent work of artist-geographer Sage Brice (2017) who experiments with a posthumanist fieldwork to draw out a multi-species politics of nature and land use, suggests that practices of fieldwork open-up new spaces of encounter within a more-than-human world. Similarly, since 2013 the Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene (AURA),

led by Anna Tsing has advocated for how interdisciplinary collaboration can ‘overlap curiosities about lively multi species worlds’ (Swanson, 2020, p.1). An early AURA project conducted fieldwork alongside and in dialogue with a number of natural scientists from the areas of ecology, zoology, and mycology, where they ‘met *in the field* to discuss *what* [they] notice when conducting fieldwork’ (ibid, p.2, her emphasis) Through engaging in what Tsing (2015) calls ‘the arts of noticing’ – the situated and sensuous acts of observing – they allowed ‘fieldwork to be fundamentally conversational and dialogic’ and explored how humans and nonhumans inhabit a particular post-industrial landscape in a process of becoming more responsive to more-than-human worlds (ibid, p.2).

With the rise of the environmental humanities over the last decade the notion of fieldwork is of increasing interest to scholars as a means to ‘expand the sphere of whose voices matter in the production of knowledge’ (Buchanan, Bastian and Chrulew, 2021, p.1). In *Field Philosophy and Other Experiments* (2021), a range of leading commentators reflect on the importance of fieldwork for challenging the practice of philosophy, including re-thinking the concept of the ‘field’ itself and thinking in relation to others. Isabelle Stengers (2021, p.27) asserts that when field-practitioners learn from their field, ‘they do not take it as a site from which they will extract what should contribute to anonymous advancement; rather, they learn to connect with the intricate multiplicity of what matters for this field, what this field makes matter’.

This idea of connecting to the ‘intricate multiplicity of what matters and what this field makes matter,’ I suggest draws some parallels with the notion of fieldwork within the physical sciences, which it occupies a fundamental part of their discipline. Keith Richards (2011) points to the physical sciences as a form of ‘open-system sciences’ referring to scientific practices that receive data and information from a surrounding environment, rather, than a self-contained, closed off laboratory, for example. Social scientists, Henrika Kuklick and Robert Kohler similarly investigate how practices in the field, outdoors in uncontrollable settings are contingent on the specific places, demanding ‘considerable improvisation to cope with local exigencies’ (Kuklick and Kohler, 1996, p.2). Their collection of essays *Science in the Field* (1996) explores what it means to go and stay in the field, where ‘practitioners deal with the difficulties of bringing some order to the phenomena that, for more than those of the laboratory, are multivariate, historically produced, often fleeting and dauntingly complex and uncontrollable’ (ibid, p.3).

As these observations indicate, fieldwork is a diverse practice that takes on a variety of forms, rich in meaning and providing valuable space for addressing complex interactions. These acts of engagement with the field – across species boundaries and inter-human

relations – raise important questions about the ethics of fieldwork how differing methodologies can open up possible spaces for alternative ways of knowing and understanding.

From a philosophical perspective the work of Bruno Latour (1999, p.24) examines how knowledge is produced in the field considering fieldwork as a series of distinct engagements and ‘transformations’. He does this through observing a field expedition, its operational activities (sampling, surveying, mapping, collating, observing, note-taking etc) and its relation to a wider practice of research (ibid). Through these reflections Latour theorises a more spatial understanding of the field as a complex structure which one transforms by being within. As such the distinct elements of field and fieldwork are linked through researchers’ own stages of production. The approaches artists take to the field are crucial to what emerges. What emerges is generated through the multivalent relationships between artist and field, not exclusively in the artist’s response *to* the field.

A significant aspect of re-thinking fieldwork stems from a questioning of the ethics of engagement and of the relationships between work ‘in the field,’ the processes involved and the production of knowledge. Donna Haraway (1988) is pertinent here in arguing for an ‘embodied objectivity’ at the centre of scientific practice. Her influential text *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988), informed critical and ethical thinking about the unavoidable situatedness and embodied reality of human existence in the production of knowledge. Haraway argues for a ‘view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity’ (p. 589). In this context fieldwork doesn’t involve a disembodied ‘conquering gaze from nowhere’ (p.581) utilising a ‘god’s eye’ viewpoint, rather activities always involve an embodied and situated subject that acknowledges both human agency – as the fieldworker producing the knowledge – and the agency of the object of study. This position asks us to re-think objectivity through more subjective terms by subverting the object/subject relations involved. Such a concept or ‘strong tool’ (1988, p. 578) directs greater attention to other voices and objects, whilst simultaneously considering the researcher’s own position and involvement. In these circumstances the researcher is no longer separated or ‘objectively’ doing research but is self-reflexively attentive to the material, social and political conditions of how knowledge(s) is produced. It is a position that does not seek universality but instead a patchwork of messy relations, together but different (ibid, p. 586). I discuss this further in both Chapters 5 and 6.

Embodied fieldwork and the dynamic relationship between the body and the field has also been widely investigated. As anthropologists Henrika Kuklick and Robert Kohler (1996) tell

us, a central premise of fieldwork has been that understanding is founded in personal and sensory experience. In *Reflections on the History of Fieldwork* (2011), Henricka Kuklick introduces the concepts of an ‘energy system’ to describe how, for early anthropologists W. H. Rivers (1864–1922) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), fieldwork meant using the researcher’s body as an instrument, involving an understanding both of the anthropologist’s and research subject’s body (ibid, p.102).

Physical scientists also use embodied fieldwork. Volcanologist Frank Alford Perret (1867–1943)<sup>9</sup> used multi-sensory engagement with the earth’s dynamic forces. The description of him clamping his teeth on an iron bed rail in the middle of the night, in order to feel the trembling emanating from the earth, is a wonderful example of how his body impulsively reacted to sense phenomena as a way of coming closer to new knowledge and understanding. As Vic Baker puts it, ‘the earth scientist [...] can bodily enter the field of [their] enquiry’ where fieldwork is a ‘continuum of interaction involving the scientist with the systems of signs or clues encountered in the natural world’. (2004, p.136).

Naturalist Alexander Von Humboldt (1769 –1859) – one of the most celebrated ‘and thoughtful, as well as passionate, of ‘explorers’ (Massey, 2003, p.72) – conducted enquiries using both perceptual and cognitive methods, gathering data through multi-sensory engagements with the field. As author Andrea Wulf (2016, p.3) tells us ‘[H]e threw himself into physical exertion, pushing his body to its limits...and crawled along narrow rock ledges at a precarious height to see the flames inside a volcano’. Through multi-sensory engagements he saw the world differently – ‘he found connections everywhere’ (ibid, p.5). Felix Driver describes ‘Humboldt’s vision of a scientific exploration as a sublime venture and his emphasis on geographical analysis as a means of scientific reasoning’ (Driver, 2001, p35).

Artists engaged in field-based activities have also employed personal experiences and observations in the production of work. I have mentioned Joseph Beuys and Robert Smithson, but the same is true for more contemporary artists. Tracey Warr (2001) describes how during fieldwork for the artwork *Polaria* (2001) artists Jo Joelson and Bruce Gilchrist (London Fieldworks) approached their bodies as a ‘mobile laboratory’; a somatic toolkit for exploring the environment as opposed to using ‘their intellects as a means of knowing’ (2001, p.7). For this work the artists carried out fieldwork over a month in remote parts of North East Greenland studying Arctic light and its effects on human physiology. The

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<sup>9</sup> Frank Alford Perret is known for his discovery of harmonic tremors, which are the constant vibration preceding a volcanic eruption. See <https://www.usgs.gov/observatories/hvo/news/volcano-watch-who-frank-alford-perret-and-what-his-connection-hawaiian>



resulting work explored an embodied sense of fieldwork and considered how this experience is then mediated with an audience. Warr positions this project as a ‘poetic investigation into human consciousness and physiology in relation to the external phenomena of weather and light’ where they ‘manifest the embodied consciousness in the immersive environment, through a combination of instrumentation and subjectivity’ (ibid).

Geographer Felix Driver (2002) examines fieldwork as an opportunity to re-address ‘habitual ways of seeing – modes of inhabiting, dwelling in and travelling through, the field’ (p.267), offering a productive point of reference to critically support the positioning of fieldwork as an embodied practice. He argues that fieldwork involves a variety of embodied practices, rejecting the field as ‘there’ and suggesting instead a space that is co-productive through movements and spatial encounters. Here fieldwork is more than a pattern of thought that ignores ‘the materiality of the field, the contingency of encounters and the embodied practices of fieldworkers’ themselves’ (ibid, p.268).

The role of the body in our perception of the environment has been widely explored across disciplines and although not discussed directly in relation to fieldwork it offers useful critical engagements for an embodied practice. For geographer Paul Rodaway theories of perception are required to understand our ‘sensuous encounters with the environment’ (1994, p.94). We can look to the phenomenological thinking of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), who placed sensation at the heart of human perception. Anthropologist and electro-acoustic composer Steven Feld (1990, 2013), recognises the importance of auditory sensations as central to language and communication. Tim Ingold (2000) asserts the centrality of the body, understanding relations between humans and environment as an active participation. All the above explore the body’s distinctive ways of knowing our environments.

As these diverse examples indicate, fieldwork is a practice grounded in personal and embodied experience through direct encounters with a place.

## 2.3 Conceptualising ‘the field’

I have talked about fieldwork, but what do I understand about the field? What are the useful concepts that help us to think about and re-imagine the field? In this section I discuss literature and ideas connected to the various understandings of ‘the field’ as relevant to my research. I situate the field in relation to pertinent concepts and literature around site, place, space, and situation. Elaborating these themes engages with aspects of geography, philosophy and art. I have continually asked how the field might be approached as not only the (terrestrial) site within which I am immediately and physically situated, but also as a complex meeting of human and non-human relations in a continuous and ever-forming process.

### 2.3.1 Locating the field

The traditional idea that the field – as a specific outdoor location – implies a physical connection to land, as ‘out there,’ has been disrupted across disciplines, revealing a more unsettled and fluid relationship between distance and proximity, pointing instead to an indeterminate space and coming together of multiple relational dynamics in one morphed area or ‘region’ (Clifford, 1997; Hyndman, 2001; Driver; 2002, Peter Wright, 2015). Caroline Hyndman asserts that ‘one is always in the field; that by being in the field one changes it and is changed by it’ (2001, p. 1). Similarly, James Clifford suggests we might find it useful to think of ‘the ‘field’ as habitus rather than a place, a cluster of embodied dispositions and practices,’ (2007, p. 200) while Felix Driver describes the field as an open space that is produced and re-produced through both physical movements and spatial encounters (Driver, 2002, p.1). Mark Peter Wright refers to an ‘Elsewhere Field’ when discussing the specific nuances of field recording as an art form where practitioners deliberately go to a place. His elsewhere field begins ‘as soon as [he] stepped foot out of [his] front door in London’ and not when he arrived at his destination in the middle of South Gare (2015, p.172).

### 2.3.2 Site

An understanding of the field as a discursive proposition that engages with a broader range of concerns beyond its locality is synonymous with artists’ changing orientations around ‘site’. As artists moved outside and into the environment in the 1960s and 1970s, site became a foremost preoccupation, articulated in works like Robert Smithton’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970), Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* (1973-76) and Ana Mendieta’s *Siluetas* series (1973-1980). The genre of site-specific art has however been nuanced by a number of leading

commentators including Nick Kaye (2000), James Meyer (2000) and Miwon Kwon (1997, 2002), who in differing ways associated site-specificity with an underlying concept of 'site' as unfixed, transient and active, rather than focused on a specific place. Meyer describes a 'functional site' that not only considers a physical place but a process that occurs between 'sites' as a growing network of multiple sites and institutions – a 'mapping of institution and textural filtration and the bodies that move between them' (2000, p.25). Like Meyer, Kwon is concerned with the institutional framework and locations in which artists are operating and the 'nomadic' condition in which they pursue new site-orientated practices today. In 2002 she referred to an 'itinerant artist' as typically a 'no-longer studio bound, object maker,' (p. 46) as a result of the increasing interest in the arts in site-orientated practices. Relevant here is Nick Kaye's (2000, p.1) more performative notion of site in considering the 'exchanges between the work of art and the places in which its meanings are defined'. He argues that site-specificity can be understood as a process that is more concerned with performative and spatial practices such as movement, the body and transience. Informed by Michel de Certeau's influential *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) Kaye works against the fixity of site and location through fluid and transient acts and relationships to reveal a 'performance of place' (ibid).

### **2.3.3 Space and place as active processes**

This research fundamentally engages with physical space. In the context of thinking space and place as active process involving multiple relations and trajectories the work of geographer Doreen Massey (2003, 2005) has been a touchstone, not only for her emphasis on the 'spatio-temporal' imaginary within which 'the field' is placed, but also her advocacy of space as an opportunity to engage, understand and approach the world in more heterogenous and ethical ways. Massey's re-thinking of the relationships between space and place as active material practices, brings greater attention to the politics of space. She thinks through space as an event on both the global and intimate scales, acknowledging the multiplicity of relations this entails. As geographer Ben Anderson says, Massey 'has been a constant advocate of the political necessity of teasing out the mutual imbrications of the spatial and the political' (Anderson, 2008, p.226) and in this sense 'perhaps disrupting how political questions are formulated, perhaps intervening in current arguments and perhaps contributing to alternative imaginations that enable different spaces to be' (ibid).

Whilst Massey's work on the politics of place goes beyond the scope of this section, several threads from her thinking has provided a productive frame of reference for how everyday encounters can relate to a much wider, more global set of processes and networks. This is pertinent when one's research concerns field-based activities in relation to an ethics of

engagement and responsibility for supporting wider ecological thinking. I discuss Massey further in Chapter four. As a geographer, Massey is interested in all aspects of that which surrounds us. She does not simply focus on, for example, the relational dynamics of cities. She goes further, incorporating encounters with physical process such as the weather (2003). Massey's reconceptualisation of space as open-ended and interrelated informs both my understanding of the field and fieldwork.

The Earth's surface and the processes that shape it are studied in geomorphology (Goudie & Viles, 2010). My own conversations with geophysical scientists with knowledge of how different landforms have altered through geomorphological processes have in turn given shape and new meaning to my research and an understanding of space and place, including Matti Seppälä's work on palsa mires (which I discuss in Chapter four), to Jeff Warburton's extensive research on the geomorphology of upland peat, which greatly informed the initial stages of this research. Observing geomorphologists in the field has been a rewarding experience as they 'seek a logical connection, an explanation, a cause-and-effect relationship' between multiple landscape relations (Panizza, 1996, p.2). While geomorphology gives the research a framework in which to think about different geophysical sites, as a way into the field, it also brings attention to various dynamic processes that affect and are affected over time, offering a way of thinking about new work with different aesthetic and productive qualities. In *Visualising geomorphology: Improving Communication of Data and Concepts through Engagement with the Arts* (Tooth et al., 2016) physical scientist Stephen Tooth highlights the need for greater visibility around the discipline of geomorphology and the term, suggesting a greater engagement in the arts can provide alternative communication channel for data and concepts, as this thesis hopes to demonstrate.

Massey's idea of space in parallel to geomorphological thinking aligns in part with Jane Bennett's (2001) 'micro-politics' of enchantment, which is another theoretical touchstone for this research. For Bennett, new attachments can bring a sense of joy and wonder 'by being struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the everyday' (Bennett, 2001, p. 4). Being 'struck' might act as a catalyst to shift 'ethical principles' to the 'actual practice of ethical behaviours'.<sup>10</sup> In *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings and Ethics* (2001), Bennett explores how the affective forces of specific moments can act as a catalyst for making new habits and, moreover, the engagement of an 'ethical generosity' (ibid, p.1).

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<sup>10</sup> This work by Bennett was part of a wider trend within political theory at that time where 'a kind of ethical and aesthetic turn that helped put 'desire' and body practices back on the ethical radar screen'. Bennett' argues how 'bodily disciplines through which ethical sensibilities and social relations are formed and reformed are themselves political and constitute a whole (under-explored) field of 'micro-politics' without which any principle or policy risks being just a bunch of words' (Bennett, 2010, p.xii).

In these circumstances she proposes a contemporary world that has the power to ‘enchant,’ which is spurred by two lines of questioning. Firstly, enchantment as a counter story to various narratives of disenchantment attributed to modernity that, for Bennett, resists the existence and capacity of ‘affective attachments’ that punctuate everyday life (ibid, p. 3). Secondly, she considers the affective dimension of ethics, which ‘requires bodily movements in space, mobilisations of heat and energy, a series of gestures, a distinctive assemblage of affective propulsions’ (ibid). Bennett argues these narratives have lost the ability to inspire deep attachments and in doing so also discourage a ‘discernment of the marvellous vitality of bodies human and non-human, natural and artificial’ (ibid, p. 4).

If Bennett’s deep fascination with matter looked in the first instance at how shifts in human attention and behaviour can be altered by various minor events (2001) she then moved to focus on those minor events themselves, or what she describes as ‘catalysts’ and how they exist in human bodies (2010). In *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things* (2010) she describes a ‘liveliness of matter’ and a political awareness of the interconnectivity of human and non-human actors. She argues for the power of things to encourage expansive ideas of how materials can be entangled socially and culturally. Things – rubbish, food, dirt for example – acting as agents or forces with productive potential (p.viii). Bennett’s position suggests a kind of ‘political ecology’ in which all bodies, things and ideas are connected and co-constitutive.<sup>11</sup>

What unites Bennett and Massey is their concern with how they engage with multiple scales, temporal events and minor experiences as a basis for understanding and potentially re-imagining engagements with the world. I explore these connections in the first instance through Massey’s reconceptualisation of space in conjunction with the study of geomorphology; Bennett’s conception of a lively sense of matter and artists fieldwork in Chapter four, then drawing on Bennett’s notion of enchantment to consider the transformative potential of fieldwork in Chapter five.

#### **2.3.4 Ecology**

In this section I turn to ecological thought and literature and ideas that have influenced the research. I engage with certain scientific, philosophical and artistic concerns to consider how ecological thinking attempts to unsettle the divisions between humanity, non-human entities and the environment.

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<sup>11</sup> Bennett refers specifically to Bruno Latour’s (2007) concept of a network and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s (1987) version of an assemblage.

The word 'ecology' (Oekologie) coined in 1866 by German naturalist and zoologist Ernst Haeckel, was inspired by Darwin's *Origin of Species* (Stauffer, 1957), referring to the studying of the oikos – home or setting – and the relationships between living organisms and their physical environment. The notion of ecology unsettled a teleological view of human existence at the top and environments as static backgrounds, offering instead a way into understanding life as an integrated whole, or 'ecosystem' where living things were bound together by a 'web of complex relations' (Darwin, 1996, p.61).<sup>12</sup>

The ambivalence that surrounds the idea of Nature and the ways in which we understand and relate to it remains an ongoing area of debate across multiple fields (Soper, 1995; Metzger, 1996; Morton, 2007). In 2007 Timothy Morton rejected the idea of 'Nature,' as a response to a crisis in humans' relationships with their surroundings. Moreover in 2016 he put forward the idea of a 'dark ecology' to engender a form of ecological awareness capable of both unsettling our understanding of our place in the world and offering a way of attuning oneself to the complexities of ecological truth. In the arts as Jeffrey Kastner (2012) reminds us, Nature has repeatedly been rejected and reclaimed by artists over the last half-century. Art that has engaged with it has been well positioned to 'benefit from the dislocation of disciplinary specificities' (ibid, p.17).

Over the last decade, as the environmental crisis worsens, the notion of ecology has been of relevance to an increasing number of artists, curators and to researchers in other disciplines.<sup>13</sup> A recent 'ecological turn' in the arts no longer views ecology as a distinct subject or artistic theme that deals with the environment as the physical world separate from us but, as curator Jenni Nurmennimemi (2018, p.10) asserts, ecology is an 'angle into experiencing that enables recognising the intricate, continuously changing codependencies characteristic to the life on this planet and to the cosmos'. Artist mirko nikolic, for instance, approaches ecology as seeking a mode of speaking 'with those who do not speak, or are not allowed to do so' (nikolic, 2017, p.6).

Wider ecological thinking in the arts is part of a paradigm shift where many philosophical theorists and practitioners attempt to make realities more tangible and investigate how we might participate in a more-than-human world. As such feminist, new materialist and

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<sup>12</sup> In the 1930s Arthur Tansley and Arthur R. Clapham developed the term 'ecosystem' or what Tansley also referred to as a 'recognised self-contained entity' see Wills (1997, p.1) for a wider understanding of the term ecosystem historically.

<sup>13</sup> As example in contemporary art See Serpentine *The Shape of a Circle in the Mind of a Fish* and cinema programme *On Earth* (2002) co-curated between Lucia Pietroiusti and Fillipa Ramos, and more recently (2020-2022) their General Ecology programme curated by Lucia Pietroiusti a long term and ongoing project researching complexity, more-than-humanism the environment and climate justice and environmental balance. [www.serpentinegalleries.org/general-ecology](http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/general-ecology).

See also Finnish Pavillion Broken Nature Venice Biennial 2018 <https://www.frieze.com/article/climate-change-what-expect-nordic-pavilion> and MIMA Fragile Earth: Weeds, Seeds, Plastic Crust July - September 2018 <https://www.art-agenda.com/criticism/286425/fragile-earth-seeds-weeds-plastic-crust> as a few examples.

posthumanist thinking has been influential in opening more interdisciplinary and intersectional debate and questioning of the ecological and technological bounds of the human. Among much disciplinary specificity and difference, central to such thinking is their complex re-imagining of multiple ecologies, the nature of agency, humanity and life, and ideas of cohabitation. Salomé Voegelin (2018, p.163) refers to a 'philosophy of the invisible' which like many feminist thinkers aims to make connections to other bodies, to other worlds beyond ourselves describing 'what we already are, but amplified' (Neimanis, 2015, p.5).

Critical to this research is Donna Haraway's work around ecological thinking and the ways in which she analyses and re-thinks theories and understandings from the orthodoxy of modern science into wider ethical, embodied and responsible concerns. Within her work Haraway explores the capacity for 'cyborgs' to re-orientate understandings of affinity and embodiment (1991), and how animals, or 'critters' can shape empathic thinking about the boundaries between species (2003, 2016). My research – spurred by scientific enquiry – is concerned with seeking connections between bodies, processes and durations in the field, searching for micro-movements and interrelations that have the capacity to unsettle thinking between humans, non-human entities and landscape. In light of this, Haraway's proposed neologism 'natureculture' is a productive point of reference. Through this concept, Haraway acknowledges the co-constitutive relationships and mutual histories shared between humans and non-humans. In the *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) she delves into a 'cross-species conversation,' offering wider thinking about exchanges, relations and encounters between species in unexpected ways. In a life of naturecultures 'parts don't add to wholes', rather, she seeks 'relations of significant otherness' which are about 'counterintuitive geometries and incongruent translations necessary to getting on together' (ibid, p.8).<sup>14</sup> She describes how the 'world is a knot in motion', where bodies, through their 'prehensions' and 'graspings' are not discrete parts, rather they come into being through complex, continuously changing ecological processes and relations (ibid).

### **2.3.5 Eco-feminism, feminist new-materialism and posthumanism**

Donna Haraway is just one of a number of theorists pushing at the boundaries of anthropocentric structures of knowledge, often viewed as patriarchal too. The overlapping fields of eco-feminism, posthumanism and new materiality speak to this urge to critique pre-existing and hierarchical systems of knowledge that places 'man' at the centre.

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<sup>14</sup> Here Haraway draws from the work of ethnographer Marilyn Strathern and her thinking in terms of 'partial connections'.

Materialist-discursive ideas such as *material agency* and *intra-action* (Barad, 2007), *vibrant matter* (Bennett, 2010), *Chthulucene* and *sympoiesis* (Haraway, 2016), weathering and water (Neimanis, 2015, 2018) *sonic materialism* (Salome Voegelin, 2018) all challenge the position of humans at the centre of the universe in support of amplifying systems of entanglement, relationships and processes. These approaches view matter and meaning as entangled in a continuous and emergent intra-action, where ‘bodies (human, environmental or otherwise) are integral ‘parts’ of, or dynamic reconfigurations of what is’ (Barad, 2007, p. 170).

In asking how one embraces non-human agents and entities as integral elements of one’s activity of thinking and producing knowledge, Rosi Braidotti argues for the adoption of post humanist position being ‘materially embodied and embedded, with the power to affect and be affected,’ (Braidotti, 2019, p.5). For Braidotti the posthuman condition exists within the realities of advanced capitalism as a resistant position to anthropocentrism, ‘offering opportunities and tools for both humans and non-human agents, as well as the humanities to reinvent themselves’ (ibid, p.4). She argues that ‘the qualitative challenge of the posthuman convergence – a criticism of the universal humanist claim that ‘Man’ is the measure of all things as well as species hierarchy and anthropocentric exceptionalism’ – is about the need to ‘defamiliarize our mental habits and learn to think differently about what ‘we’ are in the process of becoming as heterogenous subject assemblages’ (Braidotti, 2020, p.118).

Astrida Neimanis focuses on one element of this intra-active assemblage – water. She emphasises our connections to the watery planet and a need for a ‘watery embodiment,’ through a feminist lens that is ‘inseparable from the urgent ecological questions spurred by the anthropogenically exacerbated water crisis that our planet currently faces’ (Neimanis, 2015, p. 1). In *Bodies of Water* (2017) she outlines the complex way in which we live as ‘wet and spongy bodies’, proposing a new ecological ethics or ‘hydro-logic’ in order to challenge individualism and anthropocentrism predicated on our 60-90% wateriness. She describes how as ‘watery, we experience ourselves less as isolated entities, and more oceanic eddies’ (2012, p.85) For her embodiment is not only engaged in the ways in which water travels, and the kinds of bodies that water comprise, transform and dissolve. It is also context-specific, in which one’s specific situatedness is acknowledged and attunement to difference is respected. I draw on aspects of Neimanis’ thinking in relation to the porous nature of peatlands to consider how relations between different bodies of water might be understood in more complex, porous and viscous ways.

This kind of ecological and multi-species thinking is increasingly evident in the work of contemporary artists. I would include here UK artist Fiona MacDonald (Feral Practice),



whose multi-species research project *Ant-ic Intra-Actions* (2018) works with wood and garden ants in seeking human-non-human connectivity in the forest, drawing on research into shared materiality, creativity and consciousness; Finnish duo nabbteeri, (artists Janne Nabb and Maria Teeri) place importance on utilising local materials in producing their artwork as a form of ecological ethics. Their recent work observes multi species cultures, ‘hoping to relearn how to form communities and share spaces, whether bodies, other cavities or clearings, with other critters’; and Minty Donald and Nick Miller’s ongoing project *Watermeets and Guddling About* (2013-) which enacts quiet performances or actions from meetings between humans, rivers, waters and other things and the intra-actions of those encounters. As these examples indicate, ecology and multi-species entanglements are lively and topical areas of debate. They not only help us to understand new things in relation to ourselves and the world around us, but encourage a letting go of individualistic tendencies and anthropocentric ways of living. In such a world the performative and complex acts within field-based practices become more porous, becoming co-productively entangled with the ecological processes of ‘the field’.

#### **2.4 Fieldwork and ‘the field’ in art practice**

Historically, from a Western European art perspective, various artists’ movements have involved collaborations with ‘the field,’ most famously nineteenth century European Impressionists who worked ‘en-plein air’ in search of a more realistic and perception-based representation of the landscape, painting scenes as opposed to romanticised views. It was normal at this time for artists to travel for inspiration, seeing nature as a subject matter to express the imagination but for the ‘plein air’ movement the ambition was a deeper understanding of the natural world through direct observation. A form of ‘perceiving-with-the world’ (Wylie, 2015, p.3), that John Wylie considers in a recent project with artist Catrin Webster, exploring the ‘affective spatialities of landscape’ – through their respective practice-led/geography disciplines – to see the world in new ways, whilst also questioning and working through what that ‘newness’ might mean (Webster & Wylie, 2018, p.1).

The growing 19<sup>th</sup> century fascination in the arts with geology and the earth sciences spurred by the work of Alexander Von Humboldt (1860) and John Ruskin (1866), shaped how artists perceived and understood the physical nature of the earth and their connection to it (Wagner, 1988). This is apparent in the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood whose approach to nature, as John Holmes argues, reached ‘beyond the usual limits of mid-Victorian natural history to become fundamentally ecological, both scientifically, in an understanding of how individuals and communities of different species interact, and ethically, in the value they placed on the living world’ (Holmes, 2018, p, 46).

Despite landscape being a significant aspect of some modernist painting in the first-half of the twentieth century,<sup>15</sup> the next major shift in Western and European artist's engagement with outdoor sites occurred during the 1960s and 70s (Lippard, 1973; Krauss, 1979; Kwon, 2002, 1997). As Eliza Scott reminds us 'landscape was at the forefront of the public imagination in the 1960s' (2010, p.29).

The rise of environmental activism in the 1970s brought challenging ethical questions about agency and responsibility to the natural world. The publication of many influential texts during this time also spurred new understandings of how we might relate to human subjects, societies and material environments. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (2000) translated scientific knowledge to portray an ecological and cyclical interconnectedness as well as alerting the general public to ecological disasters; Caroline Merchant (1980) and Donna Haraway (1991<sup>16</sup>) were part of an ecofeminist movement, challenging established gendered and anthropocentric dualisms, whilst in the 70s James Lovelock's concept of the Gaia hypothesis, further developed by Lyn Marguilis' and Dorian Sagan (2000), suggested that all living and non-living entities on earth – a living organism – work collectively to promote life.

In the arts various alternative approaches emerged during this time including conceptual, Land art and environmental or ecological art practices which challenged their audiences to perceive and relate to planetary concerns in new ways. Examples here include Actions (Joseph Beuys), eco-logic (Agnes Denes), Site and Non-Site (Robert Smithson), earth/body sculptures (Ana Mendieta) environmental art (David Nash; Andy Goldsworthy) and walking (Marie Yates; Richard Long; Hamish Fulton). In all cases artists were disrupting the idea of landscape as a separate, distant, passive entity, seen predominantly as an object either of use, or of the gaze. Instead, through the making of works which incorporated activism, imagination, ritual, politics and poetry, these artists acknowledged and expressed the landscape as a dynamic living/material system, and the field as an inter-relational entity.

Alongside this, as Rosalind Krauss described in her influential essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979), there was also a permeable seepage between artistic disciplines in the late 1970s. This 'elasticated' sensibility allowed sculptural practices to be understood beyond their medium specific characteristics, as a pluralistic set of relations and possibilities

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<sup>15</sup> In UK Paul Nash spent time interpreting his environment into surreal and mystical landscapes. In Canada, for instance see artists David Milne; Emily Carr and members of the Group of Seven.

<sup>16</sup> The book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991) by Donna Haraway collects essays written by the author from 1978 through 1989 what she describes as 'a period of complicated, political, cultural and epistemological foment within the many feminisms which have appeared in the last decades' (Haraway, 1991, p. 2).

with a greater ambiguity in their relationship to place (ibid, p.1). By the late 1970s artists' practices were increasingly de-contextualised (ibid, p.36). Moreover, artists were repositioning themselves not just in relation to the environment but opening up to many new areas of concern and influences.

Here the work of American writer, critic and activist Lucy Lippard (1977) is pertinent, not only through engagements with various geographical locations but also through her 'multicentered' approach, revealing how artists of the 1960s and 1970s were negotiating more personal and lived experiences as part of a wider distinct renewal towards place. For Lippard place is 'the locus of desire,' a location layered with the spatial, temporal, personal and political that she can 'feel kinaesthetically,' (ibid, p.1.) I explore Lippard's analysis of place further in Chapter four.

It is worth noting that residencies have and continue to play a significant role in how artists engage with the field as a site of creative production (Hawkins, 2020, 2013; Warr, 2015). This engagement spans from artists' colonies during the 1900s<sup>17</sup> to the secluded residencies and guest studios in villages and cities during the 1960s, to the point where residencies with social agendas came into being, forming links between visual artists and commercial industries (Stephens, 2001).<sup>18</sup>

Over the last two decades residencies have offered artists important opportunities to work in cross-disciplinary ways with institutions and scientists.<sup>19</sup> Several have taken the form of expeditions, seeing artists travelling to remote and geographically distant sites. Cape Farewell and the British Antarctic Survey along with the Gulbenkian Foundation have offered opportunities to travel to the Arctic, Amazon, Antarctic and Galapagos Islands.<sup>20</sup> Given the shift in environmental thinking over the last decade aspects of these artistic explorations have more recently been viewed as controversial due to their focus on far-away

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<sup>17</sup> See TransArtists Artist in Residence History <http://www.TransArtists.org/en/artist-residence-history>

<sup>18</sup> See UK-based Artist Placement Group APG (1966-89) <http://www.tate.org.uk/artistplacementgroup/> (Accessed 8 March 2022). See also US-based Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T) (1967-77) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/e/experiments-art-and-technology-eat>

<sup>19</sup> Here I refer to the UK-based Leverhulme Artist-in-Residence scheme (2000-2016) as one example, supporting artists to work with other researchers across the natural and social sciences as well as the humanities. The scheme enabled challenging and extensive research to emerge and was an important driver of interdisciplinary collaboration involving artists during this period. From my own experience between 2014 and 2015 this was an incredibly important opportunity that offered embedded artistic research that began from mutual interest, providing time and resources for important dialogues and process-based results to emerge. See Hawkins (2020) for an extensive overview of the significance of this scheme in relation to artist/geography collaborative research.

<sup>20</sup> See Cape Farewell <https://www.capefarewell.com/>  
British Antarctic Survey and Arts Council England collaboration <https://www.bas.ac.uk/media-post/arts-and-science-work-together-in-antarctica-british-antarctic-survey-and-arts-council-of-england-fellowships/>  
And Gulbenkian Artist Residency Programme <https://gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/gulbenkian-galapagos-artists-residency/>

lands, exotic landscapes and a distancing from the broader politics of their work.<sup>21</sup> As such, over the last five years, there has been a shift to more localised and experimental residencies that focus on local cultures and ecologies. In this context, Allenheads Contemporary Arts (ACA) has since 2003 challenged artists to work in a rural context through a wide-range of research projects and education programmes.<sup>22</sup> Similarly London Fieldworks *Outlandia* (2010) saw the construction of an off grid artists' field-station in the Scottish Highlands, 'encouraging creative interaction between artists and the land, its history and its people, [...] off-grid, a space to disconnect, a sustainable sculpture, a contribution to contemporary arts development in Lochabar' (Joelson, 2015, p.2). More recently, *The Frontiers in Retreat: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Ecology in Contemporary Art* (2013-2018) partnered with seven residency centres in Europe and within this 'collided methods of contemporary art, science and activism to test the ways that ecology has commonly been approached within art' (Nurmenniemi, 2018, p.7).

#### 2.4.1 Interdisciplinarity

From the 1990s cross-disciplinary and collaborative practices have been increasingly employed by artists engaging with field and land-based practices; unsettling a singular notion of the 'artist' and focussing instead on integrating co-production between collaborators and the field itself (Phillips, 2007; Scott and Swenson, 2015). In the 1990s these approaches were solidified through projects and organisations such as Arts Catalyst, who sought to create connections across art and science; or the Centre for Land Use Interpretation, whose radical pedagogical 'centre' based primarily in Los Angeles, explores the nature and extent of human interaction with the landscape in North America through investigating a 'language of land use' (Coolidge, 2006, p, 16). Within this shift we could place artists such as Marko Pelijan and Matthew Bkederian (1997) who installed a nomadic research station in the Arctic, and London Fieldworks who since 1999 have situated works across galleries, landscape and technologies to promote interdisciplinary and collaborative arts practice.

A renewed interest in interdisciplinarity within arts practice brought new critical discourse around 'site-orientated practices' and the 'physical mobilisation of the artist' (Kwon, 2002,

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<sup>21</sup> The Cape Farewell project has in the past been criticised for its engagement with 'exotic' landscapes and excessive focus on environmental change in the High Arctic. The project responded to these criticisms by more recently investigating more local cultures and ecologies in Scotland's Island communities. See Straughan, and Dixon (2014).

Also, the text *Cloud and the Field* (2016) by American anthropologist Shannon Mattern has been helpful here. She looks at artists who work in far off lands, what she refers to as 'cloud chasers', while 'conscientiously self-reflexive about their identities as artist-researchers, sometimes fail to publicly address the broader politics of their performance'... 'Surely they recognise how this talk of bravery trekking to the 'ends of the earth' of weathering precocity and irradiation, echoes colonialist narratives.

<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.acart.org.uk>

p. 46). In 1996 art critic Hal Foster described the artist as ethnographer, within what he called ‘the ethnographic turn’ in art since the 1960s, in response to the artist as ‘participant-observer, invited to work ‘on location’ (Doherty, 2009, p.16). Foster’s discussion aligned with wider reorientations of participant-observation relations within the discipline of anthropology at the time. He was critical of a model where the artist would move from site to site and issue to issue, which he referred to as the ‘quasi-anthropological paradigm in contemporary art’ (Foster, 1996, p. 196). Foster’s critique focused on the ethics of artists practices and processes and their tendencies for ‘self-absorption, ethnographic self-fashioning and narcissistic self-refurbishing’ (Hopkins, 2003, p.1).

If the 1990s saw the artist as ethnographer (Foster, 1996) then to some extent the last decade might be as Tracey Warr (2015, p. 50) describes ‘artist as geographer as the disciplines of human geography, human ecology and eco-art elide’. In this sense, the linkages between the disciplines of geography and artistic research have over the last decade become a growing area of interest and is pertinent for this research. Diverse collaborations and productive exchanges between creative practices and geographers have not only influenced artistic methods and approaches but seen geographers increasingly turning to a range of art-based forms and processes (Driver, et al., 2002; Lorimer & Foster, 2007; Hawkins, 2020, 2013; Warr 2015; Marston & Leeuw, 2013, Wylie & Webster, 2018). Conversations between art and geography have also developed over the last decade into formulated interdisciplinary engagements, where key geographical concerns such as space, place, landscape and environment are developed across the arts and humanities. For example, the GeoHumanities Forum at Royal Holloway, London like many other Environmental Humanities networks emerging over the last decade, brings together interdisciplinary research to study the environment with a broad range of methods to confront critical environmental and climate issues.<sup>23</sup> As Harriet Hawkins asserts, ‘geohumanities recognises the value of arts and humanities perspectives and practices for geographical knowledge making’ (Hawkins, 2020, p.5).

Through artists’ camps (nikolic, 2016), performative events within hills, mountains and islands (Halperin, 2014, Tuulikki, 2014, 2016; ATLAS Arts; Kenyon, 2018) and radio broadcasts from rural environments (London Fieldworks, 2014) artists are increasingly engaging and sharing particular landscapes and ecological concerns with audiences in new

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<sup>23</sup> See [geohumanitiesforum.org](http://www.geohumanitiesforum.org) and for two examples of Environmental Humanities Networks are Edinburgh Environmental Humanities Network <http://www.environmentalhumanities.ed.ac.uk/> and Research Centre for Environmental Humanities at Bath Spa University <https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/research-and-enterprise/research-centres/environmental-humanities/>

ways.<sup>24</sup> An example is the recent place-sensitive performance by artist and choreographer Simone Kenyon, *Into The Mountain* (2018), in which she worked directly with the environment of the Cairngorms plateau and women living within the communities of the National Park. The performance involved a guided walk, leading participants to a choreographic and vocal performance ‘created for and within the mountain side,’ and offering ‘audiences the chance to immerse themselves in the extraordinary environment of Glenfeshie’.<sup>25</sup> Art projects that invite participants and audiences to situate themselves directly within remote sites are experiencing a distinct moment as people seek new ways of thinking and feeling with landscapes.

#### 2.4.2 The artistic turn towards fieldwork as subject

Over the last two decades in Western countries fieldwork as subject has increasingly played an important and critical role in the practices of contemporary artists. Since 1999 London Fieldworks, for example, have engaged with ‘fieldwork as artistic practice’ as a way of ‘generating material for art projects through an open-ended, extempore, creative enquiry based on people, things and phenomena rooted in a particular place’ (Gilchrist, 2017, p.80). Australian artist and researcher Perdita Phillips (2007), has been interested in the area of ‘walking and fieldwork *in art and as art*’ [my italics]. Luce Choules (2014) established *The Temporal School of Experimental Geography* as an itinerant network of artists sharing ideas and responses to landscape through fieldwork as activity, methodology, art form and research. Polly Stanton (2017) explores how field recording – being immersed in a site for extended time periods – reveals new embodied knowledge and understanding. Whilst Mark Peter Wright (2015) looks at the practice of field recording in relation to how agency is distributed in ‘the field’ to critically reflect the relationship between humans and non-humans. Through practical research he explores issues of ethics, agency and representation by converting the field into a ‘collaborative and contested arena for intervention and performance’ (2015, p.3).

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<sup>24</sup> I refer to the camp and symposium *earth wants to be free: on rights, autonomy & freedom of other-than-humans* (14-15 May 2016) organised by mirko nikolic in collaboration with Helsinki International Arts Programme (HIAP), part of Frontiers in Retreat programme, and held ‘at the discovered but not yet mined deposit of copper’ in Kemiönsaari, South-West Finland.

I refer to Ilana Halperin performative *Felt Event* on the Isle of Staffa, also Hanna Tuulikki’s *air falbh leis na h-eòin – away with the birds*, 2010-2015 as a useful point of reference for this kind of work, see also Tuulikki *Women of the Hill*, 2015.

*Remote Performances* (2014) by London Fieldworks which involved a programme of radio broadcasts transmitted from *Outlandia*, an off-grid artists’ fieldstation in the Scottish Highlands constructed by London Fieldworks in 2010. Twenty artists were invited to share aspects of their art-making strategies from being immersed in the rural context of Glen Nevis.

<sup>25</sup> *Into the Mountain* – spanning six years – is an example of an expansive interdisciplinary project involving diverse groups of people over extended time periods. The performance took place between 30 May and Sunday 2 June 2019. I was fortunate to participate, staying in a youth hostel in Newtonmore and partaking in the walk which led to the event. Simone Kenyon shared elements of the thinking within this project at the event *Beyond Fieldwork*, December 5, 2019, and was also one of the six artists who participated at the artists camp at Moor House in August 2019.

Against the background of these developments and as the environmental crisis worsens, it is perhaps unsurprising that the last decade has seen a growing interest in the dynamic relations and engagements between artists and the field, the ethics of artists fieldwork, its methodologies and different modes of production (Doherty, 2009; Hawkins, 2020; Scott, 2010; Warr, 2016; Wright, 2015).<sup>26</sup> This can be positioned as part of the wider surge of artists engaging with more ecological and planetary concerns, interdisciplinary conversations and deeper thinking around the idea of the Anthropocene (Drabble, 2019; Demos, 2016, 2017; Davis and Turpin, 2015).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the notion of the Anthropocene has been influential in encouraging multi-disciplinary and collective thinking, not only through greater multi-species and non-anthropocentric conversations (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015, Tsing et al., 2017, Neimanis, 2017) nor calls for a more ‘Earth-bound’ way of thinking that is based on both ‘communion and world-relatedness’ (Latour, 2018) but also in spurring differing fields to share knowledge and understanding.

Artists have played a significant role in bringing the idea of the Anthropocene and the current epochal shift in human-planet understanding to public attention, asking how anthropocentric thinking engenders new forms and writing, and interdisciplinary collaboration (Klingan et al, 2014; Davis & Turpin, 2015). In *Art in the Anthropocene* Davis and Turpin position the proposed geological epoch as some kind of ‘aesthetic event’ by exploring contemporary art modes of knowledge production in the era of global environmental change. Recent work by the collaborative practice Matterlurgy (2021) and Sonia Levy (2018) for example, critically investigates ecologies of environmental change across disciplines and species boundaries, suggesting that practices exploring new hybrid forms of art and science investigation are experiencing a renewal as modes of enquiry within artistic research.

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<sup>26</sup> See also the project *FIELDWORK*, (2009) by Art/Space/Nature, Edinburgh which gathers conversations with artists, anthropologists, landscape architects and composers to consider what it means to do fieldwork today.

See BioArt Society in Finland where artist’s fieldwork is a central part of their remit. The book *Field\_Notes: From landscape to laboratory* (2013) looks specifically at the notion of fieldwork in relation to the evolving field of art& science and in this case bioart. <https://bioartsociety.fi/projects/publications/pages/field-notes-from-landscape-to-laboratory>.

See Fieldwork, Chapter 2 in *Situations*, edited by Claire Doherty (2009) compiles a series of texts that look at fieldwork in broader artistic terms.

See also *Remote Performances in Nature and Architecture* (2016) edited by Bruce Gilchrist, Jo Joelson and Tracey Warr for a wider exploration around artists and land informed by the artistic project and space *Outlandia*.

A forthcoming publication edited by Polly Stanton, Bridget Crone and Sam Nightingale explores artistic practice and dynamics of fieldwork through the scale of the field in which one is immediately situated and the broad expanse of networks and technologies that connect us across different space and temporalities.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Anthropocene’ is a term used by scientists to refer to the increasing impact of human existence upon the planet’s ecosystems. Scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000 proposed that such a term should be considered a new Earth epoch (now agreed by the Stratigraphic Committee Working Group as a potential geological epoch on 29 August 2016), on the basis that ‘mankind will remain a major geological force for many millennia, maybe millions of years to come’ (see Working Group on the Anthropocene <https://quaternary.startigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene>)

The above examples give a broad context of environmentally-focused arts practice within which my own work operates and point towards the theoretical concerns I expand on in the thesis, particularly around embodiment, environmental ethics and collaborative practice.

### **2.4.3 Specific approaches**

Whilst there are many artists whose processes and methods in the field have and continue to inspire, most formative and helpful for this research are those of artists Lee Patterson, Ilana Halperin and London Fieldworks. Their projects and processes necessitate collaborative, cross-disciplinary work and are built on intuitive and reflective approaches to landscape and natural phenomena emphasising corporeal understanding. Critical to my appreciation is their various commitments – over many decades – to understanding how field-based activities, and direct engagements with the experiential and material embodied relations with the field are fundamental for understanding and knowing new relationships with our surroundings.

Lee Patterson is a UK sound artist and musician best known for his performative live events with everyday objects alongside his field recording work with hydrophones and contact microphones. Patterson attempts to understand elements of his surroundings through acts of close listening and noticing both with the aided and naked ear. How he listens, thinks, moves and repeats processes with and in the field, is engaged and alive in the moment. His working methods resonate with both Pauline Oliveros' method of radical attentiveness *Deep Listening* (2005); and composer Annea Lockwood's (1967-) experiments with sound, which thrive on the specificity of physical objects through listening. In 2011, 2014 and 2019 I worked with Patterson on three projects that involved intensive periods of time together in the field, exploring co-productive processes of noticing, looking, listening and understanding in relation to a number of peatland ecologies and upland habitats. Patterson works in the moment, making micro adjustments with intense concentration in a sensory way that changes his relationship with the environment from objective observer to subjective sensor. Even though equipped with microphones and hi-tech recording instruments, he becomes a form of wild-life. The sound itself becomes a force of collaboration in the composition, rather than something to be extracted and analysed objectively as data. We both learnt to look and listen differently, developing unique and attuned approaches which have gone on to inform the methodological enquiries this research details. I discuss this further in Chapter five.

UK-based London Fieldworks (2000-), as noted above, are best known for their research-led, interdisciplinary and collaborative works across places, architectures and technologies; their practice explores process and transformation. Through fieldwork in various geographic



locations, they develop a kind of intimacy with place that creates the conditions to make new work. Their approach, which often appropriates scientific language, tools and methodologies, has provided an important context for this research. Within much of their work they negotiate fieldwork as artistic practice through exploring differing forms of observation, capture and mediation. Their approach looks for correlations between landscape and imagination, instrumentation and subjectivity as part of a process of understanding how an experience of place might have the ability to profoundly affect how we think about things. Works such as *Polaria* (2001) and *Remote Performances* (2014), which span remote orchestrated fieldwork expeditions and an off-grid temporary radio station, have all contributed to the conceptual development of my own field-based practices.

US-born-Scottish artist Ilana Halperin makes work in multiple locations to engage with and understand – ‘in an empathically intuitive and bodily way’ – the vast and unfathomable timescales found in geology (Barnes and Patrizio, 2012, p. 6). Discreetly autobiographical in nature, her work over the last two decades employs fieldwork as both a research tool and context in which to make work. Her fieldwork has taken place in diverse locations including Eldfell Volcano in Iceland, erupting volcanoes in Italy and Hawaii, petrified caves in France and geothermal springs in Japan. She often works in conversation with specialists in geology, volcanology and physical geography. Halperin describes her personal experiences and encounters with geologic events and phenomena as a form of ‘physical geology’ or revolving around an idea of ‘geologic intimacy’ (Halperin, 2020, 2017), which not only considers geology as material-based but also as emphasises corporeal understanding. Halperin uses the geophysical processes of different living landforms as collaborators or agents in her work, as recognised by art historian Andrew Patrizio (2020) when suggesting that Halperin’s idea of geological intimacy ‘can only happen at the conjuncture where both phenomena, the human and the inhuman cohabit’. Sensing, experience and witnessing are important aspects of Halperin’s practice which she explores with an openness to different media. Her dialogic processes across entities, experiences, forces and specialisms share similarities to my own approaches, demonstrating an openness to a process of fieldwork that incorporates understandings of how being in the field permeates and alters both method and work.

## Chapter Three

### Environmental Context: experiential knowledge and the boggy field

This research has been both physically and conceptually embedded in, and significantly informed by my direct experience with specific landscapes. It is important here to expand on my own sedimented experiential knowledge, or what I informally refer to as ‘boggy knowledge,’ permeating the work and thinking. The fluctuating environments I have been frequenting – mires and peatlands – are, as noted earlier in the thesis, often overlooked or perceived as precarious but have nevertheless supported several field-based approaches and a fieldwork practice. This chapter, therefore, foregrounds the significance of my experience of these environments in producing knowledge frameworks underpinning my research.

### **3.1 Landscapes of peat and mire**

Over ten years, whilst thinking with and from the contingencies of these landscapes I have come to the realisation that a more nuanced and discursive understanding of these ecosystems requires greater consideration of their distinct character; their permeability, the weather, and how slowness is embedded within them. Peatlands are particular, out of the way and in-between ecosystems: particular in how they exist due to a very specific set of ecological conditions relating to topography and water; out of the way not only in regard to their physical geographical positioning but our human ‘distant’ relationship to them; and in-between in that they sit at an intermediate point, between lowland or mountain, solid and liquid.

Scientifically bogs are understood as unstable physical environments. For botanist David Bellamy, peat producing ecosystems or mires are ecologically ‘unbalanced systems’ – meaning they accumulate quicker than their rate of decay – as well as dynamic ecological entities that are constantly changing, growing, spreading and eroding (Bellamy, 1974, p. vii). Peat as a substance is similarly complex due to its ‘unusual characteristics as an earth surface material,’ described by scientist Noel Hobbs as an ‘ordinary extraordinary material’ (Warburton and Evans, 2010, p.6). Complimentary to this is the artistic positioning of peat bogs. Joseph Beuys, referred to bogs as ‘the liveliest of elements in the European landscape, not just from the point of view of flora, fauna, birds and animals, but as storing places of life, mystery and chemical change, preservers of ancient history. They are essential to the whole ecosystem for water regulation, humidity, ground water and climate in general’ (cited in Tisdale, 1979, p.39).

### **3.2 Slowness**

To understand bogs requires an appreciation of slowness, or the slow movement of time. Peat accumulates in a process of decay formed by layers of plants rotting down slowly and

partially, building up approximately 1mm a year over thousands of years. Peat soil is a mixture of decomposed plant material that accumulates in a water-saturated environment which is absent of oxygen. This absence of oxygen in the layer beneath the sphagnum means the decomposition of dead sphagnum is extremely slow, remaining ‘relatively unaltered for centuries’ (Kimmer, 2003, p.113)

The timing of plant growth in these landscapes also reveal processes and durations that are complex and interconnected. Bog rosemary, for example, grows slowly, with most plants producing fewer than four new leaves in any one year. John O’Reilly (2021), a North East England UK ecologist with whom I have spent many hours exploring bogs, tells me how in many ways these plants aren’t even growing slowly, but rather, as a result of the incredibly short growing period of approximately six weeks a year, they are for 46 weeks just sitting there, in the cold, waiting. He commented that if you were to grow bog rosemary plants in a greenhouse, they would grow best in warm and dry conditions, yet you only find them in these cold and wet places. They can grow in bogs because almost every other plant species dislike boggy conditions even more. Only a tiny number of native plant species can tolerate growing in bogs at all. They are just too wet, too acidic, too lacking in oxygen and available nutrients. ‘Even bog rosemary doesn’t really want to live here, but it has no other option’ he concluded.

I first met John whilst he was leading a workshop at Moor House NNR in 2012, attempting to explain the nuance of colour to scientists to identify different Sphagnum species. What I witnessed was revelatory. These experts, who all knew this landscape, appeared to struggle. It dawned on me that identifying mosses not only requires time, but a process of attunement to the particularity and peculiarity of these environments; something that for Anna Tsing (2015, p) is an ‘art of noticing’ or paying attention to things that are often missed. For Tsing an ‘art of noticing’ suggests a framework where time is complex, interconnected and multi-directional. Instead of a narrow understanding of time as linear, an ‘art of noticing’ allows for alternative possibilities to be considered. As I move slowly through and across a boggy landscape, I move in and out of different temporal and sensual registers into wider interconnected networks. At first, I appear to be walking within an expansive moorland but quickly find myself within smaller and more intimate processes and durations. Through my slow encounters with bogs, I have learned to think in relation to others, both human and non-human. Using a variety of embodied, spatial and perceptual registers – moving, stumbling, walking, falling, kneeling and sensing in the field, I notice changes in the vegetation beneath my feet, for example, where I feel dryness, hear crunching, see no water and then position these perceptions in relation to a wider ‘art of noticing’. In this sense a temporal adjustment causes a greater somatic immersion in what surrounds us.

### 3.3 Permeability

Peat bogs are by their very nature fluctuating landscapes. Hydrologically water moves and travels through bogs in complex ways and in doing so highlights how porosity plays a significant role in their ecological function. Bogs are often likened to a 'sponge' that holds and slowly releases large amounts of water, but this is actually incorrect for 'a wet sponge cannot hold much additional water' (Labadz et al., 2010, p.3). Peatlands rely upon their retention of water and are controlled through hydrological process which alter the characteristics of the peat based on the chemical composition, volume and variability of the waters which feed into them (ibid, p. 6). Porosity can also shift perception through direct encounter. Walking through a bog covered in sphagnum is an intimate sensation of physically melting into something else.

As I have learnt to move with these unstable ecosystems, new possibilities occur within their lack of stability. The more I stumble and sink, the more I open myself up to a situation where the bog plays a significant role in the value and effectivity of the encounter. Through experiencing bogs as fluid entities composed of permeable layers, I become aware of how my own bodily activities are also a porous membrane. Astrida Neimanis (2010) refers to the term ecotone – a zone of fecundity, creativity and transformation. For Neimanis this notion allows for a more complex understanding of how relations between multiple bodies of water might be understood to interact and relate to each other in more porous ways (Neimanis, 2010; 2015). In this context bogs are liminal spaces; transitional areas of gradual shifts and abrupt changes where multiple bodies traverse and learn to exist within ambiguous boundaries and in the 'quivering tension of the-in-between' (ibid.). From a scientific perspective an ecotone is described as the zone where two ecosystems come together and overlap. For biologists Attrill and Rundle (2001, p.1) 'ecotones are highly dynamic and usually unstable, resulting in an environmentally stressful zone (*tonus* = stress or tension), creating a coming together of uniquely different, but individually relatively homogenous environments'. Although peatlands and mires – as organic wetlands – can be perceived as ecotones between terrestrial and aquatic environments (Hatvany, 2009), the term is more commonly used to describe various transition zones within them. Permeability is a way of calibrating the ability of a liquid to pass through a material, which is a form of transition. The lagg, for example is an ecotone, which exists between a raised bog and the surrounding mineral soil.

Ecotones are useful because they not only refer to places of ecological tension and complexity, but they also foster a rich framework for thinking more discursively about how human activities become caught up in an environment's expansions and contractions. In

being aware of the physical nature of my movements within these environments, I become part of a wider consideration of how multiple bodies are coming together in actual time. The fluid and porous nature of these unstable environments re-conceptualises how we perceive of our own bodies as fluid entities in relation to others (Neimanis, 2015), a different kind of porosity both bodily but perhaps emotionally or psychologically too. Donna Haraway (2008) likens her notion of contact zones – how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other – to ecotones, where ‘their edge effects, are where assemblages of biological species form outside their comfort zones’ (Haraway, 2008, p. 217). Permeability then engenders an openness towards both the experience and the reality of being in relation with others, human and non-human. It is a lively edge where new experiences can move between states.

### **3.4 Weather**

The weather plays a crucial role in the existence and characteristics of peatlands. Blanket bogs, for example, accumulate as a result of significant amounts of rain and a generally cooler climate; a relationship between climate and topography. At Moor House, where most of this research was undertaken the weather continuously fluctuates. Climatologist Gordon Manley (1902-1980), who built a hut in the 1930s at Moor House to study local weather phenomena, was attracted to the North Pennines, and Cross Fell in particular, as the ‘most extensive area of bleak uncompromising upland that England possesses’ (Manley, cited in Veale et al., 2014, p.33). From my own experience of Moor House, these different, often intense weather experiences are never abstract, rather they ground me within a moment in time. Doreen Massey refers to how the weather, and wind specifically, can provide ‘a kind of sensual orientation,’ providing important ‘reminders of this place’s place in the wider scheme of things’ (2003, pp.117-118).

As anthropologist Tim Ingold has described it, the weather continually disrupts any interface between earth and sky where ‘the inhabited world is constituted in the first place by the aerial flux of weather rather than by the grounded fixities of landscape’ (Ingold, 2011, p. 73). For him, the weather is the very *temperament* of being (Ingold, 2010, p.33 his emphasis). My own experience confirms that it is impossible to engage with peatlands without being directly affected by the weather. It is the dominant influence on decisions, responses and experiences from the choreography of continuously adding and shedding layers; the prevailing and relentless south westerly wind that takes your breath away as you attempt to open gates; the clearest of days allowing you to see and experience the expanse of where you are; or the constant driving rain that results in having to seek shelter between slopes and gullies.

Ingold refers to a 'weather world' – a zone where all terrestrial life is lived and continually subjected to the continuous fluxes of the medium of weather (Ingold, p 96). For Ingold the weather-world is an intermediate and lively zone 'where earth and sky are inextricably linked within one indivisible field' (Ingold, 2011, p. 96). Instead of perceiving the sky and earth as separate, the weather-world is pulled into a larger construction of relations and forces. To attend and engage in the 'weather-world is to align one's own conduct to the celestial movements of sun, moon and stars, to the rhythmic alternations of night and day of the seasons, to rain and shine, sunlight and shade' (Ibid). The 'weather-world' is an open space of movement and flux engulfed in multi-sensuous experiences. When attempting to further understand boggy weather from this perspective, the weather-world provides a productive point of reference for considering what it feels like to be caught up in the continuous transformations of the environment. As such, positioning oneself as part of a 'lived zone' enables greater consideration of the experiential and atmospheric conditions of being *in* the field. As I stand within an eroded peat flat, on a typically wet and windy day, I look towards the horizon, but I don't see it, rather I feel the wind blasting against my face and my eyes watering. I engage with my surroundings in close range and hands on, feeling the weather and moving haphazardly within the 'weather-world'.

Another significant environmental actor is the process of *weathering*. Peat, rocks and vegetation are continuously altered as a result of different exposures to the atmosphere. Landforms such as palsa mires, hags and sections of peat are weathered as a result of the climate shaping and altering forces of multiple agents over time; the wind removing, frost penetrating, frozen bogs expanding, permafrost melting, wind lifting, sun drying, rain hitting, rain and ice expanding and heat contracting. The winds that buffet the uplands of the North Pennines produce shifting patterns in certain exposed sections of peat. Formed over time by the predominance of wind and rain from the South West, the asymmetrical forms of eroding hags and the formations of toothed surfaces and tiered terraces reveal a complex, weather-shaped topography.

Weathering as concept and physical process has also shaped and influenced my own experiences, thinking and practice. By existing as part of a fluctuating environment composed of a multitude of phenomena, experiences and interactions, the weather affects and shapes my moods and motivations. Equally through the process of my own movements I then literally move and alter the field. This, over time, has also revealed how the nature of my direct encounters with these environments is also caught up in a process of weathering, resulting in multiple expansions and contractions from the shedding and putting on of multiple layers of clothing, where technical polyester apparel, weatherproof and moisture permeable fabrics help me breathe, sweat, stay dry and warm; to the slow weathering of my

thinking, where the weather has not only eroded, expanded and contracted ideas but has enabled new thoughts and forms to occur. As such, the process of weathering is simultaneously impacting on my own existence as much as it does the bogs. Weather, often held to be something to rally against can even in the worst conditions be generative.

### **3.5 Coming-together: boggy knowledge**

If greater consideration is given to the distinct characteristics of bogs as ‘fields’, through slowness, permeability and weather an experiential form of understanding is arrived at which can foster alternative possibilities for engaging with the world. Firstly, slowness becomes an active process; secondly, the permeability of a bog offers a unique but interconnected sense of how multiple bodies come together, and, finally, boggy weather shapes both the landscape and the bodies who enter it. Advancing into the three main chapters, this form of *boggy knowledge* moves fluidly between each layer, acting metaphorically as a hydrological process that runs and circulates throughout the thesis, and underpinning the understandings gained and developed.



Chapter Four:  
lagg (geomorphing)

Utsjoki, Finland, 21 April 2016:

*The Lakes are now highways and the hills roads. White land meets blue sky as far as my eyes can see. After 30 minutes or so Essi stops the skidoo. He thinks this is the place. I am unsure. There are no familiar markers to suggest we are at Vaisjeaggi. We continue our search. After driving around for some time, we return to where we had stopped previously, standing pretty much in the exact same spot facing a different direction. This was indeed the same tundra of palsa mires I visited the previous September; except instead of seeing palsas, protruding out of the surface of the bog waters amongst the intensity of autumn colours, I now see a number of peaty circles of varying sizes amongst a vast snowy field, acting like portals to a world beneath. I attempt to feel some kind of familiarity with the place, but I don't. Walking up and down gradual slopes of snow covered palsas I roll down a palsa and repeat, down and repeat, down and repeat. As I move, I imagine the pools of water and mass of vegetation beneath me, now existing in a frozen and suspended state. Water freezing, uplifting and creating. I'm metaphorically blindfolded by the snow. I take my sunglasses off to attempt to film and photograph, but the light is so intense, my camera doesn't have enough aperture stops. I begin to feel nauseous, and my eyes hurt. This lasts for the best part of 12 hours.*

## LAGG: *Geomorphing*

*it will always be unfinished and open,*

Doreen Massey, 2005

This first chapter considers how a specific set of explorations within a number of Finnish peatland landscapes, like the one referred to in the field notes above, inspired me to re-think my approach to a field-based practice. These experimental investigations became playful and reactive processes that resulted in the generation of a new method for engaging with the field, which I term *geomorphing*.<sup>28</sup> This neologism developed from my thinking in the field, combining an interest in the subject of geomorphology – the comprehension of the form of the ground surface and the processes that shape it – with an understanding that what was happening to these surfaces was also inextricably happening to me. *Geomorphing* is an approach that I have critically framed with the spatial politics of Doreen Massey and feminist new materialist trajectories to understand the field as a lively work-in-progress that emerges in an understanding with a field in constant process.

Crucially, this shift towards *geomorphing* represented a deeper immersion with the field through an amplification of an embodiment that actively engages with the material and experiential nature of fieldwork in new ways. Previously I might have observed and appreciated these aspects and worked with them once away from the site. In Finland, prompted by the geophysical properties of specific peatland sites, I began to direct my focus away from attempting to extract meaning from what I was witnessing and experiencing towards an explorative investigation with the field itself; its material and phenomenological distinctiveness and my own direct physical encounters with that materiality. I was no longer behind the camera or holding audio equipment, observing the landscape, but rather I was actively engaging with the ways in which I was experiencing weather, processes and phenomena in and through my human body. As such I became part of the processes of the field, a complex coming together of a multiplicity of contingent things (human and non-human), in continuous movement and formation.

A significant element of my time in the field in Finland was spent rethinking my own activities in relation to producing knowledge, specifically in how I might give greater attention to other voices and contexts, embracing the non-human agents and entities as

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<sup>28</sup> Whilst writing the thesis I became aware of the term *geomorphing*, being used to refer to a technique within computer graphics, a way of smoothing transitions between different levels of detail in 3D objects. Whilst there are interesting conceptual alignments and parallels which might be a line of enquiry to pursue in the future, I want to clarify that there was no link between my own conception of the term and this version of *geomorphing*.

integral elements, whilst simultaneously considering my own position and involvement as part of the process. In time this aligned with a commitment towards situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988), which I discuss in Chapter five, but whilst in Finland, I increasingly engaged in a process that attempted to treat non-human entities as equal collaborators in the production of knowledge.



Figure 2.1: Rovaniemi train station (Santa Express)

In the field-notes that precede this chapter I describe the disorientating experience of both trying to locate a previously visited palsa mire and the unexpected snow-blindness along with the physical and metaphorical confusion which it triggered.<sup>29</sup> In that period of not being able to see clearly, I felt acutely aware of being somehow absorbed: an absorption which is also a type of meeting, the generation of an ecotone in Astrida Neimanis's (2010) expansion of the term. In this regard snow-blindness was an experience which caused me to not only disassemble familiar ways of working but to push through the boundaries of what an embodied field-based research and practice involves.

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<sup>29</sup> Snow-blindness occurs due to an ultraviolet exposure, which is increased by the light reflecting from the snow. Ultraviolet exposure is also higher at altitude and with clear skies. In Finnish Lapland, I experienced a mild version of snow blindness that lasted for the best part of 12 hours. This was a new kind of exchange where the landscape was in my body, entangled with pain and discomfort. A different experience to the largely visual encounter that had taken place, together with my camera and equipment out on the tundra that same day.

Over two interrelated sections, drawing on a series of works entitled *geomorphings* (2016-18), I examine the beginning of a fieldwork practice relating to the particularity and peculiarity of a number of peatland landscapes and their geomorphological processes. Section one briefly describes the two landscapes where field-based research was undertaken and how their characteristics informed my overall thinking. Alongside this I discuss an early video work *About a Journey* (2016), to foreground the field as involving a multiplicity of contingent elements, drawing on a number of artists' and theoretical approaches which have resonated with this thinking. Firstly, Lucy Lippard's notion of 'topographical intimacy' which considers an intimate immersion of oneself within a topography through lived experiences. I then go on to discuss Robert Smithson's idea of a 'primary process' as a form of making contact with matter. The second section discusses the field of geomorphology: how the temporal-spatial and geomorphological nature of the field can support a more lively and responsive form of engagement, explored through a conversation between Doreen Massey's active conceptions of space, geomorphic processes and artistic fieldwork. Alongside this I use my field-research within the palsa mires in Finnish Lapland and a raised bog in Eastern Finland to consider what a spatial practice of *geomorphing* could be, if supported by Massey's theories of space. I then go on to suggest *geomorphing* as a lively aesthetic inspired by Jane Bennett's (2010) elaboration on a vibrant sense of matter. I conclude by suggesting the practice of *geomorphing* is a distinct approach for fieldwork.



Figure 2.2: Between Kevojarvi and Vaisjeaggi, Finland, April 2016.

#### 4.1 Vaisjeaggi palsa mires, Utsjoki, Finnish Lapland & Viklinsuo mire, Eastern Finland

This field-research was undertaken between April and June 2016 as part of an artist residency with HIAP (Helsinki International Arts Programme). It involved two mire locations: the frozen bogs (palsa mires) in Vaisjeaggi, northern Finnish Lapland over the winter; and Viklinsuo mire in eastern Finland during early summer. This journey to Finland took place for two reasons. Firstly, to advance my artistic research into peatland landscapes as environmentally unstable and overlooked ecosystems, but here through the lens of palsa mires. Secondly, to challenge my own working methods in relation to field-based activities. Prior to this my peatland research had taken place in the North Pennines, UK. The difference from travelling such distance, being miles from familiarity or inter-human relations in Sápmi region in Finnish Lapland, prompted a fresh take on how the field exists as a site of experience and experimentation. Acknowledging this shift, I consciously adopted an approach to make work which was open to other human and non-human elements, which led to experiences which were as transformative as they were unexpected.<sup>30</sup>

Finland – or Suomi in Finnish – ‘is a land of mires’ (Lindholm and Heikkilä, 2006), which along with the country’s numerous forests and lakes form an important and integral part of Finnish landscape and culture (Korhonen, Korpela and Sarkkola, 2008). Mires form one-third of its total land area with some of the first layers having formed at the end of the last ice age ‘when the land was released from the grip of glaciation and of the water covering it’ (Virtanen, 2008, p.12). In the seventeenth century, Swedish writer Georg Stierhielm even proposed that the name Suomi might derive from the noun *suo*, meaning ‘bog’ (Laaksonen, 2008, p.266). A precondition for Finland’s abundance of mires has been ‘the region’s humid climate, which is compatible with mire formation – evaporation being less than precipitation’ (Virtanen, 2008, p.12). Much mire conservation work in Finland has been carried out over the last five decades – ‘a consequence of the exploitation of mires (for peat extraction, forestry, agriculture and water reservoirs) – at a higher rate in Finland than all the other northern regions in the world’ (Lindholm and Heikkilä, 2006, p.179).

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<sup>30</sup> Until going to Finland, most of my work as an artist had been involved within the moors, uplands and coastal landscapes of North-East England. The people and environments encountered during this residency, played an important role in the development of this research. Given I am discussing field-based research which took place in Finnish Lapland (Sápmi), it is important to acknowledge the Sámi indigenous peoples – the long-term inhabitants of regions encompassing areas currently governed by Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia – as the main inhabitants of this land. I also want to acknowledge support from the late Matti Seppälä, Raimo Heikkilä, Essi Kauslainene and Ikka Swanpera who all helped me to access and attempt to understand these landscapes.



Figure 2.3: Lake Snow Inari, Inari, Finland, April 2016.

#### 4.1.2 Vaisjeaggi palsa mires

Finnish mires, and specifically palsa mires were first brought to my attention whilst undertaking a year long Leverhulme funded artist residency within the Department of Geography at Durham University between 2014 and 2015. During a field trip to Moor House NNR, I met Matti Seppälä Emeritus Professor, Helsinki University – a physical scientist and visiting fellow at Durham who had dedicated over 50 years of research to the palsa mires of northern Fennoscandia. Standing together on a hagg amongst a plateau of eroded blanket peatland, he enthusiastically described the quirky but overlooked nature, geomorphological qualities and unique processes of palsa mires, which inspired a greater curiosity in me.<sup>31</sup>

The term palsa was originally used by the Sámi people and Finns as describing a large peat hummock with a frozen core, rising above the surface of a mire (cited in Seppälä, 1972).

<sup>31</sup> Located somewhere between my growing interest in Finnish mires, my offer of a post graduate research candidacy and the residency with HIAP, I met glaciologist and Professor of Geography at Northumbria University John Woodward who tentatively invited me to accompany him to Finnish Lapland, where together with Matti Seppälä, he would resurvey the palsa mires to monitor any change in size since their last visit five years previously. This trip, which occurred in September 2015, also brought together several people associated with Northumbria University who each had a broad interest in northern landscapes.

Palsas at Vaisjeaggi are found in the discontinuous permafrost region of northern Lapland in Finland (Seppälä, 1997) and contain 'a permanently frozen core of peat and/or silt, small ice crystals and segregated ice, which can survive the heat of summers' (Seppälä, 2006). They are categorised by their morphology: a combination of dome-shaped, elongated string-form, longitudinal ridge-form, and extensive plateau palsas as well as palsa complexes with many basins, hollows and ponds of thermokarst origin (ibid, p.156).<sup>32</sup> The diameter of dome-shaped palsas range from 10m up to 150m and the heights from 0.5m to 7m in Finland (ibid), and they typically rise above the surface of the surrounding peat by approximately 1-1.5m. They require certain climatic and environmental conditions in order to exist, grow and survive: an average temperature less than -1°C; the right amount of snow (too much and palsas would disappear) and wind to blow the snow from the top of the palsas and penetrate deep enough for a frozen core to take effect; and enough peat (if the peat layers are too thin then their insulating effect would be insufficient to keep the ice frozen during the summer months). Palsas have an average age of around 150 years, though they can be 1000 years old, or one-year young (Seppälä, 2006).

The sub-Arctic environment is explored by scientists as a model-nature for research, where results on environmental impacts retrieved can be quickly seen and generally interpreted (Beloff et al., 2011). As such these environments are sensitive systems showing symptoms of bigger problems in relation to climate change. Though they are not the vast glaciers caving into the sea featured more regularly on news reports, they are still important harbingers of what is happening climatically.

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<sup>32</sup> Thermokarst is scientific technical term which refers to a terrain-type and to the formation of a landscape as a result of the melting permafrost ground.





**Figure 2.4:** Palsa mires at Vaisjeaggi, Finland, September 2015. Photo by the author.

My time at Utsjoki and staying at Kevo Subarctic Research Institute<sup>33</sup> was mainly solitary, yet I carried the sedimented memories of scientific knowledge or theoretical understandings passed to me which informed my understanding of the landscape in ways that did not feel lonely, but collaborative. The work *Slow active layers (palsa/Seppälä/Harrington)* (2016) – see Figure 2.5, considers this through the construction of a photographic diptych in which two people are standing at different seasons but on the same palsa. The first image is of Matti Seppälä, and I took this photo whilst he stood on the top of a domed palsa at Vaisjeaggi, in autumn 2015, measuring the space between its frozen core and the peaty surface. The second image is from when I re-visited the same palsa in winter 2016. Alone, using a self-timer, I photographed myself standing in the same position as Seppälä. Manoeuvring across and through this tundra in the winter, I sensed through my own experience, how Seppälä was synonymous with the palsas. His presence, research, conversations, stories and cloudberry snacking contributed a significant layer to how I perceived and moved with this landscape. In other words, it was hard for me to view the palsas without Seppälä’s presence, in body or in mind, forming a significant part of the experience. Over fifty years, Seppälä, like the palsas, had been guided and shaped by the geomorphic processes of this landscape. His research and the nature of his physical

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<sup>33</sup> The Kevo research station lies in northern Finnish Lapland, in Utsjoki, by lake Kevojärvi, where studies into the subarctic nature and interactions between the natural world and humans have been studied for over 60 years. It is part of the Biodiversity Unit of the University of Turku. see <https://sites.utu.fi/kevo/en/>

encounters contributed to them too – erecting fences around some palsas, growing others – and I now found myself joining this ongoing dialogue. Part of the experience whilst there was informed by scientific knowledge, but it was equally constituted by my personal connection to the site and others who had worked there.

#### **4.1.3 Viklinsuo-Rapalahdensuo Mire**

The other peatland landscape which informed *geomorphing* take us from the palsas in winter to Viklinsuo-Rapalahdensuo in early summer. This mire is a complex of raised bogs and aapamire systems (bogs consisting of slightly elevated ridges) situated within the North Karelia region of Eastern Finland, located north of Hoytiainen Lake, near Vauisarkka. This vast mire consists of small pools, flarks (irregular depressions or hollows within the bog) and low sedge fen string bogs. As a result, it hosts a rich variety of flora and fauna, from *Sphagnum* mosses to *Eriophorum vaginatum*. It was unfathomably wet and like no other bog I have stood on before or since. Manoeuvring myself across it occasioned movements that were unique to that landscape and in reflection again the field altered the experience as I altered it; with feet displacing water, hands grabbing grasses and eyes constantly searching out the hard edges that might support my weight.

Over three days in May 2016, Raimo Heikkilä, Head of Biodiversity at the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE), not only hosted me but organised two field trips to several mires in Eastern Finland. During those days we walked through some of the wettest bogs I have ever experienced. On my final day Raimo entrusted me with his car, providing maps and directions to help locate Viklinsuo mire. This mire had no boardwalks and no interpretation, so my day was spent literally trying to ground myself whilst constantly sinking.

Within this context I acknowledge the importance of lived experiences as implicit to a field-based practice, one that involves the intimate immersing of oneself within a topography, or what Lucy Lippard, describes as a ‘topographical intimacy’ (1997, p.6). For Lippard, incorporating personal and lived experiences is part of a situated and self-reflective engagement with a location that is multi layered, connective, temporal, spatial, personal and political. This type of engagement is important here in terms of understanding how I perceive the field as a multi-layered, situated process. The notion of a topographical intimacy enables an environmental self-reflexivity to become co-implicated as an ‘active site of tension, which is both encountered and reconstructed by forces larger than itself’ (ibid. p. 6). Her notion of intimate immersion provides a productive point of reference for *geomorphing* in terms of how one might physically react to the material and experiential reality of that landscape: an intimacy that emerges in part through more sensuous engagements, where ‘a place can be felt as an extension of the body, especially the walking body, passing through and becoming part of the landscape’ (ibid, p. 34).



**Figure 2.5:** *Slow Active Layers (Palsa/ Seppälä /Harrington)*, 2016  
Photographic Print, 53cm x 24cm. Photo credit: Laura Harrington.

When considering field-based activities from this perspective, topographical intimacy offers a way to reflect upon how we move through and experience space as a coming-together of multiple, open-ended and interconnected trajectories that for Doreen Massey, is an ‘arrangement-in-relation-to-each-other’ (Massey, 2005, p. 111). Walking up and down a palsa mire the scientific understandings merged with what I was witnessing around me, creating an experience that was both embodied and informed. It was from this point that I increasingly began to explore my own position and actions within the field.

#### 4.1.4 Making contact with matter

In the video work *About a Journey* (2016, 6 min, colour, sound), I interweave many of the constituent parts of a journey to Kevo, Utsjoki through recorded moments on a phone. The work begins in Newcastle, as I say goodbye to my three-year-old son. It then moves through what I would loosely describe as a set of ‘unrelated relations’ – aspects that seem separate but are connected – the movements and thoughts of this enquiry. This includes a sound recording of birds playing through an airport toilet speaker; a busker singing Johnny Cash’s *Ring of Fire* outside Helsinki central station; my cabin on a sleeper train (where I lie on a bottom bunk beneath a sleeping woman who I heard but never meet); a bus driver delivering local papers by opening the door and throwing them into a wooden box situated on the side of the road; and moving across the trajectories of Samiä inhabited land. The work concludes with my walk through the snow to the top of a palsa mire.



**Figure 2.6:** *About a Journey* (2016, HD video, 6 min, 24 sec, colour, sound) Video still.

The coming together of these fleeting, seemingly disparate and fragmented parts of a protracted journey marks an attempt to merge my own lived experiences with the vastness and minutiae of the environments I moved through. As Jennifer Hyndman (2001) tells us, careful consideration is required of one’s own assumptions about the field, which is both here and there, a continuum of time and place. She argues ‘as a researcher, one is always in the field; that by being in the field one changes it and is changed by it; and that field experience does not automatically authorise knowledge, but rather allows us to generate analyses and tell specific kinds of stories’ (Hyndman, 2001, p. 262). The video work blurs

the edges of where the field begins and ends. It asks: am I in the field when on the train, when in the bus, or only when my feet meet the surface of the palsa? What is clear is that in arriving at the palsa my experience of it is imbued with that journey, and the relation I have with it in the present moment is composed in part by the history within me, just as it greets me formed by its own story.<sup>34</sup> As Harrison, Pile and Thrift (2004, p.10) write, ‘landforms have traditionally been seen as discrete entities (as things in themselves). Geomorphological maps employ solid black lines around landforms, yet in the field the boundaries between (and within) landforms are often very far from clear’. Distinctions between the researcher and the field are also unclear, and the works produced through this research hold and reveal the unsettling of such boundaries.

I have referred above to Robert Smithson’s term ‘primary process’ as a way of describing ‘making contact with matter’ (Smithson, 1968, p.84). Within this process, a direct encounter with an outdoor site not only affords a ‘particular encounter, a certain perceptual exposure’ (Kaye, 2000, p. 93), but involves ‘undifferentiated or unbounded methods of procedure that break with the focused limits of rational technique’ (Smithson, 1968, p.84). I take unbounded here to mean the blurring of boundaries between the researcher and field as previously discussed, as opposed to a bounded method where such lines of distinction are clearly delineated. Whilst I recognise the diversity of Smithson’s engagement with the natural world through non-site/site dialectics, earthworks as an artistic movement, etc., I was drawn specifically to an account of Smithson ‘invent[ing] field destinations as a creative-critical act’ (Scott, 2011, p.43) and the significance he placed on what occurred around or in production with the ‘actual land’.

As an example of ‘primary process’, Smithson referred to artist Tony Smith’s account of his well-known car ride across the unfinished New Jersey turnpike, where he talks about there being ‘no way of framing it – you just have to experience it’ (Smith, 1966). Smithson draws on how Smith is ‘talking about a sensation [...] the state of his mind in the primary process’ (Smithson, 1968, p. 84). It is a position that characterises encounters and direct contact with matter as situations where the artist experiences unbounded ways of working (Kaye, 2000, p. 93). It is through the primary process – the artist’s experience of coming into direct contact with the physical world and its raw materials in actual time – that new things are discovered and processed (Robin, n.d. cited in Scott, 2011). Seen from this perspective, field-based activities involve distinct encounters, experiences and negotiations with matter that enable new connections and understandings to emerge.

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<sup>34</sup> This assertion is supported by Harrison, Pile and Thrift (2004) in their introduction of *Patterned Ground: Entanglements of Nature and Culture* when they discuss ‘the identification of geographical landforms, therefore, involves a set of clear assumption not only about the nature of the landform, but also about its history’ (p.10).

Reflecting on my direct encounters and movements within Finnish mires, Smithson's use of 'undifferentiated or unbounded methods' provides a useful framework for thinking through and with the field in ways which enable more open and spontaneous encounters to occur, drawing on direct experiences with matter to describe something more open, indeterminate, and scattered.



Figure 2.7: Bus stop for Kevo Sub Arctic Research Institute, Finland, April, 2016.

## 4.2 Geomorphology, as a lively and responsive form of engagement

In this section I explore the capacity of geomorphological processes to support a more dynamic and embodied engagement with 'the field'. Through my fieldwork practice I examine how the material and experiential distinctiveness of the field informed the construction and development of *geomorphing* as a method that enables an immersive and reactive set of relations to occur.

#### 4.2.1 Geomorphology

Geomorphology is a physical scientific discipline; the study of the form of the ground (Dury, 1959). Geomorphologists work in interdisciplinary ways between hydrology, ecology, climatology and human geography. They attempt to understand how landscapes evolve and change in complex and dynamic processes subject to movement, temporality, and material flux. Geomorphologists ask questions about why landforms are forming or disappearing, positioning these changes in relation to global environmental change. They are concerned with how ‘different exogenic and endogenic processes sculpt the materials that make up the Earth’s surface over time’ (Goudie & Viles, 2010, p.8),<sup>35</sup> not just with regards to the historical record of certain landscapes, forming the backdrop to contemporary monitoring work – but also with what aspects and systems are affecting and changing them now.<sup>36</sup> As such, through its considerations of active processes within the landscape, geomorphology aligns with my method of *geomorphing* and I have come to view my own presence and movements within that landscape as a specific type of geomorphological force.

In asking how geomorphological processes might contribute to my ongoing rethinking of a fieldwork practice, I draw upon aspects of Doreen Massey’s (2005) relational approach to theorising space and place, linking these to geomorphology as a means and opportunity to engage, understand and approach the world in more heterogenous, relational and lively ways. Through drawing on the notion of geomorphology in relation to these unstable landscapes, I tentatively explore a conversation between Massey’s active conceptions of space, geomorphic processes and artistic fieldwork.

Whilst Massey asks larger scale questions than this research addresses, her attention to an alternative relation to space ‘from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny’ (Massey, 2005, p.9) has informed my thinking around geomorphological relations in the field. Massey’s thinking through the emergence of new spaces and places has allowed me to envision how I might develop a field-based practice beyond more rational approaches to being in the field as part of an artistic activity. In doing so, the research seeks new ways for re-thinking and re-imagining specific landscapes, and in light of this Massey’s understandings of how places are coming-together of diverse entities, provide a useful point of reference.

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Exogenic refers to a working from the outside and is used to refer to processes driven by the sun’s energy and usually operating through the climate system, such as erosion by wind and waves. Endogenic means working from inside and refers to the processes powered by energy from inside the Earth, such as volcanic and tectonic processes’ (Goudie & Viles, 2010, p.8).

<sup>36</sup> Whilst in Finland the scientific discipline of geomorphology became a growing interest. This evolved from work in 2014/2015 with geomorphologist Jeff Warburton, (specifically his research in peatland erosion), and now supports my own widening of thinking about interrelationships, trajectories, movement, and constantly shifting spaces always located in the present.

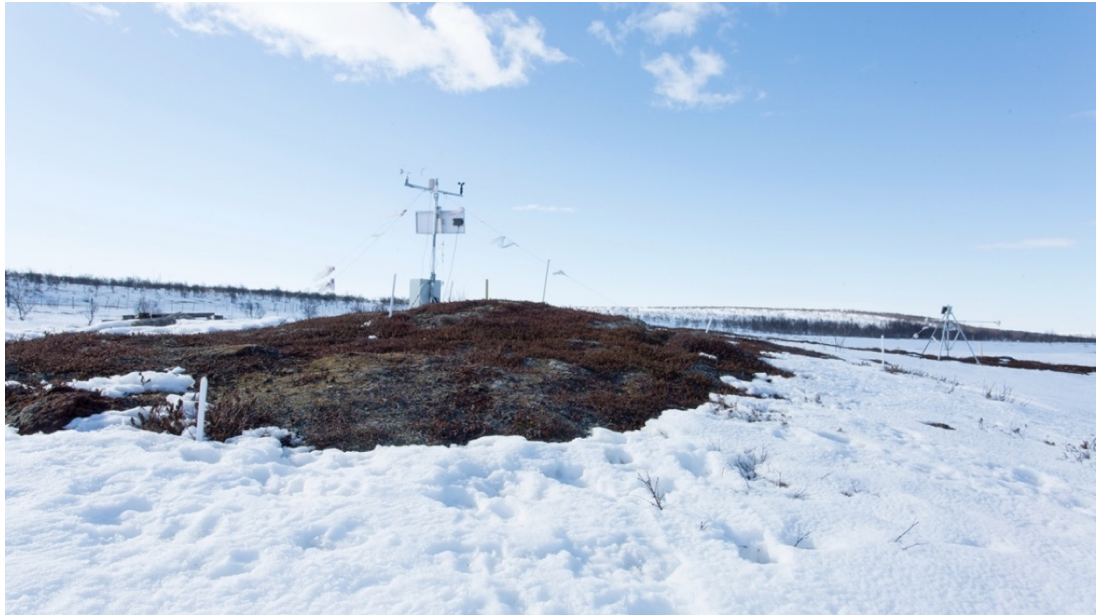


Figure 2.8: Palsa mire at Vaisjeaggi, Utsjoki, Finland, April 2016.

Following Massey (2005), I employ terms space and place in such a way as to move away from concepts of representation and stasis into something more contingent and active. Space, in this sense is a continuously evolving gathering of interconnected processes; a meeting of numerous relations; composed of both vast and small interactions. Place is not static, constituted from points on a map or things, but rather composed of ‘integrations of space and time’ (Massey, 2005, p.130). From this perspective, place is created through various processes and negotiations – what Massey would refer to as ‘*spatio-temporal*’ events (ibid, her emphasis). This notion of ‘event in place’ acknowledges how the ‘specificity of place’ involves the coming together of, and negotiation within and between, various human and non-human activities (ibid). Massey describes a ‘throwntogetherness of place’ and an ‘unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now’ (Ibid, p.140), which rather than attaining a pre-given coherence and an idea of place as a static thing, engenders a constellation of processes continually in flux (ibid). This I would argue clearly aligns with the concerns of geomorphology, with how I perceive the notion of ‘the field’ and thus my own approach to a fieldwork practice.

As with geomorphology, Massey is also looking at interrelationships, movements, and trajectories as continuously shifting temporal spaces. Space as being ‘always under construction’ and ‘always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed’ (Massey, 2005, p. 9). The constant action of geomorphological processes creates a fluctuating space that is permanently rooted in the present. For Massey, a space in which ‘there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for all potential connections have to be established), relations which may or may not be



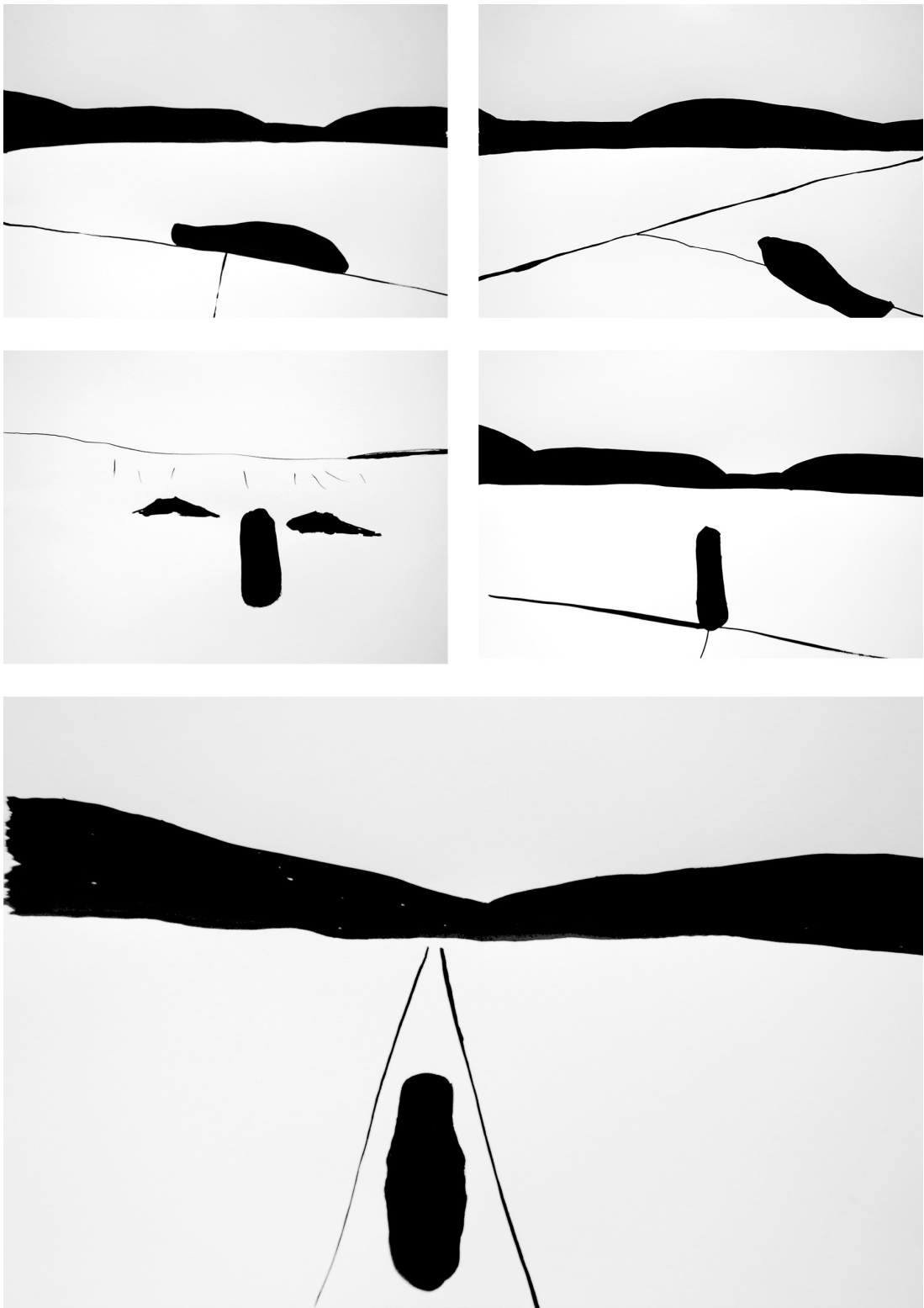
accomplished' (Massey, 2005, p. 11). In the field in Finland, when everything was frozen and seemingly still, my movements became one aspect of the geomorphological connecting forces, creating these 'interactions' as my weight pushed snow together and moved unseen water into new positions.

#### **4.2.2 Geomorphic movements**

Through *geomorphing*, – using my own movements as a kind of geomorphic process – I began to explore the geomorphological positioning of myself and the subsequent methodological approach when in the field to the production of works directly. In the following sections I detail both works that I made for a gallery context and the works that were made directly in the field as immediate and reactive processes. Whilst both explore *geomorphing* the latter is obviously more embedded with the somatic and material realities of the field.

#### **4.2.3 In the gallery**

In the series of works *Geomorphing* (2016-2019) (see Figure 2.9), I began to explore how my own movements and experiences are caught up in the various spatio-temporal processes of the field. *Geomorphing #2-4* (2016, ink on paper) use a painted black form on white paper to bring multiple bodies into convergence. They are based on a number of self-timer photographs taken when moving as part of the Finnish mires. My aim was that these movements – lying, rolling and so on, be more than a mimicking or tracing of the field, rather I was seeking reactive processes that emphasised more transversal connections. As I leant between the trees, lay on frozen lakes, etc – I was mobilising processes that attempted these connections in more embedded and spontaneous ways. These drawings, which evolved from the various connections which occurred, don't represent one thing: rather they allude to a new construction of multiple bodies and movements.



**Figure 2.9:** *Geomorphing #2-6* (2016, ink on paper, each 21cm x 19cm).

This process of thinking and acting with the geomorphic processes of the landscape was also reflected in the making and presentation of a related later work, *Mirescape (geomorphing #4)* (2019, wall vinyl, black ink, video on iPod Nano, sponges), in which I painted directly

onto gallery walls and large photographic prints taken during my time in Finland (Lapland and Eastern Finland) – see Figure 2.10. This work, which was made on return to the UK, was an attempt at interweaving and sharing aspects of the field-based experience into an artistic presentation that played with the spatial and temporal nature of the field as well as the exhibition space. The three-minute video conveyed, through image and sound, a brief embodied encounter between a section of sphagnum moss and my movements. You see my foot move into the frame and compress a section of moss; you hear several fizzing, popping and squelching sounds being released, then my foot moves out of the frame. Once the foot passes, the frame remains focussed over several minutes on the moss, observing how the compression of the foot causes micro and macro movements where the moss is expanding and coalescing with the surrounding water – see Figure 2.12. In doing so the work speaks of the coming together of material bodies, of the absorption and affects of that meeting, what Massey might term a ‘spatial event’ or what I name a *geomorphing* process.



Figure 2.10: *Mirescape*, 2019, installation view at Auxilliary Project Space. Photo by Laura Harrington.



Figure 2.11: *Mirescape*, 2019, installation view at Auxilliary Project Space. Photo by Laura Harrington.

The work, when exhibited involved a number of large black and white photographic prints, revealing the vast expanse of a number of distinct mire environments.<sup>37</sup> Each image wove a horizon along the wall and was linked through large brushstrokes of black paint, the material marking and becoming a part of the landscape, in the same way as my foot marked the moss. I was trying to use the paint to act on the image just as I had reacted in the field myself, lying upon it, in conversation with it. One of the prints, which showed a close-up of moss and fast flowing water, draped off the wall onto the ground, connecting this large image to a small iPod nano and speaker that were placed inside two domestic sponges on the gallery floor – see Figure 2.11. The placement of these small devices demanded a certain physical repositioning from the viewer, to move from the ‘immensity’ of the photographs to the ‘intimately tiny’ (Massey, 2005, p.9) so people were crouching, leaning, bending and moving as part of their experience, a somatic reality of engagement with the work creating resonances to my own movements on the mires.



**Figure 2.12:** *Mirescape*, 2019, 6min, 32 sec, colour, sound, ipod nano, sponges). Video stills.

<sup>37</sup> The work was exhibited at Hangmen Projects Stockholm and then in a different iteration at The Auxiliary, Middlesbrough as part of the group exhibition Field Study (4 July - 15 September 2019), where six artists (Fiona Kelly, Kirsty Harris, Roseanne Robertson, Mark Peter Wright, Amanda Rice) shared approaches to unsettling how place and people evolve over time.

#### 4.2.4 In the field

### CURLING

Veigisaggi, Utsjoki, Finland, April 2016:

*I remove enough snow. Curling myself into a ball and tightly filling the space of the hole, remaining still as my breathing became slower, I thought about the previous palsa with its frozen core that would have once existed beneath me. As I imagined it slowly contracting and thawing, my own breath joined in. Sounds become quieter as the fresh snow surrounding me is soft and strangely absorbent. The wind has gone as the snow envelopes me. My down jacket - filled with bird feathers, their thickness and loftiness - keeping me warm, acting in a similar vein to the peat insulating layers below me. I wondered if the ptarmigan had moved on or perhaps was watching my version of an equally enthusiastic plunge into the snow.*

Matti Seppälä, whilst walking around the palsa mires at Veigisaggi the previous autumn, described his means of investigating the possible effects of increasing amounts of snow occurring in the Arctic due to raising temperatures in the North Atlantic Ocean, causing higher evaporation and more snow in Lapland.<sup>38</sup> To study these effects Matti, over a number of years, carried out two experiments. In one, he erected a fence around an existing palsa, causing a build-up of snow where the permafrost slowly thawed and the palsa eventually disappeared. In the other, he shovelled snow daily away from one location to expose the peat beneath, enabling the wind, in combination with the mean temperature, to penetrate the peat causing ice to emerge and a new palsa to form. At one point Matti and I discussed a landform that exists as a result of a delicate balance of fluctuations, containing sensitive systems that reveal symptoms of bigger problems elsewhere – in this case warming in the Arctic.

My knowledge of the palsas was (and continues to be) greatly informed by my relationship with Matti, meaning that despite not being able to see them due to the snow cover, I was aware of some of what was directly beneath me. As I moved on the snow-covered tundra, noticing half-fallen left-over fences from Matti's experiments, I searched for deeper connections to the palsas below. I then suddenly noticed a white-tailed ptarmigan<sup>39</sup> dive enthusiastically from a tree and bury itself into the snow. Known as the masters of snow-cave construction, ptarmigans often bury themselves in the snow as a means to make snug hollows to protect them from wind and cold. When in deep snow they plunge head-first into it with wings flapping or spread out. The pleasure felt in witnessing such an encounter, in conjunction with reflections on Matti's accounts of his experiments, occasioned my own

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<sup>38</sup> See Seppälä, M. (2003). An Experimental climate change study of the effect of increasing snow cover on active layer formation of a palsa, Finnish Lapland. *Proceedings, 8th International Conference on Permafrost, Zurich, Switzerland*. Balkema: Lisse; vol. 2, 1013-1016.

<sup>39</sup> A Ptarmigan is an Arctic bird and the only genus of bird that changes into all white feathers during the winter. I read about this bird whilst at Sidda, a museum of Sami culture and Arctic landscapes during my stop-over in Inari. A small grouse like bird, which rather than having the darker colours I was familiar with in northern England, was all white aside from its red beak.

attempt at burying myself in the snow, providing the impetus for *Palsa Curl (geomorphing #7)* (2016, HD video, 1 min 6 sec, colour, sound). I was intuitively following this bird's way of engaging with the field to grapple with the entirety of it, to explore a 'zone of fecundity' (Neimanis, 2010) in that exact moment.

In the work I lie in a hole dug into the snow-covered tundra, a pile of fresh snow next to me, the sun bright and a gentle breeze blowing. I later add a strange repetitive hum as a soundtrack, composed of contact mic recordings of the metal coils at the back of the fridge at the accommodation where I was staying; a sound which was a continuous background noise whilst staying at Kevo Research Institute. In this context, the sound is positioned as another geomorphic element – a movement of air. One long static shot provides space to not only notice a random collection of posts and fallen-down netting as well as some scientific monitoring equipment in the distance, but to tune into the subtle inhalation and exhalation of my breath while my curled-up body rises and falls. As the shot continues, the breathing begins to meld with the surroundings, which in turn creeps into the present moment, curling into itself.



Figure 2:12: *Palsa Curl (geomorphing #7)* (2016, HD video, 1 min 6 sec, colour, sound), video still.

## ROLLING

Veigisaggi, Utsjoki, Finland, April 2016:

*The circles of exposed peat at the top of the palsas act like peaks of mountains, except the surrounding topography feels flat. I'm walking on what seems like a flat surface, which is out of sync with my experience of what lies beneath, dome shaped mounds of varying sizes. The largest palsa has a noticeable gradient, suggestive of what I saw in the Autumn. This palsa stands out given the large amount of monitoring equipment at its peak. Trudging slowly through the snow to the top, I had a sudden urge to lie down. As I stretched my arms out, whilst keeping my eyes open, I let the snow, the palsas somewhat hidden geomorphological features and gradual slope slowly move me downwards. Over and over, snow in my face, memories of being a child, everything even more out of sync. Back to the top, down again. Blue merging into white, into blue again, into a pale blue, sounds rushing and whizzing, feeling new sensations. My movements compacting the snow.*

The work *Palsa Roll (geomorphing #8)* (2016); HD Video, 1 min 58 sec, colour, sound) observes me rolling, or engaged within a process of turning over and over again, a moment of absurdity but also an attempt to comprehend this landform in a new way. When rolling with/on the palsa, I entered into a physical dialogue with a landscape shaped by the multiple morphological features and the processes of peat formation/insulation, snow, wind and ice. I moved as a result of its geomorphological features, felt snow on my face and heard crunching sounds beneath me as I rotated. The direct nature of my encounter with the palsa, in combination with my decision to roll, marks an attempt at negotiating the 'here-and-now' within and between myself and the palsa, 'a coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes' (Massey, 20015, p. 140). Such an event, that saw me move back and forth, down and up, down and up, was not necessarily logical or planned – there wasn't a sense of coordination between myself and the palsa – rather it was a spontaneous and playful child-like action; that 'throwntogetherness', involving a temporary meeting and negotiation between different temporal and spatial scales (Massey, 2005, p, 141).

Through my roll my body was also moved exponentially and slowed down by frozen peat. As a result of my rolling, I experienced a re-orientation – not just physically but also critically – of the material relationships and intimacies at play. Through my attempts at reading this action beyond me simply rolling down a snow covered palsa, what emerged was not only a story about an artist and a palsa as independent entities, but an artist's story about an attempt to figure out something more than just physical attributes of this landform. Through the experience of rolling, or *geomorphing*, I was not only attempting to understand the distinct material and experiential nature of this landform through a multi-sensuous engagement, a 'topographical intimacy' (Lippard, 1997) but seeking greater connections across entities.



**Figure 2.13:** *Palsa Roll (geomorphing #8)* (2016, HD video, 7 min, 2 sec, colour, sound). Video still.

## CREEPING

Viklinsuo mire, Finland, May 24 2021:

*Whether I was in the right place I will never know. Out of the car it was hot, and the presence of the mosquitos made any desire to expose my skin unappealing. I had a wee, drank some water, put my feet into neoprene wellies and slung a bag on my back; taking a moment to remember the day Jeff gifted me these boots at the beginning of my residency in Durham. There is no path or signpost and certainly no boardwalk. A periphery of trees are unable to survive as they become saturated by the acidity of the bog and the immense scrub means there is no straightforward approach. I'm with and within the mire; literally walking on fluid ground. I reconsider previous bog manoeuvring experiences and decide to remain still with my eyes open. Everything feels still but in a completely different way to the stillness of Utsjoki. There is an extensive silence, together with an overriding rumble from the depth beneath my feet. As I slowly wade the lower part of my body goes deeper into the bog and sucking sounds are flooded by squeaks and hisses as water releases from the Sphagnum. I feel absorbed rather than immersed. I am moving through the bog, between the flarks, string complexes and hummocks. I lay face down on an appa (a ridge), and I hear the cuckoo from the distant trees call. I inhale and exhale slowly in and out of the bog.*

In the work *Mire Creep (geomorphing #10)*, (2016 HD Video, 6min 85 sec, colour, sound), I am attempting to negotiate an extensive raised bog in Eastern Finland as I move from the mire's periphery towards its centre. The film consists of one durational shot, taken from a fixed camera positioned at the edges of the mire, capturing my seemingly awkward movements and attempts to remain stable within extremely unstable and fluid ground. The sound of feet squelching through a mossy terrain remain throughout. The work ends when I am left looking adrift somewhere in the mire, being consumed by both the bog and the horizon. Over six minutes, the work is an invitation to find a way into the mire; demanding both patience and a re-orientation of how one moves.



In making the work and in watching the interplay between the elements in the film, the underlying material and fluctuating interrelationships of the environment become more apparent than an initial reading or understanding of the landscape/image would reveal. My reactive movements, struggling to manoeuvre within fluid ground, stand out against the perceived static field. Peat is a seemingly inanimate substance as so much of its movements and structures are buried and out of view. In reality, however, peat moves through multiple stages and forms of life, not only in the way it expands and contracts but in how it shifts from carbon absorption to carbon release, or moss to peat, dissipating with water cycles, used as fuel or nutrients of soil, all accumulating new values and associations as it moves. Although the work doesn't speak to all of these, in displaying my *geomorphic* journey across it we come to understand that it is more than it first appears, it is dynamic and vital in other ways.



**Figure 2.14:** Mire Creep (geomorphing #9), (2016, HD video, 7 min 2 sec, colour, sound). Video still.

#### 4.2.5 Geomorphing as a lively aesthetic

Through *geomorphing* in boggy landscapes, I came to appreciate this approach as a ‘lively aesthetic’ insofar as my interactions marked an attempt at participating with both the temporal, fluctuating and material conditions of the field through a lived and active experience. By describing *geomorphing* as ‘lively’ I acknowledge how my movements are interwoven with the multiple processes of a dynamic environment. Lively implies a reactive and attentive understanding of the physical processes unfolding within the landscape through the nature of my direct encounters. However, the inherently ‘active’ nature of the field – which *geomorphing* is reacting to – is enriched further by Jane Bennett’s (2010, p.x) ideas around the ‘vital materialities that flow through and around us.’ Bennett advocates for a certain liveliness; a sensory and dynamic attention to non-human forces functioning inside and outside the human body. This is a productive point of reference for thinking about the multiplicity of dynamic forces at play whilst *geomorphing*. Bennett asserts an inherent vitality in all things, by which she is referring to ‘the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but to also act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own’ (Bennett, 2010, p. viii). This vitality is useful in thinking not only counter-intuitively about the kind of sites this research engages with: precarious, seemingly mundane and overlooked, when in fact they are incredibly lively; but also in the energetic qualities of *geomorphing* itself.<sup>40</sup> It positions *geomorphing* as part of an active landscape.

From Bennett’s viewpoint the field can be perceived as an assemblage of multiple entities, agencies and forces, engaged in open ended interactions and relations. This framing is useful for interpreting my actions of diving into snow over 2000 miles from where I live or my boot sinking against the expansion of spongy moss. This is not a field of fixed entities, rather one in fluid motion, where matter is in a constant process of renegotiation and transformation and so *geomorphing* is a method to move with those motions, to acknowledge them and react intuitively to what both I and they bring.

Referring to *geomorphing* as a kind of aesthetic points towards an enquiry that is not about picturing or representing what life is; rather, it refers to an experience that is caught up in multi-sensuous encounters between the body and the field. My use of ‘aesthetic’ here to capture the thought and practice of *geomorphing*, and its critical reliance on sense perception

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<sup>40</sup> I want to mention again here how in 1979 Joseph Beuys referred to bogs as ‘the liveliest of elements in the European landscape, not just from the point of view of flora, fauna, birds and animals, but as storing places of life, mystery and chemical change, preservers of ancient history’ (cited in Tisdale, 1979, p39). My Leverhulme Residency with Jeff Warburton and the resulting body of work *Liveliest of Elements, an Ordinary Extraordinary Material* looked specifically at peat and peatlands as a dynamic substance, landscape and ecosystem.

follows the footsteps of a ‘geomorphological aesthetic’ put forward by Dixon et al. (2012) in the text *Wonder-full Geomorphology*. Aesthetics in this interpretation is not the vision-centric, personally held attitude regarding what is beautiful, but a multi-sensuous engagement with landscape, and ways of articulating and making sense of that experience (ibid, p. 230). They emphasise modes of working through an aesthetic sensibility where the Earth’s surface and landforms were not ‘signs to be read[...] but part and parcel of this mutually dependent assemblage of people, animals, vegetation, microclimate, elevation and so on all animated and kept in harmonious balance by these forces’ (ibid, p.231).



**Figure 2.15:** *geomorphing*, lake Kevojarvi, Finland, April 2016. Self-timer photo by Laura Harrington.

## **Chapter conclusion**

In this chapter I have considered how a set of artistic explorations within particular landscapes enabled me to re-think my approach to fieldwork, as evidenced through the development of the field-based research in Finland and the related *geomorphings* (2016-2018). *Geomorphing* evolved from my singular presence within particular landscapes, recognising the material and experiential distinctiveness of the field. Through these explorative and playful engagements *geomorphing* offers a lively approach to the immediacy and materialities of the field. I recall a scientist questioning why I would return to Kevo in the winter as there would be ‘nothing to see’ and this not seeing, in snow-blindness, snow-covered frozen land and disorientation I had to grapple to find a new way of engaging with the field. It is not coincidental perhaps that in feeling myself uncomfortable or displaced within my body was the point at which these new sensibilities occurred.

By engaging with the geomorphological and spatial considerations of the field, then, I reorientated my approach towards understanding fieldwork as a complex and productive act of engagement that is actively influenced and shaped by the field itself along with the human and non-human agents that constitute it. Such an engagement acknowledges how multiple forces and relations are always at play; and that we are always with the field and never actually alone. This shapes what occurs and changes, and how distinct processes and relations interact and come together. The work of Massey has enabled me to think of *geomorphing* as a spatial and relational fieldwork practice, and further to this in drawing on Bennett and the lively, vital materiality nature of the field I extend *geomorphing* from an approach to an aesthetic. This sensibility is guided by the bogs themselves, by the immediacy and ‘throwntogetherness’ of the ‘spatial event,’ a multitude of processes and interrelations of which the body, *geomorphing*, is just one.

The thoughts generated by the conception and use of *geomorphing* continued to unfold when I returned to the blanket bogs of the North Pennines for the remaining period of this research. I moved from a reactive position and process towards one that developed a different quality of attention – elongated and deeply intentional – which I discuss in the next chapter. In all cases the concern has been to expand the understanding of an embedded and embodied fieldwork practice to extend new interdisciplinary understandings of particular environments.

Chapter five:  
rand (spiralling)

## **Rand (spiralling)**

*In this spiral repetition, things repeat but with a twist.*

Jane Bennett, 2010

*From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty.*

Robert Smithson, 1968

*I am not sure if this is the spiral Jetty?*

Tacita Dean, 1997

In this chapter I position fieldwork as a situated practice capable of enriching discussion of both artistic research and methodological enquiry. In doing so and building on *geomorphing*, the research moves towards what I term *spiralling*. This approach considers more explicitly the complex nature of a field-based practice on its own terms and in relation to its own situated-ness. If *geomorphing* emphasised engagements with the physical and material environment, recognising and responding to the understanding that the situation between the field and the fieldworker is a two-way process, then *spiralling* is a practice that necessitates an openness to the indeterminate capacities of the field. A practice that like *geomorphing*, engages with the direct somatic experience of the field whilst also widening the temporal location for that engagement; with enough time for new connections and relations to occur.

Drawing upon the methodological processes and conceptual ideas employed whilst working within the blanket bog habitat at Moor House NNR and in developing a number of artworks – *Thinking Through the In-Between* (2018), *felting (river tees)*, (2019) *dissonance (ecotone)* (2016-2020), and *Fieldworking* (2020) – the practice of *spiralling* recognises the non-linearity of fieldwork, emphasising a process that opens up the possibility for unexpected data, surprise encounters and thoughts to occur. By this I am referring to an expanded idea of fieldwork, one that goes beyond merely a projection of a pattern of thought (Driver, 2002), going between ‘here’ (studio, university) and ‘there’ (field), towards speculating new forms, a continuous spiral even, emphasising processes which confront the complexities of the field and utilises them as catalysts for wider understandings. These complexities encompass material phenomena, unruly and unpredictable entities, weathers and life forms, all with multiple needs, temporalities and agency.

There are three interrelated sections to this chapter. The first introduces the notion of *spiralling*, what it is and what it does, drawing on my field-based activities at Moor House NNR and a critical engagement with Tacita Dean's (1997) audio work *Trying to Find The Spiral Jetty* together with London Fieldworks (2018) video work *The Darkest Day*. The second section clarifies *spiralling* as an approach layered by repetition and boredom, which come together to create a third layer; that of attunement. To do this I draw on Jane Bennett's (2001) ethical politics of enchantment to inform *spiralling* in terms of mobilising encounters with the field. From here, I discuss the potential of boredom as a pre-generative process that aligns with Bennett's 'surprise encounters'. I move to Donna Haraway's (1988) notion of *Situated Knowledges* and the conceptual thinking for the work and artists' camp *Fieldworking* to support an understanding of how *spiralling*, through repetition and boredom, leads to a process of attunement that is both situated and embodied. The final concluding section considers the generative and transformative potential of *spiralling*.



**Figure 3.1:** Sphagnum moss, Moor House, UK.

## 5.1 Spiralling

To notice the rumble of the moss whilst it squeaks and hisses amongst apparent silence; repeatedly returning to the same place, noticing the journey there and back; finding a soft focus by sitting for the best part of an hour with the same rock and allowing this process to inform thinking; to take into account the kinaesthetic process that formed the rocks that you engage with whilst sliding across, over and down; to hear the different sounds emitted by a stream and respond by attempting to sound together; enjoying the slightly unconventional feeling of choosing knickers in a hardware store whilst you share a conversation with the Dean of Geography and draw on this as a new fieldwork experience; feeling the effects of snow-blindness for the first time to such an extent that you draw on the affective nature of this experience as a useful exchange; to feel yourself as part of a chaotic process that somehow brings together new matted forms.

The aspects of artistic fieldwork highlighted above help articulate important attributes of *spiralling*. Each involves an immersion and interaction with the nuances of the field not just through the reactive physical and material experiences held by *geomorphing*, but through engaging with an acute perception of time and process, memory and context, knowledge and intention. In doing so *spiralling* seeks to mobilise existing connections into new engagements and participations, recognising that the repetitious aspects of fieldwork – journey, preparation, equipment, record keeping – generate rhythms and patterns to be explored.

Following my return from Finland, continuing with my work at Moor House, I began to further re-conceptualise my approach to fieldwork. At the time I was reading Jane Bennett's *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (2001) and was increasingly drawn to her idea that encounters with the world constitute a form of ethics. The quiet politics of enchantment she details, unearthing and giving greater attention to what we might see as minor experiences, or as Bennett describes as the 'fascinating array of lively and motile morphings' (p.87) offered a touchstone for my thinking at this time, pulling the meta-narrative of climate change into a local and therefore approachable reality. Her ideas resonated with a renewed appreciation of the boggy field as incredibly complex landscapes consisting of an infinite capacity for all manner of indeterminate relations.<sup>41</sup> As such, Bennett offered a critical engagement for both how I might re-think my actions, processes and relations in the field, as

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<sup>41</sup> I refer here to how Bennett's (2001) use of enchantment is employed as a counter story to various narratives of disenchantment attributed to modernity. This, I suggest aligns in some ways to certain narratives of peatland landscapes as distant, useless and places of nothingness. This view over the last decade has altered as their importance has become more understood. As such Bennett's angle, although over two decades old, has offered this research a useful way of engaging with peatlands a – often viewed in the abstract –through experience and material engagements.



well as stimulate a range of new sensate encounters with what surrounded me. This thinking, alongside reflections on my work in Finland; on why I was carrying out repeated visits to particular landscapes; and further research into some of the ways artists were engaging directly with landscape increasingly informed *spiralling* as an approach.

*Spiralling* evolved from my fieldwork within the blanket bogs of Moor House NNR and was pushed further by several factors. Moor House is not an easy site to get to both geographically and logistically. It is an upstream location holding the source of both the rivers Tees and South Tyne. Once there you must contend with its terrain and micro-climate, which is almost always harsh, and be battered relentlessly by wind or rain or both. Visiting Moor House is a commitment which takes up a full day despite being only 50 miles from my city centre home. The social context of Moor House, its rich history of exploration, experimentation and research began to inform my own interests. This research has historically been predominantly across physical geography and environmental science disciplines – with fieldwork being a fundamental process of how scientists work on the site.<sup>42</sup> This interest drew my attention to the various scenarios in which physical scientists and artists were engaging and participating with the field, often imbuing a spontaneous child-like curiosity.<sup>43</sup> *Spiralling* was therefore informed by the frequent return visits to Moor House over extended time periods, supporting a unique depth of perception and capacity to sense multiple times, climates and processes.<sup>44</sup>

*Spiralling* is concerned with encounters between multiple agents involved in a set of interrelations that imagine the field as part of a wider process of engagement that is both dynamic and unpredictable. If Jane Bennett helped me to mobilise and think through these interrelations then Donna Haraway enabled me to consider the practice of fieldwork as a wider process of ethical engagement and responsibility, one that is always embodied and situated. This process focusses on the specific particularity of the ‘encounter’ as a distinct movement away from the conventional disembodied distillation of knowledge, the ‘god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere’ (Haraway, 1988, p.189). *Spiralling* emphasises

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<sup>42</sup> In the 1950s, for example, British botanists William Pearsall and Verona Conway with the Nature Conservancy, facilitated the purchase of the Moor House Shooting Lodge to set up a field station where research into ecological relationships could be undertaken. Weather recording and research into the effects of climate change on the uplands has been undertaken at Moor House for over 70 years and continues today, despite the station closing in 1982. The land is now owned and managed by Natural England and provides free range common (mainly sheep) for villagers in the Eden Valley.

<sup>43</sup> At the time my children were 4 and 1 years old and I was observing how everything in their reach was possible and animated. This was certainly an influence on thinking in relation to my fieldwork practice. I explored this child like curiosity in relation to scientific work in an earlier video work *A Child of its Time* (2014) in which I investigated my pre linguistic child’s reactions to an eroded peatland site which was being scientifically monitored. It aimed to frame a natural and sensory response to landscape where the child makes a claim for both the delight and the importance of creating and nurturing a fresh and engaged relationship with the natural world.

<sup>44</sup> From building a cinema in a scientific storage shed, working alongside physical geographer Jeff Warburton over a year, to hosting an artists’ camp, these artistic projects carried out at Moor House involved significant engagements with this location spanning days, months, seasons and years.

how fieldwork never exists in the abstract – it is always ‘somewhere in particular’. It involves a site and a body and recognises complex acts of engagement and reciprocal interactions between the field and the fieldworker, where one shapes and informs the other, thinking between disciplines and different ways of knowing. Underlying Haraway’s approach is the notion that ideas and knowledge can come from multiple places – weather, body, experiences, light – and all have the capacity to inform and shape understanding. Through *Spiralling* I am drawing on distributed modes of knowledge production and arguing for a fieldwork practice of embodied objectivity, a *situated knowledge* ‘that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems and ways of seeing’ (Haraway, 1988, p.191).



**Figure 3.2:** Moss Flats, Moor House-Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve, November 2016

### **5.1.2 Spiralling as an unknowing knowing**

*Spiralling* necessitates an openness to the indeterminate capacities of the field. As such you set out to do one thing but through a process of immersion, something else entirely takes place. This could be understood as a form of ‘unknowing knowing,’ that through an open-ended process such as *spiralling* new connections and understandings form. As poet Alice Fulton (1989) tells us ‘nothing will unfold for us unless we move towards what looks to us like nothing’,<sup>45</sup> Fulton’s poem points towards a form of connecting and moving between

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<sup>45</sup> From Alice Fulton’s poem *Cascade Experiment* (1989).

places of ambiguity and obscurity as a specific way of thinking. Similarly, when writer Rebecca Solnit (2005, p.6) investigates getting lost she alludes to ‘that thing of nature which is totally unknown to you, is usually what you need to find’. The process of moving towards something unknown as something of value and transformative thus sets the tone for *spiralling*.



**Figure 3.3:** *Thinking through the In-Between*, 2018. Series of black and white medium format photographs.

In the photographic series *Thinking Through the In-Between* (2018), I had gone to Moor House to do some work and had a medium format camera with me to document the process – see Figure 3.3. On the way back, with a roll of film left, I saw the typically submerged

limestone plateau at Trout Beck<sup>46</sup> Having just taken a series of composed photographs for the work *Lunch at the Summit*<sup>47</sup> I decided to ‘move towards nothing’ and attempted to record a moment of connection between myself and the rocks, where each shot would be taken as I moved between them. I was wondering if the images would have something of the quality of being inside the water which was flowing over and under, in and around, the *spiralling* of coming together. I had no idea what the work would be, rather I experimented with how I might capture something of the quality of connection between the field and myself. This is a work which has the process of what is happening at the fore and looks towards the unknown.

Perhaps this is the kind of ‘unknowing knowing’ that Tacita Dean touches upon in her 1997 audio work *Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty*, which emerged from her efforts to locate Robert Smithson’s seminal 1970 land artwork.<sup>48 49</sup> The work is a recording of a conversation made in a moving car between Dean and friend as they attempt to find the resurfaced spiral. They talk continuously about the directions they were given by the Utah Arts Council but despite instructions never find the spiral. As Dean (2006, p.16) informs us in an interview ‘...for some curious, unconscious reason, I put my DAT recorder on [...] I subsequently realised I had to make it into a sound work, because something about that journey had been so extraordinary’. She had no intention of making a work about her search, rather, the result of her elongated journey, getting lost and not finding what she set out to find had value within her thinking and artistic practice. Through continuous externalising Dean’s own embodied experience becomes part of the work. As a listener we hear coughing and mutterings; handling of the microphone; Dean laughing; conversations with her friend; the reading of directions and anecdotal noticing of things such as fences and gates. She is not directing the action, rather, she is one element of a wider action.

Dean uses her disorientation artistically. The work becomes what is happening in the *process* of trying to find *Spiral Jetty*. Through her own experiences, random noticing and chance encounters, she reveals playful interactions, ultimately embedding and embodying the complexities of encounters between artist and field. The generative process of indeterminacy was mobilised rather than ignored. The sense of getting lost is manifest as Dean searches for something that is not even locatable, and through that process new

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<sup>46</sup>Trout Beck is a tributary of the River Tees.

<sup>47</sup> *Lunch at the summit: on high ground* (2018) was a collaborative work between Laura Harrington and artist Luce Choules presented at *Under Her Eye*, British Library, June 2018.

<sup>48</sup> *Spiral Jetty* is a land artwork by Robert Smithson that was created at the edge of the Great Salt Lake in Utah in 1970. See <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/spiral-jetty>.

<sup>49</sup> It is important to acknowledge here how storytelling, mythmaking, postconstruction and playing with the line between fact and fiction – all significant facets within Tacita Dean’s practice – is not part of my consideration of this work. Rather, I draw from Dean’s *Trying to find the Spiral Jetty* (1997) as an example of how, in the act of setting out to make a work in a landscape, the various encounters will inherently shape it. In a (2006, p.16) interview with Marina Warner, Deans states that through the journey ‘It had been sort of transitional’.

connections and thoughts come into play. Dean ends the conversation, and thus the audio work, by asking ‘I’m not sure if this is the spiral jetty,’ alluding not only to the impossibility of trying to locate Smithson’s earth work but to the fact that the journey and processes involved themselves have significant value, worthy of a work in its own right.<sup>50</sup>

This form of ‘unknowing knowing’ being utilised within an artistic-field-based activity is similarly activated in a more recent work by London Fieldworks. The video *The Darkest Day* (2018, 26 min 28 sec, colour, sound) reveals a spontaneous and ambiguous approach to the field and the notion of fieldwork. The premise for the work was straightforward: using a basic camera, the artists (Jo Joelson and Bruce Gilchrist) filmed the movements of a local musician and artist over the course of a day – the winter solstice – as part of an artist residency in Seyðisfjörður, East Iceland – see Figure 3.4. There was no plan, ‘we turned up and took it from there [...] we let Jokul dictate the day, so things just unfolded’.<sup>51</sup> Whilst I appreciate there are wider concerns at play within this work – Icelandic light, darkness, community etc. – of pertinence here is how they embraced openness and flexibility, to see what would happen. This sits in contrast to their earlier expeditionary projects *Polaria* (2001) and *Syzygy* (1999), which were considerably more orchestrated and prepared, pointing towards a possible change in how the notion of fieldwork is explored within their practice.<sup>52</sup>



**Figure 3.4:** London Fieldworks, *The Darkest Day*, (2018, 26 min 28 sec, colour, sound). Video still. Courtesy London Fieldworks.

<sup>50</sup> Tacita Dean’s voice in *Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty* (1997).

<sup>51</sup> Taken from transcript of Jo Joelson talking at *Beyond Fieldwork* at BALTIC 39/BxNU 5 December 2019.

<sup>52</sup> During the event *Beyond Fieldwork* (2019) which I organised as part of this research – see Portfolio of Artworks – Jo Joelson (London Fieldworks) presented the video work *The Darkest Day* (2018) referring to it as an example of how she perceives the idea of fieldwork today. She described this as a shift from previous works which were more orchestrated, prepared, involved various pieces of equipment etc.

If we consider *geomorphing* to be reactive then the distinction in *spiralling* is that the process is attentive, considering what is happening in the moment of its occurrence enriched by a depth of understanding that comes from time and commitment to ‘the field’. Another way of describing this is to say that *spiralling* has a reach and depth that goes beyond the surface, tendrils that pull in the past and future, it is a process which is self-aware. The movement of grasses on the moor, blown by the wind, react to the flow of air with immediacy, and I can choose to move with the elements too in this way; *geomorphing* with the field. However, having had that experience I can choose to investigate further by repeating an activity, asking how does it feel when I push against this, what affects does this have, where might such a feeling lead? The field is recognised as inter-relational where all aspects have equal footing. As such *spiralling* is by nature open, not just to prior knowledge and intention but to what happens in the process. Knowledge generated in field-based activities is situated and embodied and the field has the capacity to alter intention. Space is given for the depth of understanding that comes from repeated visits, to work with both the immediacy of ‘wonder’ and ‘minor experiences’ to use Bennett’s (2001, p.5) pertinent phrases.

## **5.2 Three layers of spiralling**

*Spiralling* identifies two layers as critical modes for experiencing and practicing with the field – repetition and boredom – which in turn align to create a third layer; attunement. Repetition suggests that through the process of repeating an activity and return to the field,<sup>53</sup> new thoughts come into being. Boredom is a means of being open to the landscape, which demands being comfortable with experiencing ‘nothing in particular’. Finally, through engaging repetition and boredom it is then possible to attune to the landscape, locating moments of intersection and resonance. A practice of attunement then, that is also situated, and thus an ethical response that connects the researcher to the wider environment.

### **5.2.1 Repetition: Rough Sike**

Whilst walking up and down Rough Sike (a stream at Moor House), I began to notice and hear things around me in new ways. Not a sudden occurrence, but something that transpired as I continually revisited and moved alongside the stream. I had repeatedly walked the same route over several years, as a way of getting to Moss Flats.<sup>54</sup> There wasn’t a clear path but staying close to the water offered a safe route. At some point, I increasingly noticed how I

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<sup>53</sup> Within my work and this research these ‘returns’ were to particular upland landscapes, as I’ve discussed, but I’m not arguing for *spiralling* to be limited to that sort of specificity.

<sup>54</sup> Moss Flats, is an eroded peatland at Moor House National Nature Reserve as well as a site of scientific monitoring. It was the focus of my Leverhulme AIR between 2014-2015.

was perceiving what was around me differently; noticing new resonances and the way they intersected with my movements. Triggered by hearing the changes in sounds emitted from the stream I moved in relation to them. These sounds were distinct as a result of the undulating topographies, geomorphological qualities of the river's course. Unexpectedly, I found myself humming in response to these sounds. Through my humming, the sounds drew me into another kind of engagement with my surroundings. Sounding out loud felt spontaneous and at the same time awkward, and then caught up in and carried away with the movement of water. This was not a preconceived activity but emerged from the experience of repeatedly walking the same path. My footsteps embossing the peat with each pass and following the flow of the stream – humming in response – I became aware of how much I was part of an interaction of multiple relations, somatic affects and movements that were constantly changing and altering. My sounding, although a simple act of engagement, had a transformative effect. I no longer walked alongside the stream but with it. I was involved in a process of call and response, and through this repetition recognised multiple ways of registering and feeling; both sensuous encounters and emotional responses. I moved into a composition with the stream, which over time, resulted in the work *dissonance (ecotone)*, (2017–2021, 7min, 35 sec, stereo sound). Whilst I go on to discuss this work more fully in Chapter 6, I emphasise here that it evolved from a *spiralling* process rather a singular encounter. It is not the linear fieldwork of point a. to point b. but is engaged directly with what happens cyclically between a and b when repeated.

In repetition, different iterations occur, incorporating changes that take place as a result of their relations with each other. Within my experience of Rough Sike these repetitions gave rise to new conceptions, and I was 'enchanted' by the field in new ways. My theoretical support for this shift was Jane Bennett's (2001, p.38) notion of enchantment and her idea of 'spiral repetitions'. For Bennett, these 'repetitions' can be 'accidents that give birth to wondrous and unsettling enchanting-new forms' (ibid, p.40). Although sensuous experience is central to enchantment there is also a requirement for the 'presence of a pattern or recognisable ensemble' – in my case Rough Sike's tumbling flow – 'of sounds, smells, tastes, forms, colours, textures' (ibid, p.36).

Jane Bennett describes how transformations occur as a result of differentiation through repetition 'because each iteration occurs with the absolutely local chirps, odours, herbs, thoughts, whirs, images, breezes, light waves, viruses, animals, machines, and minerals in its milieu' (2001, p, 40). The more I incorporated repetition into my fieldwork practice, the more I created a space for the unexpected to occur, which in turn revealed new creative possibilities. Each transformation is of course idiosyncratic 'where singular elements of the process undergo mini-metamorphosis and change as a result of their encounters with each

other' (Deleuze, cited in Bennett, 2001, p.38). What *spiralling* does is to offer continual 'encounters with each other' so that one can attune to the 'mini-metamorphosis' and become 'enchanted' with the 'extraordinary amid the familiar and the everyday' (ibid, p.4)

*Spiralling*, in my conception, utilises techniques of repeat and return: visiting the same sites repeatedly over a year, walking the same routes, traversing the same expanse of blanket bog, repeatedly negotiating its haphazard terrain.

### **5.2.2 Boredom: felting**

*Spiralling* also holds boredom to enable renewed forms of engagement to occur. My own lived experience has revealed how fieldwork involves mobilising various rhythms and movements, not only altering my sense of time but how I relate to it. Boredom became part of my experience at Moor House as I found myself increasingly comfortable with doing not very much, a kind of not doing that informed the doing. By this I am not referring to a lack of engagement, rather to how the environment – hectares of blanket bog moorland, minimal paths, sphagnum carpets, and harsh weather conditions – shifted my perception through these direct encounters.<sup>55</sup> I was no longer walking, for instance, rather I was sinking and stumbling in a process that demanded much 'legwork'.

The legwork I refer to is not about repetitive walking along clear paths, but rather strenuous movements between multiple geophysical markers – bog pools, hags, streams, gorges, gullies, bothies, mine shafts, monitoring equipment, and so on, affected by the weather and non-human entities – wind, rain, sun, midges – as I moved. It was through this type of necessary legwork that the kind of boredom I was trying to articulate within a *spiralling* process emerged.

Boredom as part of *spiralling* is a generative pre-state to attentive engagements that occur from various encounters, opening up creative possibilities. It involves uncertain movements that are permeated by haptic encounters in the present, and responds intuitively to a multitude of phenomena, experiences and interactions. In this context, boredom does not occur through a form of detachment from an event, object, moss, heather, person, walk for

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<sup>55</sup> I'm distancing myself here from the types/levels of boredom(s) that Heidegger (1940) refers to and specifically what might be referred to as 'profound boredom' – a metaphysical and existential engagement. Whilst I appreciate there are similarities, what I am arguing for is a kind of boredom that is directly and materially embedded with the landscape – one's position cannot be elevated – boredom is a pace, an active process which necessitates deeper sensing of processes but is in constant relation with the temporalities of the landscape. Rather, I draw from the kind of productive understanding of boredom, a more hopeful one even, that cultural-political geographer Ben Anderson (2014) articulates. He points towards boredom as 'inevitably uncertain,' embodying a 'risk that is absent from an optimistic stance' but is grounded on the 'movement of affect and a specific materialism that attunes' to the possibility of where things might lead to (p.751).



example, rather it exists as the kind of pre-transition necessitated by a transition to joy or ‘enchantment’. In this sense boredom is both a process and a layer in a porous encounter, enabling ‘surprising encounters’ (Bennett, 2001, p.5) to support a transition into new events, understandings and feelings. To work with boredom in this way brings to the fore a consciousness of experience that draws from the movement of forces and weathers; the minor, slow, necessary activities and the relations that occur.

In asking how such ideas of boredom and repetition might be explored creatively, I began to experiment with the process of felting over several months in 2018.<sup>56</sup> This occurred initially through several attempts to make felt at Moor House, during which I explored the haptic, repetitive and unpredictable nature of felting as a process. This involved taking some untreated raw wool, typically used for felting to Moor House, and agitating it with a few elements – from my feet to a beck’s current – to form felt. This in turn led to wider explorative investigations that drew on these experiences to enrich discussions of artistic research and collaborative working, for example in *A Wonderful Anti-Connection: A Conversation Whilst Felting between Laura Harrington and Lesley Guy* (2021). Felting marked an experimenting with some of the complexities of field-based practices: complexities that are composed of folds, twists and unruly processes, much like the internal structure of felt itself.

Moor House, April 2018:

*Pulling a large clump of raw wool from my rucksack, agitating it between the sphagnum moss and my hands, I experience a sense of pointlessness as the fibres seem to resist any form of cohesion. I continued in this way; everything now in close range and hands on. After an hour or so of continuous rubbing the fibres start to matt. Taking another piece of wool, I stand amongst a fast-flowing current in a shallow section of Trout Beck (a tributary of the river Tees). Rather than using the movement of my fingers, the river’s current agitates the fibres. I stand still in the cold water, with both hands supporting the wool as I watch the water pound repetitively against and through the fibres. When home, I remove two pieces of felt from the footholds of my neoprene boots, which I had made as a result of my continuous nine hours of movement in combination with my slow secretion of sweat. Back at home three distinct pieces of felt lay on the floor. Each one embodying the forces and elements that shaped them. An embodiment which they still held in their fibres when later displayed at The Old Fire Station, Middlesbrough in 2018.*

Felting in this way embodies *spiralling* as it is a haptic process that encompasses several layers, holding the transformative effect that occurs as a result of legwork, repetition and movement.<sup>57</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987, p. 553) describe the haptic nature of felt as an entanglement of fibres formed through an ‘aggregate of intrication,’ pointing

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<sup>56</sup> This built on previous interests with felting in connection with peatland landscapes and specifically the work *Vegetation Blankets* (2014).

<sup>57</sup> Felting is a process that requires movement, moisture and animal fiber (wool). Through wetting, agitating and kneading and repeating, new forms accumulate, mat and come into being as microfibrils within the wool mesh together.

towards a process that is in ‘principle infinite, open and unlimited in every direction’ (ibid). Similarly, when Chris Thompson (2011, p. 28) writes about French scientist and mathematician Gaspard Monge (1746-1818) and his precise discovery of how and why felting happens he likens this to a ‘wonderfully accidental anti-connection’. By this I understand a process where seemingly disparate and contrasting elements interact and relate together in unexpected and open-ended ways, leading to something new. My own perception was that the essence of *spiralling* was mirrored in the unruly and repetitive characteristics of blanket bogs and the haptic and elongated nature of a felting process. As I stood in the river, I tried to feel grounded amongst rocky terrain and fast flowing water, grasping the wool loosely but firmly in my hand to avoid the water’s current taking it away. I eventually experienced and observed the water agitating and changing the wool into felt – see Figure 3.5. Through this process I was engaging with a process – the pre-generative state of attentiveness and boredom that wanted to engender and articulate – one that is materially embedded and involves the legwork of continued repetition, becoming embodied encounters caught in a process of folding and twisting that is also subject to its own rhythms and contingencies.



**Figure 3.5:** Harrington holding raw wool in the current of Trout Beck to make felt, Moor House NNR, September 2018. Photo by Alexandra Hughes.

### **5.2.3 Attunement**

*Spiralling*, through engaging with the concepts of both repetition and boredom, as defined, leads to attunement: a type of attentive and active engagement which tunes into the

resonances and dissonances that evolve from repeated and bored relations with the field (in my case Moor House). It simultaneously encapsulates external, somatic and internal realities. In the case of my felting materials from Moor House for example, there is resonance between the movement of the flowing water in the stream (external) and the movement of my submerged hands clutching the felting materials (somatic), and between those movements and the flowing threadlike thoughts that matt themselves together in my mind whilst this process is occurring (internal). Attunement is a combination of situated knowledge and a practice of attention, and thus an ethical responsiveness that enables the researcher to connect with place in a deeper process of engagement.

Resonances and dissonances emerge from boredom and repetition through embodied and situated knowledge that is also open to surprise encounters. The repetitive nature of walking along the stream when I began to hum, for example, lulled me into a state of boredom from which I started to attune to the site in more embodied ways. My body was not detached, rather it was reciprocal and responsive, and the more I hummed the more I noticed new resonances and moments of intersection within my movements, attuning to what I was experiencing. I heard new sounds and noticed details I might have previously missed.

An awareness of these kind of resonances became apparent from not only noticing my own feelings and heightened sensitivities at Moor House but observing other artists and scientists at work in the field. My observations of Lee Patterson's distinct approach for instance, is a case in point. He engages in a form of listening 'in' and not 'out,' open and attentive to what the field offers him in that moment without prior expectation. If a metal fence sings, that is where he goes, or if an exposed heather root is scratching into bare peat by the movement of the wind, he focuses his microphone on that. If water emits a sonic expression that prompts him to participate, he attunes to it. He is not listening out for something he has the intention to capture, rather he is attuning and listening in to what the environment is offering. Similarly, I observe how scientists carrying out fieldwork allow themselves to be influenced and shaped by the phenomena they observe. This might not align with what scientists conclude in journals and books, but I always witnessed an embodied scientific objectivity at play.



**Figure 3.6:** Lee Patterson at Moss Flats, Moor House NNR, November 2016.

In viewing and recognising these kinds of attunements I draw on Haraway's (1988) notion of 'situated knowledges' to perceive the reality of the environment I am in as part of a wider process of engagement. Haraway's position is that the perception of situations involves an embodied and located subject with their own perspectives, which are constantly being shaped and influenced by current conditions. She tells us 'we need to learn in our bodies', arguing for a practice of embodied '[o]bjectivity [that] is not about dis-engagement, but about mutual and usually unequal structuring, about taking risks in a world where 'we' are permanently mortal, that is, not in 'final control' (1988, p. 596). In my conception of the term attunement, I am drawing attention to a practice that can only be seen from the intricacies of one's own position in conjunction with the reality of the actual environment that you are within. Donna Haraway refers to this as 'partial perception,' which positions a locatable, embodied view that is not about splitting the object and subject but rather 'requires a knowledge tuned to resonance, not to dichotomy' (ibid, p.588). It is this embodiment of a *resonant knowledge* that attunement speaks to, a process through which we might find our way.

In *spiralling* – and exploring this notion of attunement – I evolved *Fieldworking*, an artists' camp at Moor House and an associated film. This work was born out of an interest in what it would be like to make a film that wasn't concerned with the result of artists' fieldwork, but in the actual processes and encounters of artists in the field, privileging the action of fieldwork. I envisaged several artists coming together with the remote and boggy environment of Moor House over several days to sleep in tents (on the site of the former

field station), share working methods, and co-practice fieldwork through the reality of our embodied existence and our inevitable situated-ness. The location of Moor House provided an intentionally unfamiliar environment to the participating artists. I was interested in how the situated-ness of this upland environment might translate into a collective, creative and boggy situation.

Whilst the camp itself did set out to share the concept of *spiralling* as a working method with others, how I structured and planned things and then went on to edit the final work actively engaged with this thinking. *Fieldworking* needed to take place at Moor House; to see how other artists' approaches, perspectives and knowledge about diverse environments would interact with this specific place to understand it anew. It wasn't conceived as a field-trip, rather as an opportunity to enable, over five days, a richness of experience and engagement.

*Tyneside Cinema, 6 March 2020.*<sup>58</sup>

*In the beginning your eyes flicker between black screen and shifting movements of pinky-blue colour; it's blurry as if your eyes are closed, seeing light as phosphenes, or the moving sensations that interact and shift between your retina and the surrounding environment. The sound is fuzzy where rustling and deeper sounds juxtapose. Then abruptly you see six people, their backs turned, slowly moving over several minutes, within an expansive moorland location. The fast-moving clouds contrast with the slow-moving people, generating a strange spatio/temporal effect. As micro and macro worlds unfold multiple sensations and experiences are explored intimately and expansively. The film continues: from observing Ludwig Berger moving as he listens through the grassy terrain, to hearing collective voices sharing the cadence of the wind and rain hitting the roof of a hut, then watching clenched hands move into a bog, or observing people slowly turning in and around themselves as the wet weather permeates into them and onto the camera lens.*

Over 29 minutes the moving image work explores modes of encounter and processes which are both attentive and enchanted by the world (Bennett, 2010; McNally, 2020). We can understand these modes of encounter as conversations between material, spatial and bodily entities – the material character of Moor House, the intensity of wet weather, the materiality of film, the expanse of boggy fields, tents in the wind, intimate gatherings under fabric and so on. Such attunements reveal our collective, perceptual, embodied and situated means of knowing and understanding the specific landscape of Moor House.

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<sup>58</sup> *Fieldworking* (2020) was made for presentation in the cinema at Tyneside Cinema as part of their artists' moving image programme Projections. Early March I was able to test the work in this context. Sadly, due to Covid 19 pandemic the work has yet to be presented in the cinema context as intended.



**Figure 3.7:** *Fieldworking*, 2020. (29min 19 sec, colour, 4 channel sound). Video still

### **5.3. Transformative and generative potential of *spiralling***

In this final section I give attention to the generative potential of *spiralling*, its value in revealing new forms of knowing and understanding, and its capacity for creating new possibilities in the world. *Spiralling* builds on *geomorphing* in continuing an explorative investigation of field-based practices: rejecting notions of fieldwork as merely a projection of a pattern of thought and instead reimagining it as a creative practice.

My strategy within this research has been to explore ways in which *spiralling*, as a situated and lively field-based practice, can generate artworks that embody and acknowledge the complexities of the field. In doing so can these works allow a wider engagement in the research, focussing as much on process as outcome, marking an attempt at enabling the multiple encounters and relations involved to resonate, intensify and become more than fieldwork? In this way *spiralling* contributes to a cross-disciplinary revision of concepts of fieldwork that foreground situated and embodied engagements as well as interdisciplinary understandings and experiences of the field. Supported by a critical engagement with Jane Bennett's (2001) capacities to think through the affective and relational potentials that emerge from the field and Donna Haraway's (1988) embodied objectivity, I have explored several layers of a *spiralling* process, emphasising various stages of encounters with

phenomena that surprise and ‘provoke wonder’ (Bennett, 2001, p.169). I have highlighted situations where *spiralling* occurred – the space between the known and unknown, the places where one confronts the indeterminate nature of the field, between the resonances and dissonances that evolve from repeated and bored encounters.

In this chapter, I have described works which have been formed from both a *spiralling* relation to the field (*diss/onance (ecotone)*) and a *spiralling* relation to the process of artwork production (*Felting River Tees, Fieldworking*). In the final chapter I discuss the artists’ camp associated with the work *Fieldworking*, which was the coming together of *spiralling* in both these modes. It is important to reiterate a previous point that whilst the notion of *spiralling* was not an explicit part of the project it is inconceivable that the conception of that project would have occurred without the development of *spiralling* as an approach.

*Spiralling* as an experiential and multi-sensory approach necessitates distinctive ways of looking and listening, emphasising slow ethical engagements that require a reconfiguration of somatic energy by affective means (Bennett, 2001). It is open to changes of intention: just as the rain comes plans alter, so the approach allows itself to be altered by the unstable and provisional nature of the field. *Spiralling* therefore has an ethical potential which opens the possibility for new ways of coming together in conjunction with other senses and bodies, in doing so creating the conditions for productive relations with them. *Spiralling* reveals a useful expansion of practice-based methods and a playful form of knowledge production through drawing on the characteristics of a specific environment and the repetitive, boring and attuned tendencies they provoke. In doing so I suggest that it might offer a way of ‘being with’ the world of value in our efforts to engage with the current environmental crisis.

Chapter Six:  
centre (co-productive ecologies)



**Centre: (Co-productive Ecologies)**

*Existence is not an individual affair.*

Karen Barad, 2007

*...to collaborate is doing-in-common, more than being-in-common.*

Astrida Neimanis, 2012

In this final chapter I discuss the work I have conducted in the field with human and non-human others in generative collective actions. The chapter builds on the notions of *geomorphing* and *spiralling*, acknowledging how collective feeling and action play a significant role in my practice. If *geomorphing* supports a practice for fieldwork that is reactive to the material conditions of the field, and *spiralling* offers a slow embedded immersion in a process of unknowing-knowing, then this chapter focuses on inter-human-field-relations and a reading of fieldwork made with and through others. By discussing the research activities experienced during the development of three works – *dissonance (ecotone)*, (2017-2021), *Cleampering*, (2018-2021) and *Fieldworking* (2020) – each informed by collaboration and collective action – I am arguing that interdisciplinary ‘thinking and doing-together,’ can generate more than the sum of its parts.

These collaborations can be understood as *co-productive ecologies*, a concept constituted by two qualities. Firstly, the fieldworker acknowledges the complexities of the interdependent relationship between humans and the field; secondly the convergence of individual and shared experiences – of other people, multiple bodies and subjectivities, emotions, affective atmospheres, and elemental forces – helps to extend interrelations and interdisciplinary understandings of the collective, or ecosystem.<sup>59</sup> Throughout this chapter, my understanding of collective working develops beyond a collaborative experience, to become an active and relational methodology, in which working with others in a *co-productive ecology* is a tool and vehicle for practice-based artistic research.

My conception of *co-productive ecology* has evolved directly from inter-human interactions, conversations and giving greater attention to the complex processes through which ideas and relations come together and form during field-based activities. However, it is framed within

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<sup>59</sup> Here I view an ecosystem as an entanglement of multiple lives as opposed to a single idea.

a critical context supported by both feminist, posthuman and new materialist philosophies as well as a wider ‘co-productive trend in research’ (Duggan, 2021, p.1).<sup>60</sup>

A *co-productive ecology* then, involves further investigation into the complex inter-human-field relations that occur during field-based activities. It requires us to think above and beyond a set of physical and situational conditions. Whilst one could argue that all experiences are multi-authored, what *co-productive ecology* research pushes for is an implicit acknowledgement of and openness to, the complex process through which ideas and relations emerge, expand and form, and the multiple forces at play in creating discursive dialogues and connections.

Social scientist James Duggan grapples with the concept of co-productive research. He argues for a ‘co-productive imagination’ capable of illuminating the necessary complex processes of ‘conceiving propositions, techniques of relation and methodological tactics that move us through creative advance to eventful realisations that something in our research matters’ (ibid).

Co-production has helped to mutually reveal some of the complexities of field-based research, as well as interrogate the ethical responsibilities and kinds of activities involved in fieldwork. As such the term ‘co-production’ points to how a mutual responsibility is required during field-based activities, where each individual(‘s) action constitutes part of the production process. Instead of conceptualising a collective coming-together as a premeditated event, a *co-productive ecology* consists of actions that are rooted in the present, a work-in-progress that takes place in the field.

The following is divided into five interrelated sections, each establishing an aspect of a *co-productive ecology*. These aspects are not hard edged, rather they blend into and inform one another. They are divided into sections here – shared conversations, ecology, encounters, responsibility and listening – to aid clarity of understanding, not to mark them out as distinct entities.

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<sup>60</sup> See James Duggan (2021) *The co-productive imagination: a creative, speculative and eventful approach to co-producing research* from a social scientist perspective. Through process philosophy he examines the ‘co-productive imagination as a means for illuminating the ‘necessary imaginative work of conceiving propositions, techniques of relation and methodological tactics that move us through creative advance to eventful realisations that something in our research matters’.



**Figure 4.1:** *Fieldworking* artists camp, Moor House NNR, UK, August 2019.

## **6.1. Shared conversations**

One aspect of a *co-productive ecology* is a form of conversation sharing; a possibility for new understandings and thoughts to emerge through spending time conversing with others. In asking how a shared conversation might support a rethinking of collective working, Donna Haraway provides a useful starting point. She describes a practice of ‘connection’ as the capacity of a subject to connect to others, in which ‘shared conversations’ represent ‘the possibility of webs of connections’ (1988, p.584). For Haraway, shared conversations are partial, locatable and positioned, having the potential to lead to ‘solidarity’. A ‘shared conversation,’ implies situated and open-ended relations with others. It is not necessarily describing a joining in dialogue – as in the coming together of separate entities – but involves being part of an active and cumulative process of relation. Shared conversations have formed a persistent pre-occupation in the development of this research both remotely and face-to-face. However, not all these conversations could be understood as constitutive of a *co-productive ecology*.

A Leverhulme Artist Residency (2014-2015) with physical geographer Jeff Warburton, for example, involved working closely with his research on upland peatland erosion, both within the Department of Geography at Durham University and in the field at Moor House NNR. This residency informed new artwork, collaborations, exhibitions and the co-authored text *A Snapshot in Time: The Dynamic and Ephemeral Structure of Peatland Soils* (2019), in which together we explored the morphology of peat soils through our distinct disciplinary lenses. The most active and informative thinking that developed emerged from our conversations in the field at Moor House; as we were able to discuss the material of the field whilst in direct engagement with it. However, whilst these conversations and our work together was both collaborative and rich in outcomes, this form of conversing could not be described as a *co-productive ecology* because while we were working side by side, we were not together with a shared intention.

*Cleambering* (2018-2021) stemmed from a residency in Northern Italy and conversations with ecologist and ethnobiologist Meredith Root-Bernstein and could be described as a *co-productive ecology*. Whilst the differences are subtle, they are vital in distinguishing what I understand by co-productive as opposed to working side by side.<sup>61</sup> The ecology which developed the work came about whilst sitting next to a river in the foothills of the Italian Alps. With no expectations to create a work at that point our conversations were informed by our surroundings: the giant syenite rocks, the geological and geomorphological processes at play, our own emotional responses to the site and memories of rock-hopping as children. We imagined and evolved the idea of a ‘deep time parkour’ – a kinaesthetic and reflective practice that enters a physical dialogue with rocks about the processes of water, wind and soil, that shaped them (Root-Bernstein & Harrington, 2021). A collective conversation was produced in the moment of encounter between all these distinct but co-relating bodies – me, Meredith and the mountains. Conversations that support a *co-productive ecology* then, occur as a result of being with the field, engaged in shared experience and intention, thinking and feeling together.

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<sup>61</sup> *Cleambering* was initially a performative action and playful experiment, this work then became a manifesto, a co-authored text and now a bookwork. I also invited Meredith to participate in the artists’ camp, in which her reflections from the perspective of an ecologist were written as the text *The Science and Art of Fieldwork at Moor House* (2020) and included within the artist publication *Fieldworking* (see appendices).



Figure 4.2: The author *cleambling*, river Cervo, July 2018

*A co-productive ecology* also feels like a form of friendship. When it exists, it contains similar feelings and connections to those we might experience with friends; meaningful exchanges with enough trust and support to be challenged. Not just with human friends either, but also the idea of affinity with what Haraway (2003) describes as ‘companionship’ with the non-human world. Drawing on cultural theorist and artist Simon O’Sullivan’s (2004) likening of friendship to a form of community, which privileges the encounter between two or more bodies and the joy that is produced by it, I began to reflect critically on the formation of *co-productive ecology* as a form of friendship. For O’Sullivan, thinking through friendship enables greater reflection on our being in the world and through our lived and shared experiences leads to new understanding and knowing. In this context, he argues the idea of the encounter is vital in understanding ‘the rising and fallings, those becomings – that make up our experience’ (2004, p. 20). He refers to a ‘joyful encounter’ – the result of two or more bodies meeting and trusting each other – having the capacity to alter how we act in the world (ibid).<sup>62</sup> In seeking understanding, or what might be referred to in O’Sullivan’s terms as a kind of ‘ethics of experimentation it is possible to move from passivity to social action. Instead of human sociability being influenced and imposed from a ‘transcendent formation – a projection onto man,’ a joyful encounter is where humans freely come together through nothing other than their own will. This ‘immanent formation is a community produced on the basis of active feeling’ (ibid, p.21).

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<sup>62</sup> Here O’Sullivan expands on the idea of ‘joyful encounter’ through Gilles Deleuze’s (1970) reading of Spinoza in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*.

Conversations and collective working with other artists have sustained this research, not only through helping to build understandings of particular environments through distinct practices and methods but through friendship and shared experiences. Over many years, I have implemented collaborations with artists within several field-based research environments: but have also worked closely with them in the production and development of new work. The artists' camp at Moor House NNR, and the research/training event *Beyond Fieldwork* I convened in conjunction with the camp, are two examples where I have actively invited artists to work, share practice and methods with me to progress this research. My time spent with artist Lee Patterson, for example, has involved a decade of working closely together at Moor House with our distinct methods and personalities in continuous correspondence. This commitment is both professional and a form of friendship. In the field together the creative outcomes are dictated as much by our personalities actively engaging with each other as they are by pre-planned intentions for the work. In the case of *Fieldworking* the intensity and shared experience of the artists' camp created a bond which lasted beyond the time frame of the event.



**Figure 4.3:** *Fieldworking* artists' camp, storage shed at Moor House NNR, UK, August 2019.

## 6.2. Ecology

Co-production can be described as a form of ecology insofar as it concerns the ways in which beings are interconnected. For Timothy Morton (2010, p.4) '[e]cology is profoundly about coexistence', where thinking ecologically isn't simply about non-human things. 'Ecology has to do with you and me'. At the artists' camp I convened in August 2019, six artists, an ecologist and two film-makers came together to work collaboratively within the remote and boggy environment of Moor House NNR.

Wednesday 20 August 2019:

*We are all gathered somewhere around Valley Bog - a vast area of flat blanket bog where the peat reaches several metres deep - wetness is everywhere. My exposed skin feels damp as water continuously drops from my face. Our brightly coloured waterproof clothing stands out against the monochromatic terrain but at a macro level resonates with the vegetation. My feet sink deeper, but I remain still. My waterproof trousers and boots, although close to saturation, mean I'm relatively dry. My chest feels more absorbent, perhaps through my skin, my mouth, allowing the relentless moisture to creep in. Lee and Ludwig are moving cables and hydrophones as they negotiate where to bury them within the peat. As they move back and forth, up and down, the rest of us chat, rub our hands together to keep warm and simultaneously sink further. I notice Meredith in the distance, blurred by the falling rain and mist as she slowly observes what is beneath her feet. I then see Simone to the left, lying down, knees bent, a gloved hand held into the air. After a few minutes she removes her glove and returns her hand to the air directly above her chest, slowly making the tiniest of movements with her fingers, mirroring how the surrounding deer grass is also responding to the wind.*

*We then all come together and one by one in an exercise of listening and attention, we move our hands in and through the bog. Our knees sink whilst also being supported; our bodies become a kind of porous sponge, absorbing water whilst colliding, expanding and coalescing with the field. We listen to each other whilst simultaneously feeling held by the field. As we sink deeper the tiny microphones buried within the peat around us are picking up on this intimate conversation.*

The above describes a collective experience from the artists' camp which would lead to the moving image work *Fieldworking* (2020). These field-notes contain several observations on the relationality and materiality of the experience of the field, or what we could call the ecology, when working co-productively. There is an experience of being always immersed in the present moment, caught up in dynamic processes of noticing and engaging with various contexts – material, human, phenomenal. Simone Kenyon – one of the artists – moves and I notice her shift of position and decide to film it, unscripted and unrehearsed, spontaneous and emerging from the collective experience – see Figure 4.5. Lee Patterson and Ludwig Berger – two of the other artists – are thinking of how to place microphones into the bog whilst we are already sinking into it; the ecology of the field infiltrates us as we mark ourselves onto it – see Figure 4.4. We then come together in an exercise of listening and responding – see Figure 4.6.



**Figure 4.4:** (top) & **Figure 4.5:** (bottom): *Fieldworking*, (2020, 16mm transferred to video, 29 min, 19 sec, colour, sound). Video stills.



These observations highlight how collective actions are entangled and co-produced within the field, so generating the ecology this research affirms. Simone, lying in the heather, moving her hand through micro movements, was not only responding to the force of the wind, but also to the other participants. In that moment, whilst waiting for Lee and Ludwig to position their hydrophones, Simone moved away from others, lay down, took off her glove and moved her hand altering how she responded to her surroundings. A quiet and subtle interaction that was barely noticeable until it was captured on film. Reflecting on her experience of the camp, Fiona MacDonald described how as artist fieldworkers, rather than scientists, we foreground ‘interoceptive dynamics’ and make them visible in the encounter. Interception is the sense of the internal state of one’s own body. This reflection came from an experience that involved one of her wellington boots, which early in the camp had a nail sticking up through the sole. After levering it out and while Meredith, the ecologist who was also part of the camp, assisted the repair with some superglue, Fiona felt able to stay dry whilst up to her ankles in the bog. She told me how ‘a novel sense of imperviousness mixed with porousness started to emerge, like I was made of different stuff, so I started lazing about in the bog, letting my body sink in towards it, embracing and being embraced’.<sup>63</sup>

By emphasising these observations and passing events, I am exploring the capacity for collective human-field relations to reveal a coming-together that both shapes and defines. This ecology or coming-together resembles what Rosi Braidotti (2020, p.2) refers to as a ‘bond’ – an ‘ontological relationality,’ emphasising ‘the embodied, transversal and embedded selves that we are’ and a ‘particular vision of the human within the fraught landscape of the posthuman convergence’ (2020, p. 118).<sup>64</sup> As Braidotti says:

*Embodied and embedded because we are deeply steeped in the material world. Transversal because we connect but also nomadically differ from each other. And yet we are structurally related to one another, to the human and non-human world that we live in. We are after all variations on a common matter. In other words, we differ from each other all the more as we co-define ourselves within the same living matter – environmentally, socially, and relationally. (Braidotti, 2019, p.45)*

In this context the posthuman subject is embodied, embedded and relational, where ‘its relational affectivity produces a shared sense of belonging to, and knowledge of, the common world we are sharing’ (2019, p.47). Whilst I recognise the breadth and complexities of Braidotti’s thinking, of pertinence here is her reference to a form of

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<sup>63</sup> Fiona MacDonald (Feral Practice) quoted from her artist reflections on the camp. Fiona MacDonald is an artist who works with human and nonhuman beings as Feral Practice to develop ethical and imaginative connection across species boundaries.

<sup>64</sup> The Posthuman convergence is a coming together of both a criticism of ‘Man’ as the measure of all things with a form of post anthropocentrism, which targets species hierarchy and anthropocentric exceptionalism (see Braidotti, 2020, p118). Braidotti tells us this ‘entails a shift beyond humanist exceptionalism and un-reflexive anthropocentrism, so as to embrace the human’s relational dependence on multiple anthropomorphic beings, but also a multitude of non-human entities’ (Braidotti, 2020, p.1).

‘affirmative ethics’ – an ethics that isn’t based on humanistic and anthropocentric tendencies but instead foregrounds a ‘relational ethics’, emphasising how certain conditions have the capacity for individual entities to relate to and shape each other (2020, p.120). In this light Braidotti refers to affirmation as the ability to ‘open up to others and take in – and take on – more of the world’.

Over the five days we quietly observed and supported each other adapting to Moor House. Each day becoming increasingly wet while at the same time we became more porous to our surroundings, something which was uncomfortable at times but allowed us to sink deeper into the process. This deepening of relation to the embodied experience engendered a *co-productive ecology*. It did so by prioritising a lively and unformulated approach to a collective production, allowing meanings, ideas and artistic processes to be constructed in relation to what is directly there; Simone’s hand would have moved differently if the wind was blowing another way, if the microphones had been positioned at speed, if she had noticed us filming. Encounters and mediations determined how things might unfold. Braidotti describes a situation where each entity is the expression of a common core, which is the freedom to affect and be affected by others; the relational capacity to grow and become alongside others (Braidotti, 2020). This ‘alongside others’ is critical to a *co-productive ecology*.



**Figure 4.6:** *Fieldworking*, (2020, 16mm transferred to video, 29 min, 19 sec, colour, sound). Video still.

### 6.3 Thinking through the encounter

A *co-productive ecology* thinks through the encounter and what happens in that dialogue in-between. What are the kinds of processes and encounters involved during artists' field-based activities? The work *Cleambering* (2018-2021) provides a context for discussion here. As noted, I developed this work with ecologist Meredith Root-Bernstein on a residency in Northern Italy whilst we were sat on the giant syenite rocks of the river Cervo.<sup>65</sup> We envisaged a slow-moving deep time parkour; a combination of meandering and clambering; *cleambering*. Through our direct physical engagements with rocks, we participated in a process that enabled a moment of reflection, a mediation or a method for considering the interconnectivity of different environmental systems.

Drawing on Tim Ingold's (2013) notion of transduction – which describes the use and experience of objects not in terms of an interaction but in terms of a conversation of kinetic energy between human and non-human entities – we saw our movements not just as interactions with the rocks but a conversation with the water, the rock formations it shaped and the living things it moves among the riverbed. In the *cleamber* the rocks are transducers, meaning they convert the 'kinaesthetic quality of the gesture, its flow of movement, from one register of bodily kinaesthesia, to another, of material flux' (Ingold, 2013, p.102). As such, *Cleambering* and our collective action, was about a continuity of process. The rock will outlast the *cleamberer* but the work lies in the encounter and what happens in that dialogue. Our feelings flow in and out, in correspondence with the rocks. As Ingold tells us, '...to correspond with the world, in short, is not to describe it, or to represent it, but to *answer to it*' (Ingold, 2013, p.108). This 'answering' within a co-productive ecology I suggest is the movement through the encounter; my foot lands on the rock and answers it by responding through movement onto a different but related rock.

In 2021, having continued to develop our interest in *cleambering*, we collaboratively produced a small flipbook using stills from video footage of two different *cleambers* – see Figure 4.7. By creating a book in this format, we aimed to further extend our thinking and understandings of the movement, connectivity and engagement of the *cleamber* – a

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<sup>65</sup> Both Meredith and I were selected to participate in the module Expanded body #2 Inhabiting Time 9 - 16 July 2018 with UNIDEE - University of Ideas, Biella, Italy. UNIDEE is a research hub started by Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto in 1999. The module Expanded body #2 Inhabiting Time 9 - 16 July 2018 was an experience about Time in the Oasi Zegna with mentors Andrea Caretto and Raffaella Spagna (Italy) with guests José D. Edelstein (theoretical physicist, Department of Particle Physics, University of Santiago de Compostela) and Marco Giardino (Professor of Physical Geography and Geomorphology at the Department of Earth Sciences of the University of Turin). A residency with other artist participants: Ludwig Berger, (Swiss/Italy) Marit Mihklepp (Netherlands), Enrico Partengo (Italy), Meredith Root-Bernstein (France) and Elisa Sorelli (Italy). UNIDEE Modules are intensive residential modules taking place at Fondazione Cittadellarte, Biella in partnership with Fondazione Zegna. Questions explored included 'what is Time? How do we perceive the flow of time and what is our relationship with it? What is time for a plant? How can we approach the Deep Time of rocks? What is the relationship between the time of machines, of human beings and natural cycles? What is free time? What is time for contemporary Physics?

secondary form of interactive, tactile experience. We were drawn to the physical interaction between the person holding the book and the pages themselves; how one's thumb moves with the pages in quick succession in order to stimulate change within the images, echoing the contact made between the soles of our feet and the rocks – see Figure 4.7. The speed of our *cleamber* is determined by the person moving the pages whilst our dialogue is explored visually through positioning our *cleambers* facing each other on opposite pages, so we always move together but separately and in opposite directions.

Such movements are not particular to *Cleambering*. After my participation in a workshop with Ilana Halperin in 2018, I found myself reflecting on her development of a particular underfoot rhythm when walking on a forming volcano.<sup>66</sup> I was imagining the kind of relations involved and wondering if observing and recording such an encounter might tell us not only something about the volcano and the artist but also what they were doing together. My thinking then drifted to sound artist Mark Peter Wright's playful encounters with the South Gare landscape in Teesside, through his 2013 film *Re-capturing* and the playful back and forth between the artist and his audio equipment whilst moving through the sand dunes. In the cat and mouse sequence of the artist chasing recording equipment, we haphazardly follow the rhythm of the chase. In considering these two examples of movement in combination with my own artistic reflections, I suggest that thinking through the encounters between artist and the field enables a view of what they become together; what happens in these co-productive environments involving multiple bodies. To this end, within the framework of *co-productive ecologies* the importance of thinking through the encounter is to broaden one's understanding, to consider not just one's own relationship but all the spaces and places in-between with a multitude of others.



**Figure 4.7:** *Cleambering* (flipbook), 2021. 10.5cm x 7.4cm, pp68, colour.

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<sup>66</sup> This workshop led by Ilana Halperin – *THE MOUNTAIN INSIDE –Geologic Intimacy. Physical Geology*– formed part of the event *Into the Mountain* organised by artist Simone Kenyon in collaboration with Scottish Sculpture Works (SSW) and Tramway, Glasgow on 24 November 2018. It brought together practitioners and enthusiasts interested in the intersections and conversations between the arts, dance, mountain and hill walking cultures. Through talks, discussions and sessions the event explored how women encounter and engage with mountainous environments, considering both historical and current perspectives of gender in relationship to landscapes.

## 6.4 Responsibility

Being in a co-productive ecology necessitates a form of responsibility, as each direct action constitutes a part of the production process. Direct action here means that the active input and participation by human or non-human others affects the situation or ecosystem. With such action comes responsibility. In this context both Aldo Leopold's (1966) reflections on the idea of a land ethic – a theoretical framework for how humans should ethically understand their surroundings – and Donna Haraway's (2016, p. 34) notion of 'response-ability' identify critical potential in human/non-human relations for imagining co-productive field-based practices. I utilise several threads from their research to help establish the notion of a *co-productive ecology* as a responsive, collective or 'thinking-with' process that resists an individualisation of thinking and emphasises the responsibility one holds within a collective.

In the 1940s America, Leopold argued for a community that questions ideas of responsibility in relation to the land, where humans – as the living beings capable of making judgements – take responsibility for each of its members as well as the health of the whole ecosystem (Leopold, 1966, p.238). Drawing from his own experiences and observations in the field, Leopold likens ethics to a form of guidance, drawing upon animal instincts to point towards a kind of 'community instinct in-the-making,' where respect for fellow members and respect for the community are implicit. In a co-productive ecology, a 'biotic community' incorporates intuition with responsibility when promoting a sense of co-operation with others. 'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and [reality] of the *biotic community*' (ibid, p.22). In terms of the camp, I would argue that we became just such a 'biotic community': we shared warmth, ideas, food and equipment together but as distinct individuals within a shared experience. Our feet sank into the same bog in different places and we each took responsibility not just for our actions but our openness to what the camp was offering to us. Responsibility within the rubric of the *co-productive ecology* is to both trust one's instincts and move towards them but to do so holding others in awareness, ready to be moved by them as much as one's own intention.

Building on and deconstructing Leopold's notion of a biotic community, multiple eco-feminist, posthumanist and new materialist commentators have remarked on the various forms of emergent interdependencies that exist as part of active engagements that are in continual processes between and amongst human and non-human bodies (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2003, 2016; Neimanis, 2017). Donna Haraway thinks and works with multiple

beings and things, where thinking is also 'thinking-with'. Critical to Haraway is an imagining of new ways of existing in a complex multi-species ecology at a time of unprecedented climate and humanitarian crisis. Her attention to the value of non-human forces as a means for collective thinking-with has both challenged and supported the notion of a *co-productive ecology*. Challenged insofar as it has prompted me to face my own responsibilities as a person who works through practical engagements with others and supported in terms of how to hold the complexities of collective working. For example, the living organisms and phenomena such as peat, water and the geological strata at Moor House, have become details, or points of encounter and tension to confront and work with, or as Haraway might say 'stay-with'.<sup>67</sup>

Haraway (2016) speaks of a more cooperative and conflicted mode of 'world-making', in which a re-calibration of our relationship with each other involves different species and forms of knowledge interacting in indeterminate and open ways.<sup>68</sup> In Haraway's worlding, 'companion species are relentlessly becoming-with' where bodies making up the collective are not determined in advance but are co-constituted through entanglements (Haraway, 2016, p. 13). This co-constitution is key to a *co-productive ecology* as it is created in direct response and becoming with the field. In terms of *Fieldworking* (2020) every aspect of the film was guided and shaped by others; from the artists, the weather, the bog, our moods, our equipment, what we ate, the damp in our clothes and how it then permeated through our chests to how we slept.

Haraway refers to a collective knowing and doing, an ecology of practices as a form of cultivating 'response-ability' (2016, p.34), pointing towards our capacity and ability to think and respond accordingly with others. Within the co-productive ecology of the camp these non-optional relations are clear in the construction of the event itself. Everyone was in a tent, under the weather, the same conditions, over several days, there were no other options and we had to make it work collectively, taking responsibility for both our being together but also for the reality of being with and in the environment.

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<sup>67</sup> Haraway (2016) talks about a staying with the trouble as a learning to be 'truly present' through a process of generating joy, terror and collective thinking (p.1).

<sup>68</sup> Haraway makes a clear separation from a Heideggerian worlding stating she is 'finished once and for all with Kantian globalising cosmopolitics and grumpy human-exceptionalist worlding' (Haraway, 2016, p. 11).

## 6.5. Listening

A *co-productive ecology* also involves acts of listening and noticing. As artist and philosopher Salomé Voegelin (2010, p.5) tells us, listening is not a physiological fact but an act of engaging in the world – a sensory event involving the ‘listener and the sound in a reciprocal inventive production’. In this sense listening, like Haraway’s notion of ‘response-ability,’ cultivates an ethical consideration to respond and act according to others in co-production. Composer and writer John Cage also refers to a form of ‘response ability’ as the listeners’ capacity to be able to respond to sounds with feeling, recognising them as present and themselves, rather than a vehicle for something else (Cage, 1961, p.10). Here, in the *co-productive ecology*, listening is to be understood as a quality of attention and feeling through all senses.

Similarly, Anna Tsing (2015) describes the ‘art of noticing,’ comparing it to a form of musical polyphony which fosters a practice of listening, or paying attention to autonomous rhythms, that come together in unexpected moments of harmony and dissonance (Tsing, 2015, p. 23). This is not a searching for unity and coordination, although these may occur, rather it is a noticing of the interplay between several sources.

In the audio work *dissonance (ecotone)*, (2018–2021) I began to explore this practice of listening as a method not only for understanding my own role and position in relation to the field but how these direct encounters were involved in continuous processes. On one level I was interested in whether I could make an audio work which could hold an interpersonal ecology; how these multiple forms of relation translate through a process of listening together. On another I was drawn to the notion of an ecotone in relation to a liminal space or transition area of gradual shifts and abrupt changes where multiple bodies learn to exist in the ‘fuzzy’ boundaries of the in-between (Neimanis, 2012). The piece works with tones, transitioning in and out of phase with each other, with the wider sound field, recorded traversing a physical boundary.<sup>69</sup>

In the work two people are heard humming or making drone like sounds in relation to the running water of a stream (Rough Sike). The score was the field itself, the relationships generated between feet and water, tones responded to or pushed against, movements made, breaths taken; full of tension as well as moments of harmony. This improvisation was co-produced with my long-term partner at a site I know well, with a sound recordist I trust. I

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<sup>69</sup> I refer to a phase here with its audio meaning, where a difference in sound is due to a changing in the relationship between two waveforms.

was curious to expand on the inner listening I had previously explored on my own at Rough Sike with someone whom I had learned to listen with for twenty years.

Rough Sike, Moor House, August 2021:

*Midges were everywhere, the flow of water was slight, it was a dry but damp day. We decided on a point to begin, remaining still at first but slowly moving upstream, sometimes together, sometimes not. As we moved, our attention and feelings moved back and forth awkwardly in an attempt to listen and respond sonically to our surroundings. I started to sense how I was moving as part of a counterpoint, or a polyphonic tone of mass and richness. Slowly moving and pausing upstream, my feet in the water, knees bent, midges attacking, head bowed down, I imagined myself as one of the rocks allowing vibrations to seep through and over me, which in turn conjured a sonic response imbued with a range of experiences, sensuous understandings and emotional resonances. Carrying wireless microphones (sometimes held close, sometimes passed between us or moved through the air), we walked through the water, listening and at times sounding out and making drone like noises in relation to the pitch of the water.*



**Figure 4.8:** Laura Harrington and Peter Evans at Rough Sike, August 2021. Photo by Sam Grant.

In asking how the notion of listening might contribute to a co-productive ecology, the critical framework of Jean Luc-Nancy (2007) and Salomé Voegelin's (2010, 2018) approaches to listening – as complex acts of engagement with the world – offer useful insights. In *Listening* (2007) Nancy asks what it means to listen, rather than focussing on hearing. Listening here points to the capacity of the sonorous, or hidden characteristics of



sound, as a way of acknowledging the various unfolding processes listening encompasses and how our perceiving body is situated within these. In this context listening amplifies vision and visual descriptions, affording ‘amplitude, a density, and a vibration’ (Nancy, 2007, p.2). Salomé Voegelin similarly refers to sound as a concept that invites us into the materiality of things, ‘not to deny the visual but to augment how we might see...promoting the reading and experiencing of things as agitational, interventionist, multi-sensory and capacious’ (2018, p.47). This occurred in the recording of *dissonance* and the intention is for it to generate this sort of listening when heard as a sound work. As Nancy (2007, p.2) reminds us it is through the experience of listening that we are always on the periphery of understanding, participating in something that is in motion, unknown and in production. Our physical encounter with the stream, and our set of decisions to move, make a sound or pause, marks an attempt to listen to ourselves and our relationship with other bodies (human and nonhuman), in improvisational, attentive and reactive ways.<sup>70</sup>

Listening then within a *co-productive ecology* is a quality of awareness which generates both understandings and new relationships. Listening fosters responsibility as we understand more fully what we are responding to. Within the most fully formed co-productive ecology within this research – the artists’ camp – listening was perhaps the most vital aspect. This quality translates into the film work itself through several actions which took place as part of the project, through Ludwig Berger’s *Babbling*, Luce Choule’s *Slow walk*, and Lee Patterson’s object-based sounding with found crockery – see Figure 4.8.<sup>71</sup> Listening is a type of attention that a *co-productive ecology* cannot do without.

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<sup>70</sup> The work and practice-based research of artist Polly Stanton has been useful in this respect, and the way in which she unsettles understandings of the relationship between listening and seeing. Her (2018) thesis *Fields of Resonance: Towards Embodied forms of Listening and Looking* investigated how listening can expand visual comprehension in moving image works about landscape. I met Polly whilst on my residency with HIAP in Finland and I am grateful for our ongoing conversations.

<sup>71</sup> *Babbling* was an activity led by Berger where we listened to a stone or another thing, inside or close to the water emitting a call to the human player. The human player places, replaces or removes the thing into, or out of the running water. The water responds to the action by changing its sonic expression.

*Slow Walk* or performing duration (slow actions) was an activity led by Luce Choules, where we moved together along a remote mining track as slowly as possible. It explored decelerated encounter and potential timelessness states for body and mind.

For this activity Lee Patterson invited participants to listen and improvise together using found pots and stones, debris from the former shooting lodge at Moor House.



Figure 4.8: *Fieldworking*, (2020, 16mm transferred to video, 29 min, 19 sec, colour, sound). Video stills.

## Chapter conclusion

I have proposed the notion of *co-productive ecologies*, identifying five interrelated elements which together form the basis for this way of working. This proposal arises directly from the research I have carried out with others and the works generated – *cleambling*, *dissonance (ecotone)* and *fieldworking*. I argue here that in acknowledging a thinking-and-doing together, through *co-productive ecologies*, there is capacity for new understandings and relations to emerge that evolve beyond the action or the encounter itself.

Voegelin (2018) referred to a recording of a bolt being tightened and the way we aren't hearing the bolt and the screw separately but the in-between, what they do together.<sup>72</sup> It is not just the doing together but the attentive, responsive and reactive producing together which makes *co-productive ecologies* distinctive as an approach.

As described, *co-productive ecologies* are composed of all aspects of the production process, through experience and direct engagements with others, and involving an explicit openness to those others. To be a participant within a *co-productive ecology* demands an active

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<sup>72</sup> I refer here to a talk I attended by Salome Voegelin's (*Sonic Materialism: How to be a thing according to sound*) was presented as part of *caféphilosophique/café culture 2018/2019* held at Brunswick Methodist Church, Newcastle upon Tyne, 4 December 2018. See also chapter *Sonic Materialism* in the publications *The Political Possibility of Sound* (2019) that expands on this in greater depth.

attitude, a form of surrender, an improvisational approach, an inner listening and an openness to the precariousness of what might connect, rupture and fluctuate.

In a *co-productive ecology*, as in *spiralling* and *geomorphing* this research has involved working directly with the field, recognising that such engagements are multi-layered and complex. They are all in their own ways lively and productive, generating new works and understandings.

# Chapter Seven

## Conclusion

## 7. Conclusion

The explorative nature of this research has entailed examination of the complex processes involved in direct engagement with particular landscapes. It has grappled with and re-imagined creative field-based activities within these landscapes reflecting on the ways in which artistic intention and the subjectivity of the artist has been shaped through, or in, co-production. Across a body of work bringing artistic methods into dialogue with the discipline of geomorphology, scientific knowledge, boggy sites, bodies and philosophical ideas, this research has generated creative outcomes that contribute to an interdisciplinary rethinking of fieldwork as artistic method informed by ecological thought. In this way it quietly questions the ethical relations at play whilst working with ‘the field’ in an ever-forming process, creatively advancing and nurturing a way of moving into more productive acts of engagement.

The research has investigated both boggy landscapes and field-based artistic practices as distinctively active and complex processes, perceiving the field as a continuous co-productive entity. Bogs are ultimately heterogenous and active environments composed of a multitude of phenomena, materialities, experiences and relations, and thus an osmotic teacher of complex interactions. My engagement with peatlands has not only changed how I practice and produce artworks but supported a complex and environmentally important enquiry. As a result, the research unsettles understandings of those interrelationships, by moving its focus away from outcomes and towards ‘in process’ dynamics. To these ends, this thesis lays claim to the critical terms – *geomorphing*, *spiralling* and *co-productive ecologies* – their contribution to knowledge being the possibilities they offer for understanding different processes and relations within the field, illuminating the multiplicity of contingent things (human and non-human), embodied practices and the experiential and material encounters which converge to create new understandings and meanings.

These methods have focused on the tangled and often contradictory means through which ideas, relational possibilities and affects emerge within fieldwork and in doing so altered the way I approached my artistic practice. By examining events and ideas created through co-productive processes in the field, the research moves beyond a model of fieldwork as orientated towards ‘findings’; emphasising instead consideration of fieldwork for its capacity to allow artistic practice to engage with the productive nature of the field and its transformations. In the process new narratives and sensibilities emerge which recognise how knowledge production and value occur both in relational encounters and intentional outputs, without hierarchy. Reflecting on my own activities through the lens of Doreen Massey’s

(2005) re-conceptualisation of space, Donna Haraway's (1988; 2016) situated and 'response-able' feminist thinking, and Jane Bennett's (2001; 2010) elaborations on enchanted and vibrant matter, I have critically framed this investigation of how field-based practices might support new understandings of value both to artistic practice and other disciplines working in 'the field', such as geography, ethnography, or ecology, for example.

The first approach, *geomorphing* acknowledges the ways in which scientific constructs can frame understanding and experience in valuable ways but also gives importance to somatic encounters, where physical, material and porous responses within the fieldworker are equally valid. *Geomorphing* enabled me to work with processes, making immediate and reactive works, acknowledging the interrelations taking place. This enabled an immersion in multiple processes and movements, facilitating a cross-disciplinary revision of fieldwork as a practice constantly in flux.

*Spiralling* recognises fieldwork as a form of 'unknowing-knowing'. Building on *geomorphing* it is distinct, in that it involves a building of relationships over time, in which the fieldworker is attentive and intentional rather than immediately reactive to the material conditions. For example, the sound work *dissonance (ecotone)* was not an idea developed solely in the studio, rather it was a thought that emerged out of and developed into a work through regular engagement with the site.

*Spiralling*, I argue, is an essentially nonlinear method, readily accepting of change, new connections and understandings of form. Ethically, it involves accounting for one's position, giving space to the field to be what it is rather than ascribing meaning onto it. *Spiralling* holds what Jane Bennett (2001, p.131) might term a 'presumptive generosity' – in that to be attentive one must be open to all the possibilities one might attend to – it is the act of making oneself open to noticing other bodies and phenomena and to entering interrelation with them. Crucially, it is open to a change of intention within the fieldworker, allowing oneself to be altered by the unstable and provisional nature of the field.

*Co-productive ecologies* incorporate aspects of both *geomorphing* and *spiralling* but with a distinct focus on working with others (human and non-human) non-hierarchically. A *co-productive ecology* fosters collective processes and considerations, embracing relational techniques and shifting positions. It is interactive and prioritises coexistence, multiplicity, listening and responsibility.

In acknowledging a thinking-and-producing-together a capacity is generated for new understandings to emerge that evolve beyond the action or the encounter itself. As such, I

propose that a *co-productive ecology* is not just a ‘doing together’ but an attentive, responsive and reactive ‘*producing together*’ and that it constitutes the conditions needed for new understandings of the living systems we interact and exist with.

These methods all position fieldwork as a situated and embodied encounter where multiple forces are at work within a single moment. By moving as part of the field – acknowledging how environments are as much felt and heard as seen – this research opens different embodied understandings and experiences. As such, these methods have a quality of relational responsibility that explicitly acknowledges the field as an active participant.

*Geomorphing* is a practice which is reactive to the material and experiential conditions of the field. *Spiralling* holds and works with an indeterminate openness, altering the temporal and attentive focus via repetition and boredom leading to attunement. *Co-productive ecologies* focused attention on interrelations between elements such as rock and body, hands and moss, method and action, understanding these as having agency within the field. Co-production therefore is ethically critical to field-based activity. I also suggest that these complex processes, connections, attentions and relations can shift our positions into co-creative ways of being, generating new ways of thinking and doing. A situation that respectfully engages and practices ‘becoming-with’ the world which sustains us, through systems of ‘enduring relatedness’ to borrow two of Haraway’s (2016, p.12) pertinent phrases. What is advocated here is a form of soft productive activism or what Jane Bennett (2010, p.xii) might refer to as ‘micropolitics’ – small, personal, and bodily practices – which speaks to a form of action that seeks localised connections and tangible approaches.<sup>73</sup> An activism that necessitates a re-orientation of experiences as manifold, utilising immersion, playful energy, creativity and embodied acts as systems for comprehending and engaging with complex ecological interrelations.

*Geomorphing*, *spiralling* and *co-productive ecologies* all conceive of the processes of fieldwork as complex, performative and productive acts of engagement. Complex in the way that they acknowledge and incorporate multiple elements (human and nonhuman), performative due to the improvisational and eventful nature of the encounter and productive in their diversity of physical and conceptual outcomes.

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<sup>73</sup> I refer to ‘soft activism’ in relation to the term ‘soft engineering’. A phrase I heard regularly whilst artist in residence at the Environment Agency between 2009–2010, informing both my understanding and appreciation of the term upstream as well as more holistic forms of flood management work. In this sense soft engineering doesn’t involve building artificial structures, rather it utilises existing topographies, landforms etc. to manage upstream water storage and flow.

Soft activism also resonates with how geographer Laura Pottinger describes a ‘quiet activism’ as a form of ‘embodied activism’ to include ‘modest, quotidian acts of kindness, connection and creativity’ (2016). Writer and poet Nan Shepherd and specifically her work *The Living Mountain* (1977). I suggest is also a form of soft activism in the ways she related to complex, interconnected ecologies of the Cairngorm Mountains through small, embodied acts of engagement.

## 7.1 A productive ethics of engagement

The contribution to knowledge generated as a result of these methods lies in the strategies they offer for interacting with the field in experiential ways that prioritise attentive, co-productive and reactive engagements. In this sense they align with Jane Bennett's (2001) description of both 'presumptive' and 'ethical generosity,' whereby the affective forces of different moments can act as catalysts for new habits and engagements. In this sense, these methods act as intense and lively engagements with the field, and advance towards a form of generosity and responsibility towards others (human and non-human). These methods attempt to move on from narratives around environmental and climate change which ask what we should do to stop or fix things, towards a subtle sensibility that attunes us to the ways in which we might relate and work co-productively with the world.

These methods combined, create an ethics of engagement that, through emphasising the embodied, affective, situated and embedded nature of fieldwork, recognise the fieldworker's position within multiple interrelations and ecologies. They constitute an openness to reciprocal interactions with the field, recognising conditions which have the potential to shape each other. It is a relational and lively ethics which involves equality and respectful engagement, a form of ethics that resonates with Haraway's (2016, p.34) pertinent term 'response-ability' that 'might augment the motivational energy needed to move selves from the endorsement of ethical principles to the actual practice of ethical behaviours' (Bennett, 2010, pxi). Critically this means a shift from a thinking about, to a doing with. A position in which the productive 'event' is key and informs our understandings.

## 7.2 Upstream consciousness

The research began with an idea of *upstream consciousness*, seeking to investigate how an artistic research practice might find new routes, concepts and systems for making greater connections to upstream environments – peatlands and mires – which although distant and overlooked, continually sustain us. Through this research I have found possibilities, methods and pathways to do this but there has also been a shift into understanding that *upstream consciousness* might be concerned not only with upstream environments but could also afford a means of re-orientating ourselves within the current environmental crisis. Furthermore, the research has clarified that *upstream consciousness* both emerges from, and suggests an attention to, active processes, or what James Duggan (2020) might refer to as 'eventful realisation[s]'. The methods of *geomorphing*, *spiralling* and *co-productive ecologies* generate productive acts of co-engagement, which in turn inform *upstream*



*consciousness*. *Upstream consciousness* constitutes a way of thinking that also encompasses an ethics of doing.

### 7.3 Summary, context and generative potential

Through this thesis I have demonstrated how particular field-based activities became acts of critical reflection, and that rather than serving as a means to an end, they became mediums of exploration. *Upstream consciousness* and its collective approaches have expanded the possibilities for human and non-human co-production and opened up new cross-disciplinary spaces, forms of art making, types of field investigation and co-productive practices. These methods have involved embedded conversations with physical scientists, ecologists and cultural geographers which have informed and shaped the research, leading to co-authored publications around the capacity of artistic practice to support cross-disciplinary revisions of fieldwork and understandings of specific landscapes.<sup>74</sup> In this way the research sits within an interdisciplinary context, aligning as much with environmental institutions and ecological research as it does with traditional arts practice. By doing so it forms part of a network of individuals and research which is attempting to reconfigure how we might respond and be with the environmental crisis. Cultural geographer Danny McNally, for example, noted that this research ‘helped expand [his] methodological and conceptual thinking on the notion of fieldwork beyond the confines of the social and natural sciences.’<sup>75</sup> Ecologist Meredith Root-Bernstein, who increasingly works with artists and across disciplines, describes our co-productive works as ‘joint reflections into different kinds of ‘products’ that can act on the world differently than scientific papers and recommendations’. As Mike Crang (2015, p.1) says ‘to think of a world not organised around humanity, a less anthropocentric vision takes a recasting of eyes onto processes and durations seen from multiple angles’. As such whilst other disciplines might not actively engage with *spiralling* and *geomorphing*, this research offers a different angle to be explored, acting as an important layer in the *co-productive ecology* of an environmental activism as we all seek ways to attend and adjust our habitual approaches, assumptions, and procedures.

Driven by ecological concerns this thesis has examined how artists’ methods might engage with and contribute to interdisciplinary understandings of particular environments questioning not only what it means to practice in the field but offering ways, in the face of escalating climate anxiety, of establishing closer connections to what sustains us. The

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<sup>74</sup> See Artists in the Field as part of RGS Explore weekend, November 2021 <https://www.rgs.org/in-the-field/explore/explore-2021/>

<sup>75</sup> In an email (24 May 2021) cultural geographer Dany McNally at Teesside University wrote how my methods were something which [he has] used in [his] teaching on the BSc Geography and MSC Environmental Management courses at Teesside University.

increasing attention on the climate crisis over the period of this research, has to some extent become a fashionable subject for cultural production (Ramos, 2022). This caused me to question both my own and other artists' practices in this context. As a result, the research found itself increasingly interested in what artists were engaged with in the field, 'developed through practice – not through post-rationalising in texts and presentations – but in the doing' (Morgan, 2020 p.8), homing in on process as much as outcome.

This research took place over six years, running in parallel with still unfolding change in response to which thinking and behaviour continues to alter. It also straddles the pre and in-pandemic period which has itself occasioned new negotiations, feelings and challenges. The writing of this thesis began in the COVID-19 lockdown of early summer 2020 and wresting time at my desk, in Newcastle, away from my two young children to write about my experiences wandering in the snowy tundra of Finnish Lapland or in the working with other artists within the collective space of the camp at Moorhouse felt confusing. I was disoriented from a life I once knew, able only to imagine meeting other artists, or walking through a bog. Now, at the end, those imaginings continue waiting for a moment to engage once more with the field.

#### **7.4 Further considerations**

Understanding fieldwork as a process is always a work in progress. In this way certain questions have and continue to inform the research as it moves beyond the confines of this PhD. Questions and thoughts that don't only affect my own thinking, but I suggest are considerations in the wider area of environmental concern. A critical one for myself, with limited resources is how we might argue for small productive acts, or what Jane Bennett might call 'micropolitics' when the scale of the environmental crisis is so vast? *Upstream consciousness* helps thinking and being with the world differently but how do we embed this into action?

The research has found ways of connecting to entities which are usually unseen, out of view, underground, but as we have moved into more virtual communications during the pandemic, I wonder now how might the methods I've developed help us look beyond the horizon? Is there a way in which these methods can engage with imaginative and speculative relations, with what is out of site but physically close?

In now having defined *upstream consciousness* do I choose to see it in relation to a *downstream consciousness*? I would argue that thinking with *upstream conscious* moves away from any such dialectic. *Upstream consciousness* allows for an ethics of engagement

in which the movement of one's thoughts focuses on the source, as well as the results, the generative moment as well as the final effect. *Upstream* is deeply entwined with *downstream* and the *consciousness* of this is to hold that reality in mind and have it play into and alter our approaches and relationships. In naming this productive area of enquiry one can ask how might the work develop if the practice works with downstream sites utilising these same methods and co-productive ethics? These concerns, as with much of the field, have been present in different ways over the course of the research, but now, with more space to attend to them I wonder what they might offer to support this *co-productive ecology*.

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## Appendices

- 1) *Cleambling* (manifesto)
- 2) *Fieldworking* (publication)

## **Cleambering Manifesto**

- Cleambering is a combination of clambering and meandering
- Cleambering is collaborating, traversing, engaging and unfolding with rocks in an improvisational, fluid and intuitive way.
- Cleambering is 'deep time' parkour.
- Cleambering is when a rock invites you to make a kinaesthetic register of the processes that formed it.
- Cleambering pays attention to the contact between the sole of your feet and the surface of the rock - texture, angle, form, temperature, moisture and scale.
- Bring lichen, mosses, algae and other vegetation into the collaboration.
- Attend to the emergence of rhythms and sounds created together.
- Play with bringing other parts of your body into the collaboration.

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Meredith Root-Bernstein/Laura Harrington, July 2018



# FIELDWORKING



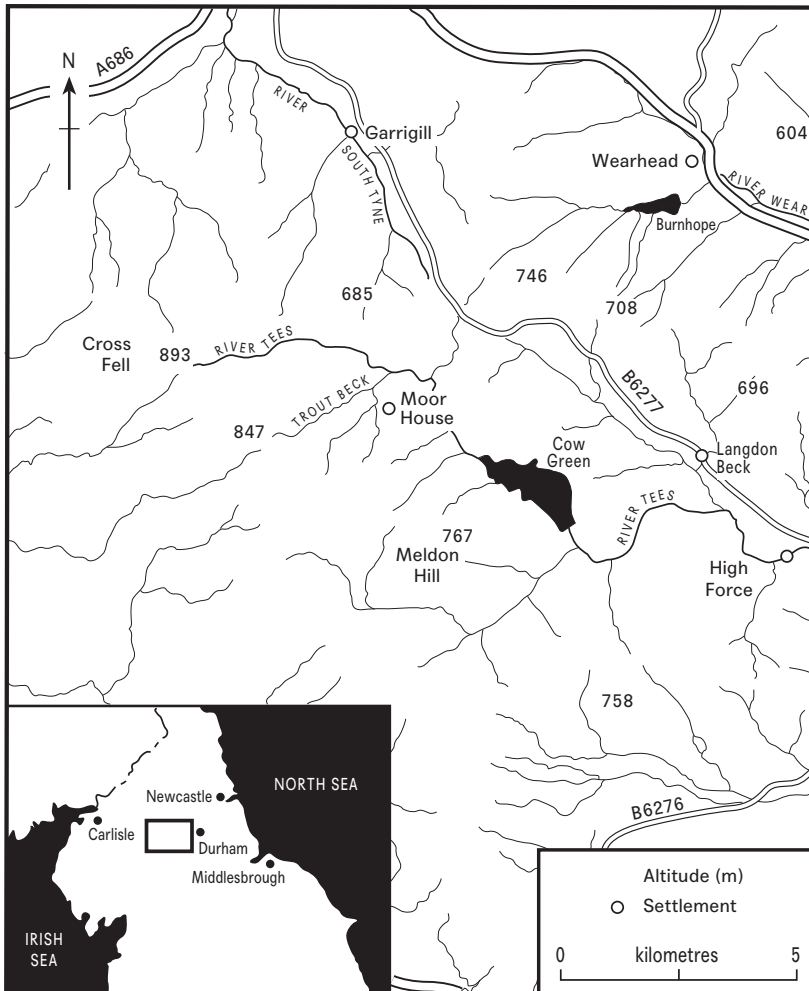
A project by Laura Harrington

## Fieldworking

with Chris Bate, Ludwig Berger, Sarah Bouttell,  
Luce Choules, Simone Kenyon, Fiona MacDonald,  
Lee Patterson, Meredith Root-Bernstein  
and Moor House-Upper Teesdale Nature Reserve

# Introduction

Laura Harrington



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*Fieldworking* is a film shot during a five-day camp in the uplands of Moor House-Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve during August 2019. I brought together six artists, an ecologist and two filmmakers at a former scientific field station to cultivate multifarious practices of artistic fieldwork. Together we found ways of existing, inhabiting and working within the context of this remote location.

Moor House and its upland, blanket bog ecosystem was largely unknown to the participants. The camp intentionally provided an opportunity to experience an unfamiliar context, with the intention of exploring a rawness of perception in relation to artistic practice. The camp wasn't about endurance, remoteness or having a difficult time with the elements, although it did rain continuously. Rather, it was a space to think about how artists and landscape meet and what happens in that encounter.

Over the five days we slept in tents, used a compost toilet, shared local food provided and delivered daily. We dealt with unfamiliar experiences. We created an autonomous space to eat, work, shelter and dry clothes. We sat around a campfire, walked, listened and shared different working

methods. We hosted a dinner for invited guests, including former residents of Moor House to share experiences and found multiple ways to exist together with such a place. Having arrived from multiple geographies and professional contexts, we came to refer to our collective endeavour colloquially as 'The Upland School of Art': a temporary institution focused on finding ways to comprehend, subsist and work in such a climate and place.

This booklet offers a few insights into the premise of the camp, together with responses to the new moving image work.

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## Being with Moor House

Elinor Morgan

Laura Harrington understands moors, mires, frozen plateaus, rivers and peat bogs. She inhabits, observes and feels these landscapes. Through her work, she structures time to be with them and to be with other living things. Over ten years she has developed a practice based on an idea of 'upstream consciousness' through a relationship with high ground. For much of this time she has regularly visited Moor House–Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve in the North Pennine moors, which straddles Cumbria and County Durham.

*Fieldworking* came from Laura's idea to convene artists for a week-long camp on Moor House, with its extreme terrain and weather. In August 2019 she brought five artists and an ecologist to the remote site, with support of her existing collaborators. Why? To see how each other's approaches and knowledge about diverse environments interacted and existed with this specific space. Laura wanted to share this place with others to understand it in new ways. This represents something of her practice: she gathers connections with humans and non-humans through systems of 'enduring relatedness' that are close to the kinship systems described by ecofeminist theorist Donna Haraway.<sup>1</sup>

Laura's invitation to the camp was generous. She has been working with Moor

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House for ten years, building relationships with its tussocks, each species of alpine flower, the compost toilet, the wind that carves your breath and the rain that soaks into your pores. She has formed trust too with the people who have been studying weather, environment, fauna, upland geomorphology and geology with this site of outstanding interest – sometimes for decades – and has helped them to understand new things about their fields of research. Laura has enabled those from other fields to see that what and how artists know is distinct from and complementary to other knowledge systems. The artist uses somatic and embodied knowledge that is developed through practice – not through post-rationalising in texts and presentations – but in the doing.

In 2018 MIMA and the Projections programme at Tyneside Cinema joined Laura's constellation of seekers, experts and enthusiasts. Through conversations and a site visit which turned out to be the wettest day of my life, we entered into a partnership to co-commission a new project that included public events and the artists' camp. The collaboration involved two public trips with groups of people from the Tees Valley area to trace the River Tees from its source somewhere around Moor House, to the North Gare as it meets the North Sea. We showed an earlier piece by

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Laura, *The Liveliest of Elements*, 2015, in the exhibition *Fragile Earth: seeds, weeds, plastic crust* at MIMA in 2019 and supported the development of her new ideas. We introduced Laura to new thinkers and met many people through her. Ultimately this process has revealed the expertise of an adept and thoughtful artist at work.

Staying at Moor House required a lot of planning. There is no electricity or water, limited phone signal and the site's three buildings are tiny and bare. Everyone needed to know exactly what they were walking into, not only practically but in terms of roles, expectations and the ethics of the work. Being unsafe would be easy in this environment. Beyond the physical challenges, many would struggle with the intensity of spending a week with people they had not met before in a place where it is difficult to sleep and impossible to be dry.

The artist camp at Moor House was the latest part of Laura's investigation into practices of fieldwork. Through invitations to several distant places, she built knowledge of environmental and geological phenomena. Making the decision to work geographically and culturally close to home, she developed a relationship with a site just 50 miles from the centre of Newcastle upon Tyne. Her nuanced approach is based on repeat visits and sustained attention to one of the most studied upland areas in the world. Through this environmentally conscientious approach, she avoids relying on the heavy use of resources and intense mobility upon which fieldwork often depends.

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1. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, 2016. The phrase 'enduring relatedness' comes from an interview with Haraway by Steve Paulson for Los Angeles Review of Books <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/making-kin-an-interview-with-donna-haraway/>

Importantly, the fact that Moor House is a 90-minute drive from Laura's home makes a relationship with the ground possible for an artist with young children. This way of working has enabled a deep and respectful understanding of the area. Her demonstration of being with, not attempting to conquer and complete, is akin to the naturalist Nan Shepherd's affiliation with the Cairngorms, shared in the exquisite book *The Living Mountain*.<sup>2</sup> In this, Shepherd describes her time crossing and closely observing this extreme terrain as a 'traffic of love'. She is not interested in scaling summits, but in their undulations and details. Laura's approach has resulted in some of the most interesting sustained collaborations I've come across.

*Fieldworking*, 2020, forms a portrait of the camp, a week in which people came together with the structures, time and environment of Moor House. It is about the affiliations and dissonances between the place and the group. This work has the sweet sincerity of a geography field trip: shoes and socks off and down to the river to squelch and feel. Walk as slowly as you can to a point, with awareness of your movements and contact with the air and land. Bury contact microphones in the springy moss and lie there, listening, deeply hearing the ground and its creaking groans and watery pops. While there is a great sense of play in the activities observed, the piece represents a serious investigation of site through a range of tools and techniques used to come close to the air,

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water, land, flora, fauna and microorganisms. Each person brings their expertise via modest activities with sound, movement, language and touch.

The activities or games are devised as ways into being with the place, slowing down, heightening senses and thinking about the slow time that has built this land with its strata of peat and lead and shale and finally moss, which breathes in water and stores it by the gallon. Imagining the site in this way – as a place that impacts on the various lives downstream – is to understand how and why it is powerful and integral within a bigger structure. The simple gesture of dam-building, something that many of us did as children, becomes poignant if you consider the intervention into the river as a metaphor, both for the ways that rivers change course over thousands of years, and the push and pull between humans and rivers through the use of hydro-electricity, flood defenses, the lack of respect for flood plains, and so on and so on.

The camera filters and mediates the group's intense tactile experiences. Laura uses close-up shots that convey texture and detail. She deploys sound as a methodology, a tool and a representational device. It is hard to describe how wet the site is, from above and below, but through the constant noise of rain and wind and the rustle of waterproof clothing in every frame, the sound brings us closer to a physical experience of Moor House. Towards the end of the film, we are reminded of Laura's role as a thoughtful and generous host as we witness briefly an indoor dinner scene which looks somehow sumptuous despite the harsh

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2. Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, Canongate, 2014

conditions. The steaming bodies and dragon breath offer an insight into how cold the room is.

The work contains very little talking. Aside from a scene in which the group practise describing elements of the place, the film captures only distant chat. There is a sense that a temporary community has formed. Gesture takes the place of spoken word; ideas are expressed through activity rather than talking. This recalls Orcadian writer Robert Rendell's sentiment about shorelines of his island, that 'only those can know it intimately who do something on it'.<sup>3</sup>

At points the humans on film appear as very separate from the land, standing atop it, experiencing it through limited physical access, but at others, they seem to melt into the moist air, morphing with elements of the place. We are reminded that this site and its components are not a setting but active parts in this process and actors in this work. They are played with and expected to act back rather than treated as an opponent to lasso or govern. If the peat under Moor House is formed over thousands of years, holding layers of plant and pollen histories, Laura's approach feels like an apt response to the place.<sup>4</sup> We need this kind of respectful kinship building between artists – people – and living environments.

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## The Science and Art of Fieldwork at Moor House

Meredith Root-Bernstein

1

*Tuesday. Arrived last night; it was much colder than in town. As we drove up to and through the moor, we rose to the level of the clouds at around 600m, and it was raining fitfully. Same in the morning. We walked along Rough Sike to a place called Moss Flats, where there is erosion of the peat down to a 8000 year-old layer of birch still preserved, including its bark. The terrain is very slippery due to the rain, and uneven with little pits and humps. On the moorland surface, in between the bouncy heather is spongy sphagnum moss, of uncertain depth.*

I do not know what I am looking at. I have been in monotonous habitats covered in dwarf shrubs before, in Lesotho, but that was very dry, and on mountain slopes between 2000 and 3000m. Here, not far from Newcastle upon Tyne, we are lower down, and the landscape is gently rolling. I am on a moor. I am in a bog. It is very wet.

I am a drylands and Mediterranean-climate ecologist of anthropogenic habitats, so I am not used to wetness. I am overwhelmed by the dampness and the constant drizzle of rain. I am used to thinking about moisture as

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3. Robert Rendell, quoted in Victoria Whitworth, *Swimming with Seals*, Head of Zeus Ltd, 2017, pp 149

4. See Donald S. Murray, *The Dark Stuff: Stories from the Peatlands*, Bloomsbury, 2018 for fascinating insights into the formation and uses of peat.

something that has to be carefully attracted, preserved and nurtured. I am not really familiar with the problems and solutions of plants and animals exposed to an excess of water. I feel ignorant and confused. I don't know what questions to ask of the shapes of the plants or the movements of the animals. I see lots of caterpillars sitting on the ends of grasses or tops of heather. Are they trying to get dry in the constant wind?

When I am trying to learn about a place, I look for patterns; things that often occur together.

*Fæces—sheep, and some bird fæces that is shaped like long pencil-width macaroni and organ-like blobs (belonging to grouse). Also bigger, tubular; not sure whose. Flies—seen several kinds; wish I had my fly book. I always see tan flies on fæces.*

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The other strategy is to figure out how other people, who have more experience with the landscape, categorise what you are seeing.

*Martin says that the bright green vegetation I saw around the little sike that emerges from the peat is an acid flush. The flower is bog asphodel. Saw a peacock butterfly, lots of caterpillars, a frog. In the open water of the flush there were lots of water striders and flies. Some had fallen in.*

Next, to start understanding things you have to go back and look at them in different moments and conditions, as often as possible. This way you start to understand how they change, in what ways they stay the same, what do

they react to and what their parameters of reaction are. Over a couple of days I started to understand what the water did in the landscape, and how it shaped the relationships between things.

*Thursday. This morning I went down to Trout Beck to photograph the fossils in the stone. It had rained a lot the previous evening and in the night. The river was a lot higher, so that some of the fossils I saw yesterday were covered by water—probably a 40-60cm rise in the water level. The river was rushing and loud, black with pale brown froth. All the heather and grass and moss were saturated and dripping onto the river banks. The water was running down the rock surfaces, dripping, running in a slick, forming little waterfalls between arm-shaped grooves in the rock. You could see the water making the riverbed and shaping the landscape. It was very intense. As I edged along the rock shelf next to the water, the little river seemed to be very alive, overexcited, charged with purpose, rejoicing, powerful, proud.*

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*Ludwig, Lee and I walked further upslope to where the meander area becomes wider and the stream snakes back and forth and splits and forms pockets where the water mills around and hardly moves, networks of anabranching arms.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to understand where the water decides to cut a channel, since the whole grassy and reed-covered area is entirely waterlogged. The heath separates out into buttes, or islands, 3m high, with bare peat sides. Thousands of years*

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1. An anabranch is a branch that separates from and then rejoins the river.



*of peat! At a puddle at the base of one hagg, I stepped into the edge and almost couldn't pull my foot out. The peat has an inscrutable, finalising gravity. I climbed on top of the hagg and saw more in the distance as the fog came rolling in fast all around me. The sheep who had been watching us had disappeared. I felt like the lone explorer of an alien planet.*

*On the way back, Ludwig found a place where the channel narrowed to half a metre and poured downwards, welling up again immediately and releasing lots of little bubbles with a hissing noise. I watched the pale white lines from the sky's reflection spilling and scattering across the black surface of the water, over and again; always different. Ludwig recorded the hissing sound of the water and Lee and I watched. Infinity seemed to be contained in that little water-elbow. As we turned back, I wanted to climb on top of the heath but when I put my hand into the heather to get a grip, I heard a sss-sss-sss. Lee said it might be a shrew.*

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I later learned that the white foam that collects on the surface of the water, especially after rain, is formed by humic and related fulvic acids. Humic acid comes from the decay of plant material as soil is formed and helps plants with nutrient uptake. When I think about it, I have no memory of having seen humic acid foams in rivers and streams in central Chile. Noticing it here helps me to notice its absence elsewhere.

Feeling the agency of the water and how it shaped the moor also allowed me to sense directly some ideas I had been developing with environmental historians. What I call the

'mirescape' is the land-and-waterscape, the conception of landscape as fundamentally made by movements of water, and grading inseparably from dry to wet. The water rises and falls, expands and contracts, making channels and ponds. Dynamic mirescapes bring many opportunities for life and complex ecological interactions.

2

A moor is an upland area covered by dwarf shrubs – such as heather – and grass. In the Pennines where we are, 7000 years ago, this used to be an open or patchy forest of birch, hazel, willow and pine, later succeeded by oak, elder, ash, lime and perhaps elm. Following a few centuries of the activities of sheep, fire and tree clearing, these forests have settled into their current form. Many moors also have patches of conifers that were planted for forestry purposes.<sup>2</sup>

Moors form over specific types of base rock, including outcrops of limestone, sandstone and shale.<sup>3</sup> Limestones erode into basic soils; other rocks richer in silica form more acidic soils. Moors can be drier or wetter, depending on the draining capacity of the underlying rock. When the soil of the moor is waterlogged, it is anoxic and degrades very slowly. This results in the accumulation of peat. The kind of wettish place that we find

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2. Simmons, I.J. (2003). *The Moorlands of England and Wales: An environmental history 8000 BC to AD 2000*. Edinburgh University Press.

3. *ibid.*

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on moors are bogs: they are rain-fed, have no trees, and are nutrient-poor.<sup>4</sup> But a bog can also be other things: moderately wet and wooded, or open water and not wooded.

Sphagnum moss is found in many bogs, including this one, and deserves attention because it is very interesting. Mosses have a strange life history. The large plant that you see is haploid, as our gametes (eggs and sperms) are. The diploid, sexually reproduced organism lives on small organs on the haploid plant.<sup>5</sup> Mosses are thus a weird reorientation of the life cycle: our haploid parts (eggs and sperms) are hidden, private, brief-lived and small, while their haploid part (the body) is the ecological actor, public, long-lived and large. They have no roots and capture nutrients not from the soil but from the rainwater, as it filters through their structure.<sup>6</sup> The vascular plants, such as grass and heather, or bog asphodel, that also grow in bogs have to make do with the nutrients that filter through the mosses into the soil, or that result from the decay of the mosses or other plants when they die. The grasses and flowers may also risk being overwhelmed by the large sphagnum mosses, and lose access to sunlight. The competition between shrubs, grasses and sphagnum mosses results in the dense patchwork that is so funny to walk over, making you bob, stumble and spring.

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4. Rydin, H., & Jeglum, J.K. (2013). *The Biology of Peatlands*, 2e. Oxford University Press.

5. Haploid is when gametes (egg and sperm cells) contain a single set of chromosomes. Diploid is when a cell or organism has two copies of each chromosome, one from each parent.

6. *ibid.*

Bogs change over time. Many have been drained. The peat soil of a dried-out bog starts to degrade more quickly, and may erode. This can lead to an end to peat accumulation, and loss of the characteristic flora of the bog. Some theories suggest that dry moors are dried-out bogs; that all moors were once entirely bogs.<sup>7</sup> But bogs also undergo succession towards other ecological forms. While succession is usually associated with an increase in species richness (number) and ecosystem complexity over time, bog communities tend to get simpler over time. That is, they tend to get drier over time.<sup>8</sup> Wetter habitats are usually more nutrient rich, while drier ones are more nutrient-poor, which probably accounts for the simpler plant communities found on drier sites.

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Our assorted orange and red coats punctuated the pale greens of the moor and the black water beautifully. Like different species of flies with their different niches, each of us had a different practice of engaging with the landscape. These came together in a community of practice. Did the wetness indeed make this community richer, in a different sense?

Luce's practice of slow walking up the path allowed me to appreciate texture of the ground, the wind, the business of the

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7. Pearsall, W.H. (1989). *Mountains and moorlands*. Bloomsbury Books, London.

8. Rydin, H., & Jeglum, J. K., *ibid.*

clouds. It was more interesting than standing still, because while I had time and attention to give to observation, I felt like I was part of the slowly moving cycles of nature, rather than some separate observer. Similarly, the ‘cleambling’<sup>9</sup> put me in a completely different observational position. My poor bare feet, on the point of cramp from the cold, made me feel terribly exposed and precarious. Their careful pitter-pattering and sliding along the slick and pitted rocks of the riverbank felt like a fleeting register for the endless. I imagined myself as a transitory version of the razor clam fossils that I walked across.

During the game of Babbling,<sup>10</sup> we found a suitable curve of the sike and settled around it. Instantly, we seemed to all be mesmerised by the silent conversation with the sike, which we managed to organise almost entirely without speaking among ourselves. It was as if we were in some kind of commons with the sike. We would make a proposition with a rock, or a plant, or some peat, and then the sike would change its tune a little bit. I felt that the water was paying attention to us. Our spontaneous orchestra of potshards, led by Lee, was also magical. Each shard had its own sound, or sounds. As we played with the shards and experimented with them, they took on all kinds of dimensions I never suspected. They became alive and spoke to us.

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9. *Cleambling* is a combination of clambering and meandering that Laura and I had previously developed as a way to interact with rocks and rocky landscapes.

10. *Babbling* was an activity led by Ludwig Berger where we listened to a stone or another thing, inside or close to the water emitting a call to the human player. The human player places, replaces or removes the thing into, or out of the running water. The water responds to the action by changing its sonic expression.

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If we thought of science as an art, we would understand that behind the scientific publication, which is proof of work, there is a long process of actions in the field, or in labs, actions on data, actions of narrativisation. We might think of field ecology as one of the most demanding genres of performance art. In the field, your practice must be canalised into a specific performance of selecting sites, taking samples, making measurements and recording them. This performance is supposed to be repetitive, mastered, logical and rule-following, like the movements of a master printer. This is a very physical, embodied process, and a very social one. The prejudices and tastes of others must be incorporated into the work from its inception if it hopes ever to become part of the public record.

I envied the artists because the formal demands on making sense and being interesting are relatively lower. Not that artists make work that is less interesting, quite the opposite—more things are admitted to be of interest. I was not sure, and I am still not sure as I write this, how to immediately work into science all the things of interest that artistic practice brings to the attention, into science. But perhaps this is asking too much. First of all, science need not – and cannot – be the master transcript of the world. Secondly, inevitably the things I notice and come to understand through art practices will filter slowly through the moss of my mindset, and change my scientific practice without my noticing.

As I did not come equipped with fancy instruments, the things I could measure as part of a scientific method consisted of counting things I could identify, such as plants or flies, faeces, caterpillars, frogs, water pH, and so on. Then I would have to work backwards from what I could measure to a well-formed question that that was the answer to. I did not manage to come up with both a theoretically valid and original question and a way to answer it by counting things. I was doing research, but I did not complete an entire project. There are also parts of science practice that are just about observing, learning, and thinking, part of the invisible process not reported in publications that is easy to overlook or even skip altogether. Moors and bogs, I learned, are a good learning laboratory, a ‘living museum’, for understanding better the slowly evolving, simple habitats of the world, and our place in the panoply of environments made by, but not exactly for, humans.

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## Materiality, bodies and space

Laura Harrington and Danny McNally

Artist Laura Harrington and cultural geographer Danny McNally have been collaborating since meeting on a panel discussion about *Fieldworking* at MIMA. With shared interests in the relationship between art and geography, they are currently developing ideas on interdisciplinary approaches to encounters with the landscape around Moor House. What follows is a conversation exploring the new moving image work *Fieldworking* and the context of Moor House-Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve, in which it takes place.

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*Danny:* Moor House has a rich history of exploration, experimentation and research conducted from a number of related disciplines including physical geography and environmental science. More recently, through your work, it has also hosted artistic endeavours. What is it that initially drew you to Moor House—do you see any commonalities between your work and the historic fieldwork which took place there?

*Laura:* I would say the biggest commonality between my work and previous research at Moor House is curiosity and also exposure. Something drives us to work there. It has to. I don't think we would return otherwise. It's a site that takes time to know, takes time to get to, a commitment to be there, and you

are always exposed to the elements. There's very little shelter so anyone working there has to be up for that sort of encounter, on a regular and changeable basis. I also think there's something in its size and distance which shifts perceptions into more relational ways of thinking and perhaps that's as useful for scientific research as it is for me. Reading more around its social history, looking deeper into the archive as well as attending the 60th anniversary of the reserve in 2012, I can see this place seeps deep into anyone who has worked there.

There was something edgy, hard-work and difficult about Moor House that I found impossible to ignore. It sparked an intense and persistent curiosity that has motivated many of my activities and initiated various new works over the last ten years. Moor House helps me better understand my place in this world. By repeatedly returning to a small section of its vast terrain,<sup>1</sup> I have come to know and understand the place relatively well. I am not alone in my appreciation: many people had, and still have, important and memorable working relationships with Moor House.

To give some context, the Moor House area of Upper Teesdale was one of Britain's first National Nature Reserves (NNR) and was designated as such in 1952. However, its potential as a research area was highlighted a lot earlier through the work of physical scientists such as Jim Cragg and

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1. 3900 hectares of predominantly blanket bog habitat at an altitude ranging from 400-850m.

British climatologist Gordon Manley whose hut which he erected in the area provided an important infrastructure via which he observed the local Helm wind phenomena. In the early 1950s British botanists William Pearsall and Verona Conway, with the Nature Conservancy, facilitated the purchase of the Moor House Shooting Lodge in order to set up a field station where research into ecological relationships could be undertaken. Weather recording and research into the effects of climate change on the uplands has been undertaken at Moor House for over 65 years and continues today, despite the station closing in 1982. It is regarded as one of the most understood uplands in the world.<sup>2</sup>

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*Danny:* In the film, your experiences at Moor House seem to embrace the liveliness, even wildness, of its landscape, searching for moments of closeness and attunement. In this sense the work can be understood to hold what political theorist Jane Bennett would describe as an ethical politics—a mode of encounter which is attentive to and enchanted by the world. I want to put forward three ways in which I feel this emerges in the film and our wider discussions on *Fieldworking* and Moor House—materiality, bodies, and space.

The importance of materiality when working in the environment really came through in the work. Your encounters with the material character of Moor House's landscape, individually and as a collective, highlighted its vitality, but also how this became a

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2. Natural England now oversees and manages the Moor House site.

challenging experience. You spoke of the intensity of the weather, how the rain and damp atmosphere permeated your clothes almost immediately on arrival and how it never seemed to let you fully dry. This damp materiality becomes gradually and accidentally visible through the film as the camera succumbs to the environmental conditions and lets moisture into the lens, creating a subtly blurred and milky filter to some of the later scenes. You also spoke of the comfort and pleasure of eating fresh meals, cooked locally and delivered to the camp. This vibrant materiality of the Moor House landscape is captured sensitively, and to some degree accidentally, in the film.

Can you talk through these experiences and the effect they had on the feeling in the camp, and in how you edited and produced the film?

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*Laura:* Your choice of the word ‘accidentally’ is perhaps a good way to begin. Accidentally would imply unintentionally. What I’m looking for are encounters that are inherently unpredictable but in some ways anticipated. Of course there has to be an element of knowing what might happen. ‘Might’ being the important word here. Exploring Moor House over many years means I have a good sense of what its upland microclimate is capable of. Despite the camp taking place in August the winds hit 40mph on one evening; it averaged 2 degrees at night and rained pretty much continuously. These are uplands in the North Pennines and Upper Teesdale after all. Such conditions weren’t unexpected but what those conditions felt like was unknown until they encountered

us. Hectares of blanket bog as far as the eyes could see wouldn’t happen by accident—it exists entirely because of this kind of extreme wet weather. The weather shaped and became an integral part of the work and its production.

The moisture on the lens is a useful way into thinking about the materiality of fieldwork. Often this material dialogue with the landscape is something which is hidden in the writing-up of fieldwork, regardless of discipline. This dialogue involves a reciprocal relationship between the field and the investigator, where one shapes and informs the other. Like the moisture on the lens, the damp in our chests and permeating throughout clothes, these were relations with the field that soaked into the collaboration, experience and then ultimately the film.

Jane Bennett’s idea of enchantment, as a way of encouraging affective attachment to the world has certainly ebbed and flowed within my work and way of going about fieldwork for some time. The way she advocates for a sense of play, the wonders of minor experiences and a complete easeiness with uneasiness has supported a lot of my own questioning and approach to working with unpredictable scenarios, ‘awful’ weather conditions and ecological relations. To allow for the possibility of enchantment, one needs to not be thinking of how to enable it to happen. It is, in her words, about finding ways ‘to hone sensory receptivity to the marvellous specificity of things’.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Page 4, Bennett, J. (2001). *The Enchantment of Modern Life*. Princeton University Press: Princeton.

Going to Moor House is not about a romanticised idea of getting away from things or being remote in the wild etc. Rather it is driven by a curiosity to find new understandings that question my own agency and points of interaction with the field. I'm interested in the negative perceptions of the weather in landscapes like uplands, moors, and peatlands. I explore ways of working in and with these harsh landscapes, using this to present grounded, embodied experiences which demonstrate their complex character.

The materiality of using analogue 16mm film enabled a physical and causal relationship between light and weather, subject and material to take place. I questioned its use both aesthetically and environmentally. However, its physicality became an important aspect in informing how the work would be made. Each artist had a quota of 400ft of film, meaning there was a finite amount that could be shot and ultimately worked into the final edit. This ensured there wasn't a focus on constantly shooting, capturing and hard drive storage: rather, the focus was on allowing things to unfold and trusting Sarah and Chris to film as appropriate. Sometimes this would be in dialogue but at times not. The camera became another element in the camp, as the wind, or the moss, or one of us. Nothing was elevated.

*Danny:* Bodies play an important role in the film. In places they were used to bring a slowness and contemplative temporality to the film, most evidently in the 'slow walk'. At other points we see bodies huddled together in the

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hut, a sociable hue emanating whilst eating food or experimenting with different items from the landscape. Then there is a scene where members of the camp stand in close proximity to each other, facing different ways, but all evidently bearing the brunt of the harsh atmospheric conditions. Finally, a series of scenes show members of the camp exploring rocks and boggy ground with bare hands and feet. In my reading, what links these different bodily practices is a sense of connectivity, both with the landscape of Moor House, and to each other. How do you see *Fieldworking* as a process of connectivity, and how does this relate to your wider art practice?

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*Laura:* One of the primary intentions of the camp was to observe encounters and connections between the field and the body through a collective experience: to examine the action of doing fieldwork. Often landscape is the focus when people go there, but I was interested in turning the lens onto what was happening between the participants and the land. We view a blade of grass swaying in the wind differently than if we watch a person doing the same, even though both are responding to the same forces, and I'm interested in questioning that divide. Maybe this work is the most explicit in doing that but it's a thread throughout my practice. During fieldwork it is impossible to separate the two: they are intertwined, the body being fundamentally part of the field and not separate or privileged to it. Fieldwork activities are complex and performative acts of engagement.

The 'slow walk'<sup>4</sup> suggested by Luce offers a useful way into the film, and during the camp, was a means to shift spatial and temporal perceptions early on. It allowed other aspects of the landscape to creep into our consciousness alongside an overwhelming sense of our smallness.

The coming-together for food three times a day played a key part in the rhythms of the camp and its ability to nourish us, and of our moods. Together with Lisa Armour-Brown – who animates ingredients like no-one else I know – time was spent thinking about different ways food can become part of the experience. These ingredients fuelled and warmed us in multiple ways.

The camp was very much about understanding and listening together. Not only between the group and our equipment, but together with the field. During the game of Babbling we listened and responded to the sonic expression emitted by water.<sup>5</sup> When we clambered we felt the soles of our feet in direct contact with the rocks and at the same time considered the different forces and processes that shaped the river, beck or sike.<sup>6</sup>

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4. *Slow Walk* or *Performing Duration (slow actions)* was an activity led by Luce Choules, where we moved together along a remote mining track as slowly as possible. It explored decelerated encounter and potential timelessness states for body and mind.

5. *Babbling* was an activity led by Ludwig Berger where we listened to a stone or another thing, inside or close to the water emitting a call to the human player. The human player places, replaces or removes the thing into, or out of the running water. The water responds to the action by changing its sonic expression.

6. *Cleambering* is a combination of clambering and meandering. A method proposed by Laura Harrington and Meredith Root-Bernstein in 2018 that proposes a practice of attending to rocks to understand and enter into a physical dialogue with them about the processes of water, wind, soil formation, and so on, that have shaped them.

When we were standing in close proximity together we were turning in and around ourselves, letting our eyes follow. The film is shaped by these kinds of encounters: voices sharing the cadence of the wind and rain hitting the roof or our feet meeting the moss; listening to the sound of a bog interacting with us, as our feet and hands move in and through it.

The camp was inherently about connectivity, where we explored a new habitat: an ecosystem where different elements met, shifted and integrated. It was a place of ecological tension but also where something happened. The notion of connectivity is an important part of my wider art practice. Mostly through exploring an idea of 'upstream consciousness', which stems from ongoing interests in physical and relational connections to place, connecting back to what is sustaining us. It's a term I use to think about different ecological relations by looking to cause rather than effect; the source instead of the mouth. Moor House and the uplands of Upper Teesdale are upstream and are situated at the source of the rivers South Tyne and Tees. It is also upstream to many people's daily downstream activity. Upstream is both the origin of the water that sustains downstream communities and industry and is also a giant stratigraphic sponge that locks carbon deep within its peat and slowly acts as a natural floodwater buffer. The last twelve years have been spent exploring elements of this in various forms. It's an interest which, like the peat itself, doesn't stop, but just gets deeper and more layered.

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*Danny:* The final theme to highlight is the role of space in the film. From boggy fields to a communal dining room, tents in the wind to a glimpse of an outdoor fireside area, these each highlight the different ways members of the camp engaged with each other and the landscape of Moor House. The scale at which these spaces are presented to us in the film is also interesting, ranging from open and expansive landscapes, to close-quarters scenes under fabric. Could you talk about the importance of these different spaces to the process of fieldworking, and what you are trying to capture with these different scales of space?

*Laura:* Space in this instance could be a call for greater consideration for the in-between, which brings us back to the notion of connectivity. The film doesn't show the field on its own or portray us above or separate from it, but rather shows us doing things together. The space becomes about the momentary encounter of what we are together at that time. We, as a group, together with Moor House, became a new ecosystem. These spaces intentionally move between different scales to consider the habitual ways we tend to understand, explore and represent the things around us.

The closed-eye or darker sections that punctuate the film act as moments of stasis that explore speculative representations of more internal or hidden elements. At the same time they play with representations of light, phosphenes and the moving sensations that interact with shifts between our retinas and the surrounding atmospheres.

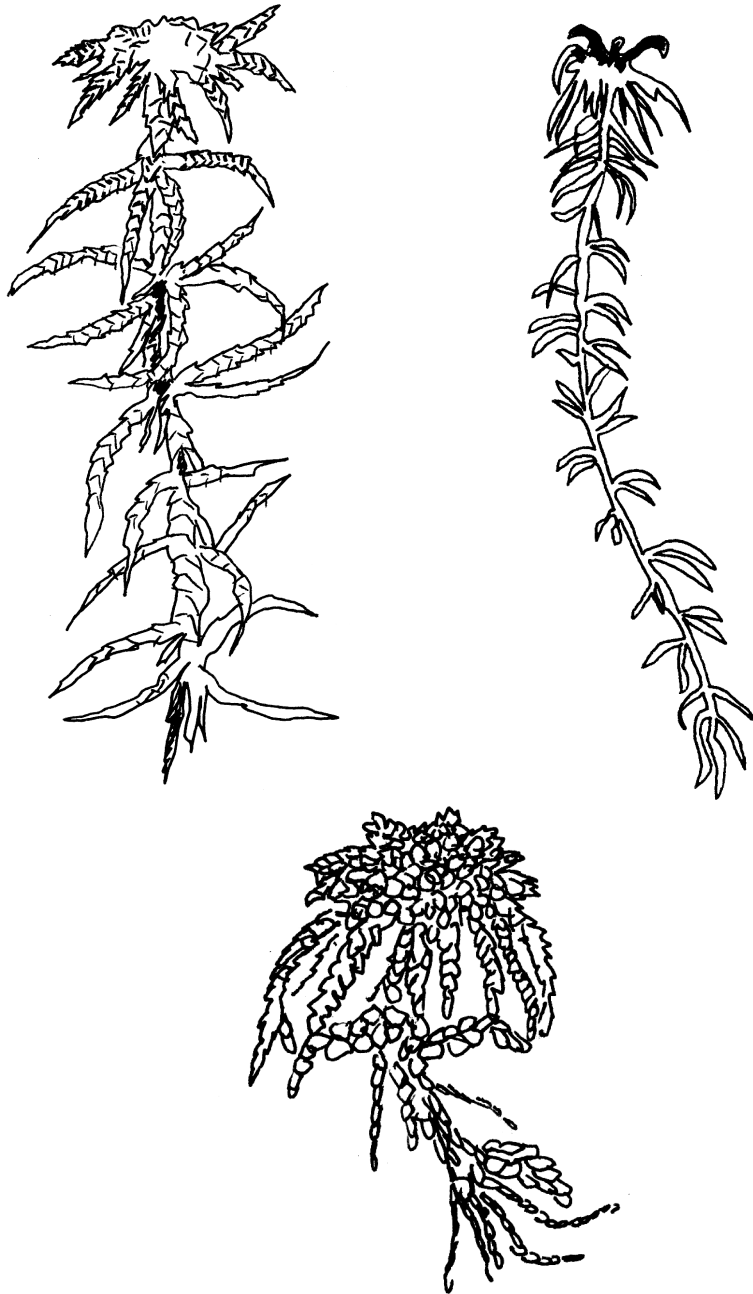
32

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There is also the important space between the screen, viewer, sound and the cinema. Making new work for this context involved much consideration around how an upstream camp experience could translate downstream. A space and context that would offer an entirely new experience, bringing new feelings, temporalities, relations and points of understanding into being. To give yourself space, allows for transformation, or learning. As James Benning – whose work *Nightfall* (2011) remains for me an important touchstone in thinking through relations between landscape and cinema as experience – observes, ‘I always believe that any learning comes through concentration and patience, and that you have to train yourself to have that patience and to perceive. That isn't slow to me, that's hard work’.<sup>7</sup>

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7. This quote comes from an interview with Benning by Nick Bradshaw for The Sight and Sound Interview <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/interviews/sight-sound-interview-james-benning>



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## Sediments, Between Moor and Me

mirko nikolić

*“Actually, it’s not ground at all.  
It’s only water, cleverly held by the architecture of  
moss.  
I am walking on water”<sup>1</sup>*

In this moor of yours, where i visit  
each step matters, a move that leaves the  
certainty of a terrestrial animal,  
surrounded, by you, of a billion names,  
known and unknown to the two-legged  
visitor  
i wonder: did you make the first step, or did i,  
i am being moved, carried along  
with your sedimentary rhythms,  
layered through centuries in care and  
meaning  
listening to you, i am awash with  
the unforgetting of water, air and vegetal being,  
while  
ground and figure play through each  
others  
this dance is a gift, a promise,  
a jagged circle on way of  
reassembling

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1. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2003)  
Above, L-R, top to bottom: *Sphagnum papillosum*; *Sphagnum cappillifolium*; *Sphagnum magellanicum*

Ankles, knees, hips, and lungs, inside  
foot remembers how to pat stone,  
how to meet peat, soft and warm  
revel in memories of heather, moss,  
cotton-grass  
    whispered in shades of soil,  
    salmon, light and dark  
    scents of a spring long gone by,  
    and many that preceded  
you and i unrewrite the membranes,  
sponges that spread and retreat  
in understanding that whatever  
shapes between  
you and me, you and you,  
    it is for a little while  
    a while can stretch in many directions  
    for a leaf, a scar in time  
or almost forever, deepening the mucky  
common

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The surfaces of my protections,  
moving geometries of flesh bone technology  
reattach themselves to the surrounding  
    through wet rustlings  
    as it gets a bit tiring to breathe  
    through these lungs,  
    a remembrance condenses  
we have never left the ocean

Seeing touching wading through jets,  
streams, filaments,  
    your body of water  
    from above, from below, upwards,  
    downwards,  
    adsorbs, spills through walls,  
    as thin as they can be  
    almost not there, subtle

delineations  
    come together in concert  
roofs and fundamentals to giant and  
minuscule beings  
    a village of sphagnum shares events of  
    another wet day

Amidst this mellow roar, i reach out  
    touching desires waver along  
    cupriferous filaments  
disowning the defences in hugs of  
porosity  
    transits through me  
    passing on the refrain  
    word for world is hisss hummm<sup>2</sup>

Herstories and futures of this moor are known  
to you,  
    you remember well  
    quest for progress,  
    the lead squeezed out from the rocky ones  
    insinuated in your crevices  
    the mines had come and have been  
    moved elsewhere  
    you are still here  
    giving in, letting in, resisting  
    not turning away  
    reanimating carbon oxygen water  
    throughout the pluriverse  
i step in your steps  
thank you for keeping this passage open  
for  
    many more than your kind,  
    i am seeking how to reciprocate  
    through my pores

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Let us share a story, dance it out slowly as it  
comes,  
before stepping forward, please, let us agree  
what is it that shall remain between our  
bodies,  
before and beyond these vibrancies of  
touch, joyous  
lands of proximity that resist  
formulation in bits and bytes  
the beckoning of radical hospitality,  
outsides nestling insides,  
inhalation, preceded by an exhalation,  
swinging between one end and the other  
once again, we start something like this:  
once upon a gully, a spore took flight...

Even with my eyes shut,  
the background is scintillating  
thousand little fires dot their way through  
the dark, echoing  
field is not a place we go to, it is a  
summoning  
in a most walled-off space it may perchance  
you  
when you shut your eyes wide, brim  
with yearning  
wind brings about visions from within  
i crawl through grass  
sun filters through tissues of the one  
who was here before  
who brought me here

How many spores do i carry now,  
in the seams of my shell  
committed to re-enact ancient agreements  
fruits of aeons of giving and taking,  
returning spirals, “honourable

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harvests”<sup>3</sup>  
at this present, i still squash  
many of you, as much as i try  
to become light, i am a landslide  
are you too kind to cast me away, or too  
weak to resist  
or are you absorbed in altogether other  
matters  
a knowing rises in me, trying to care is not  
good enough  
out here in the open we see each other  
fully  
embodied intentions and responsibilities  
yet, across this terrifying inadequacy,  
can we mould together  
without me being me,  
what had thought itself singular,  
turns now into this dependency  
on each and every one of you  
learning how rhizines and shoots  
thread through each others  
tip-taps on a shared drum, syncopated<sup>4</sup>

Memories of a brook on a late summer day  
feet and plastic among your waves  
swirling around my bones glazed over by  
skin  
hairs dangling in your wavy quiver  
we play a game of ‘getting involved’ in  
each other’s paths<sup>5</sup>

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3. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013.

4. Echoing Karen Barad, *What is the measure of nothingness: Infinity, virtuality, justice I* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 9.

5. After Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers, *Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters*, *differences* 23, no. 3 (2012): 77.

upstream befriends downstream  
downstream waves to upstream

Sometimes it feels like

you have been waiting, or that i have been  
invited,

as i sit between sun and your skin,  
i feel more and more distinctly, calls  
from the pond  
touching blobs

beautiful sways, like at the bottom of the  
sea,

you've come a long way to these hilltops  
traveling along drenched bodies

that do not admit to clear cuts between  
ocean sky land  
intricate weaving within weaving <sup>6</sup>

i will have been an algae, a fungus, a lichen  
over solar circles to come, i will spread  
out as tiny little arcanses  
of life, death, and other herstories

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In a circle, reassembled, our bones are  
turning

into clay, returning rethinking

the decisions, the feelings, when my  
ancestors  
parted genetic constellations from the  
earth ones,

this facing away is not irreversible,  
in this future past now  
boundaries may yet reunite and  
reshuffle,

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6. Speaking with Arendse Krabbe and our ongoing interplanetary  
trans-temporal drifters...

nothing fits perfectly but it may be  
a melody  
harmony and chaos are fleeting  
transitions

many more ripples are to come  
to pass

murmur along

In this land of moors, who knows that  
it is not a territory, it is a field  
with no beginning nor fence  
decay and renewal twist and turn  
leeward and windward, and in still  
intermezzos

we share meals and hungry times  
coexistence vines  
sometimes a cloak of boredom gathers,  
as it does,

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that is fine  
we persist and wait, sink in tiny  
puff closer  
each breath is once and different

Light is fading after this long day, in  
indistinct season,

bodies dress in metamorphic greys  
the strata get redder

i ask you for permission, to resurface  
chthonic energies  
reanimate our tired joints  
and to invite the neighbours,  
come along without fear  
ectotherms endotherms and all the  
others

the laboured carbon will crackle about  
warmth,

a craving wedded with a  
longing

for the tapestry of clouds  
a crisp sensation in early dawn,  
a regathering trust  
the leafy, the four- and the  
two-leggeds, thirsty  
we will reawaken as amphibians,  
permeated by the same world  
of quenching encounters,  
some of which will be remembered  
as stalks, wood, peat, pebbles,  
invitations extended to yet-unseen creatures  
who might  
tippytoe in our prints, in fresh moss,  
now we sediment  
before you





## Listening Through the Bog

Ludwig Berger and Lee Patterson

If a microphone is buried within the peat of a bog, that bog not only becomes a responsive membrane but a resonant body of sorts. It does not distinguish human from non-human nor underground from over, rather, it welcomes many sources of vibration. Raindrops, footsteps, plant roots, wind, voices—all may act upon and within it. Listening through the bog, we might forget which is body or activator, our own breathing or that of the moss, which voice belongs to the wind, ourselves or another. The peat is porous enough to allow us to listen deep, yet coherent enough to answer in its own resonant voice.

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Every action has far-reaching consequences. Each momentary footstep upon the moss or peaty ground leaves a trace, it triggers a release that may last a week, an impression that may last for months or even years. As the bog recovers, the duration and level of the microscopic sounds correspond to the energy of that impact. By responding so clearly, it calls for responsibility.

The sound edit of the film followed the non-hierarchical acoustics of the peat, treating equally the sounds of earth, plant, animal, weather and water. Sounds were often recorded over and underground simultaneously. This allowed multiple sonic perspectives, combining our 'naked ear' perception with an acoustic experience inside the bog. The idea that we not only listen to the bog, but that the bog also listens to us, is both a fascinating and compelling one.

## Material Field: North Pennines (2019)

Luce Choules

Upstream – against drenched air of fine mist  
billowing – in  
Low cloud brushes the hagg – residual  
mounds – overhung  
And channels – aside hold wet and moss flat  
With low-growing Heather – Cottongrass –  
Deergrass  
Bilberry – Crowberry – Cloudberry  
Fine coarse branches – and resilient fronds  
All yielding – forgiving – under foot

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And lichens all alive and bright – hidden  
Across a deep green land – a mantle over  
blanket bog  
In places three metres strong thick fibres –  
acidic deposit  
One millimetre a year it grows

And erodes with hail – rain – fog – mizzle – and  
sun  
Cleaved by bulging sikes even in summer  
Carrying golden-brown water filtered – and  
soft  
Away from the tops – through gullies and  
holes  
Past smooth rock – soaked and sculpted  
Fossilised seabed and dry blocks – loose – hold  
ore



Above these cuts – tussocks – tufts – anchors of long  
grasses  
Hardy pathways over deep moss – water logged  
Mires stretching around dark matter – knolls  
A stepped plateau of thin wet – bare

Monitored by new visitors – water proofed  
Carrying equipment to lightly touch find depth  
In the layers of ancient birch softly broken – and  
exposed  
All knitting back – with scrub  
Year-on-year the dark disappears  
Under green – purple – orange – pink

Undulating land exposed and raw  
But it is the wind – that shapes – this nebulous place  
Unfixed as it is – humid and cold  
Guards its wellbeing – with distinct atmospheric  
A cycle of moisture let go – and held onto 48  
Drains slow through old fuel

A heavy footstep resonates in dense material –  
muffled  
Through the fibrous mass sound bounced – from  
bedrock  
Captured by wires recording – events

As do the instruments – of science  
Small discs of yellow – held with thick pins  
Just above the delicate dark surface – reveal loss  
And white poles – scattered make frameworks for  
fields  
Survey – markers – fixed – and mobile measure  
Carbon sink – carbon store

Reverberations are also consequence  
Felt – not heard

## Contributors

Chris Bate and Sarah Bouttell  
Artists and filmmakers who make work  
collaboratively as members of analogue collective  
Film Bee, based in Newcastle UK.

Ludwig Berger  
German sound artist based in Milan and Zurich;  
enjoys playful entanglements of sonic bodies.  
ludwigberger.com

Luce Choules  
Itinerant performance artist working with  
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lucechoules.com

Laura Harrington  
Artist exploring relations with landscape, its  
geomorphology, phenomena and day-to-day life.  
lauraharrington.co.uk

Simone Kenyon  
Scotland-based artist / performance-maker  
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cultural environments through somatic and bodily  
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intothemountain.co.uk

Fiona MacDonald  
Works with human and nonhuman beings as  
Feral Practice to develop ethical and imaginative  
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Danny McNally

Cultural and social geographer interested in the relationship between art and society; Lecturer in Geography at Teesside University, and co-founder of Social Arts Seminar at MIMA.

Elinor Morgan

Head of Programme at MIMA, Middlesbrough Institute of Art; a curator and writer.  
visitmima.com

mirko nikolić

Through place-based practices, in collaboration with bodies and forces of different fragility and vulnerability – works for naturecultures of reciprocity, solidarity and commoning.  
mirkonikolic.com

Lee Patterson

European-British artist and musician working with object-based and environmental sound.

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Adam Pugh

Curator, writer and designer based in Newcastle upon Tyne; Director of the Projections programme at Tyneside Cinema.  
projections.org.uk

Meredith Root-Bernstein

Conservation ecologist and ethnobiologist working mainly in Chile.

## Artist's Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Elinor Morgan (MIMA) and Adam Pugh (Tyneside Cinema) for the opportunity to make this new work in the context of the exhibition *Fragile Earth: Seeds, Weeds, Plastic Crust* and for all the support and encouragement that entailed. I am grateful to Arts Council England for funding this new work, enabling new engagements with artists to develop in an ecologically unique place. This made it possible to develop long-term research into a new body of work with an ongoing legacy.

Thank you to the artists who entrusted me with this journey and felt that camping together in the middle of nowhere in the pouring rain was something worth pursuing and sharing. Thanks to Moor House-Upper Teesdale NNR for enabling us to share, look and listen together. A special thanks to Lisa Armour-Brown who kept us nourished and fed enabling us to sink more comfortably into the process. Sincere thanks to Martin Furness, Senior Reserve Manager for Natural England at Moor House-Upper Teesdale NNR and his team who was convinced enough to enable the camp to become a reality in a place which is as equally complex as it is compelling.

I have been fortunate to call upon a number of artists and technical people to support the making of this work. I am particularly grateful to Sarah Bouttell and Chris Bate who sensitively shot the film during the camp and then continued to support the edit of the final work.

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Ludwig Berger and Lee Patterson whose ability to listen and translate the camp through new sounds and sonic experiences have played an integral part in shaping the finished work. Thanks to mirko nikolić whose caring and generous writing offers a deep perception of what took place. To Danny McNally for our shared conversations and contribution to this booklet and to Meredith Root Bernstein for her camp reflections. Thanks are also due to Maya Cohen-Nicholson who looked after Otto, enabling Simone, his mother, to participate in the camp. Also to Dan Adams who provided a suitable vehicle that meant we could actually get to Moor House and back, together, safely.

Thanks also to the people who visited the camp and shared experiences of working at Moor House over the years—John O'Reilly, Linda Robinson, John Worsnop, Alistair Lockett and Josephine Dickinson. I would also like to thank John Adamson and Claire Wood whose conversations have enabled new insights into the history of Moor House through its archive at Lancaster University.

Thanks to Adam Pugh from Projections at Tyneside Cinema who not only supported the works development and commissioning but designed this booklet, and to Tess Denman-Cleaver for supporting the launch event.

Thanks to Rona Lee, Ysanne Holt, Northumbria University and Arts and Humanities Research Council who have supported my practical research for the last four years that weaves into the thinking and development around this work.

A special thanks to Peter Evans, Idris and Ada for their total support.

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*Fieldworking*, 2020

16mm transferred to video, colour, sound  
29'19

Laura Harrington with Chris Bate,  
Ludwig Berger, Sarah Bouttell, Luce Choules,  
Simone Kenyon, Fiona MacDonald,  
Lee Patterson, Meredith Root-Bernstein and  
Moor House-Upper Teesdale National Reserve

Cinematography

Chris Bate

Sarah Bouttell

Edit

Laura Harrington with

Chris Bate

Sarah Bouttell

Sound edit

Ludwig Berger

Laura Harrington

Lee Patterson

Field recordings

Ludwig Berger

Lee Patterson

Sound spatialisation

Ludwig Berger

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This booklet has been produced to accompany the launch of the film *Fieldworking*.

Edited by Laura Harrington

All images courtesy of the artist, except p.46 courtesy Luce Choules; pp 43-44 courtesy Ludwig Berger

Designed by Adam Pugh / [thewaythingsgo.co](http://thewaythingsgo.co)

*Fieldworking* is a co-commission by Tyneside Cinema (Projections) and MIMA (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art). Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. Additional support from Natural England, Northumbria University and The Arts and Humanities Research Council.

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Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
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