Materiality and Metaphor: Environment and Place in Contemporary Poetry

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Abstract

This thesis considers literary and critical reverberations of environment and place in order to reframe conceptions of what nature might mean for contemporary poetry. It attends to the timeframe of 1990 – present, assessing how developments in socio-political context and critical thought correspond or conflict with poetic responses. The interdisciplinary reach of the thesis brings together literary geography and ecocriticism, both of which established their roots during this period, putting conventional understandings of place and environment under pressure. The approach encourages a geographical attention to socio-cultural concerns whilst maintaining critical awareness of recent ecocritical focus on materiality, emphasising the potentially productive friction between cultural representation and physical reality. The thesis responds to earlier Romantic paradigms, granting marginalised contemporary poetry a stronger critical agency whilst still accepting the transformations and metamorphoses of literary convention.

Taking a thematic approach, each chapter engages with key binaries found in environmental and geographical thinking to reveal how contemporary poetics unsettle and challenge such dualisms. The study looks at the work of twelve writers: Thomas A. Clark, John Burnside, Alec Finlay, Roy Fisher, Philip Gross, Barry MacSweeney, Robert Minhinnick, Alice Oswald, Frances Presley, Jo Shapcott and Zoë Skoulding. As a result, it compares and contrasts the poets' engagements with the key threads in the thesis, suggesting that contemporary poetry of place and environment is united through its recognition of the paradox or gap between the material world and linguistic representation. Ultimately, the thesis concludes that contemporary poetry of

environment and place is deliberately unstable, as it metamorphoses forms, modes and legacies, encouraging an understanding of such work as simultaneously responsive to and yet distinct from conventional paradigms of nature poetry.

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1 Introduction

1.1 'Where we are who knows': Inscribing Contemporary 'Nature' Poetry

Words!
Pens are too light.
Take a chisel to write.

[…]

Name and date
split in soft slate
a few months obliterate.

Basil Bunting, *Briggflatts*[1]

Poetry which takes nature and the environment as its subject matter is generally positioned outside of and adjacent to other poetic categories. This leaves the umbrella term of 'nature poetry' to attempt to contain and define the wealth and complexity of poetry which engages with environment.[2] Recent interest in nature writing has compounded this, with anthologies such as Alice Oswald's *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet* (2005) and Owen Sheers's *A Poet's Guide to Britain* (2009) serving to maintain poetry of the

[1] Basil Bunting, *Briggflatts* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2009 [1966]), p.15, p.16.

[2] Throughout this thesis 'environment' should be understood as encompassing plural 'environments', as the term strives to represent diverse environmental materiality without reducing the notion into clearly definable 'types' of environment. This takes impetus from Matthew Jarvis's *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*. When discussing the title of his own book, Jarvis emphasises '[the significance of] the term of the book's title – environment'. He states that: 'this is, after all, not a volume which is restricted merely to poetic dealings with non-urban places and their conventionally associated forms. So the necessity of dealing with the term nature should not overwhelm the larger aims of the volume: this is not, to put it bluntly, merely a study of "nature poetry" […]. A factory is an environmental phenomenon, in this sense, just as much as mountain or sunlight or the weather.' Matthew Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p.13. It is in a similar vein that the title of this study, 'environment and place', signals how the focus of the thesis is, as in Jarvis's words, beyond 'merely a study of "nature poetry"'. This will have particular resonance in chapter one.

environment's degree of generic separation from poetry more generally.[3] This thesis contends that such a generic grouping does not and cannot serve as an adequate or fixed definition for contemporary poetry. Taking impetus from the growing theoretical fields of literary geography and ecocriticism, my approach produces an interdisciplinary dialogue which encourages a nuanced and refreshed analysis of the multifarious modes of post-1990s poetics. Intersecting literary geography's attention to the relations between landscape and culture with ecocriticism's conjunction of socio-political concerns with literature, this study will push at the boundaries of what 'nature poetry' might signify, creating a new critical paradigm for contemporary poetics of environment.

Historically, nature poetry has been placed within somewhat loose frames of reference, particularly evident in the notion of 'pastoral' poetry.[4] The legacies of pastoral writing and Romanticism have endured within nature writing's critical structure, creating an apparently persistent influence on contemporary nature poetry.[5] Such a legacy has left critics tentative of the genre's contemporaneous implications: twenty years ago Terry Gifford

[3] *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet,* ed. by Alice Oswald (London: Faber, 2006 [2005]), *A Poet's Guide to Britain,* ed. by Owen Sheers (London: Penguin 2010 [2009]).

[4] The historical legacy of 'pastoral' has had notable influence on interpretations of nature writing. Lawrence Buell defines how 'traditional pastoral, dating from the poetry of Theocritus, is a stylized representation of rusticity in contrast to and often in satire of urbanism, focusing in the first instance on the life of shepherds. In the early modern and romantic eras, as in seventeenth-century English country house poems and in Wordsworthian lyric, pastoral becomes more mimetically particularized, and more given over to representation of country ways that are being displaced by enclosure and/or urbanization'. Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination (*Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.144. See also Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999). Both Buell and Gifford reveal pastoral writing's over-emphasis on description, and on the attempt to mirror external processes in literary representation.

[5] The Romantic tie with nature writing is well explored in early ecocritical works. For instance, Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) views Romantic depictions of nature through an environmental lens, a text which simultaneously indicates the emergence of literary ecocriticism. Bate writes: 'it still seems […] valuable and important to make claims for the historical continuity of a tradition of environmental consciousness; Wordsworth by no means initiated that tradition, but he has been a vital influence upon it'. Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.9.

asserted that contemporary 'nature poetry is having a bad time', suggesting that the ongoing absorption of contemporary poetry of environment and place into previous traditions has resulted in an element of literary exclusion.[6] This thesis aims to readjust conceptions of what 'nature poetry' could mean, specifically and urgently in regards to contemporary (post-1990) work. Although the 'contemporary' is a difficult timeframe to define, Peter Robinson points out in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (2013) that 'contemporary' does not necessarily discern between twentieth and twenty-first century authors whom are living or dead, but rather suggests a mode of writing which continually responds to both the past and the present, noting 'presences' which 'may also be considered part of the contemporary, because the present is also shaped by poetry from the recent or remote past freshly brought to bear as significant within it.'[7] For Robinson, the contemporary creates a presencing which is 'in perpetual forward movement […]. Everything published is instantly dated, on its copyright page if nowhere else'.[8] The concept of 'presencing', of something which is simultaneously present and still in a continual process of becoming, grants contemporary poetry a sense of immediacy whilst still remaining attuned to the historical determination of that presence. This study accepts the murky edges of the notion of the 'contemporary', yet it also maintains a specific timeframe through dialogue with wider critical and cultural moments. It responds to how contemporary poetry is a presencing, in 'perpetual forward movement' whilst

[6] Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.1.
[7] Peter Robinson, 'Introduction: the Limits and Openness of the Contemporary', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.1-17, p.2.
[8] Robinson, 'Introduction: the Limits and Openness of the Contemporary', p.3.

still being bound and influenced by literary and historical legacies. The concept of 'legacy', of a literary form of handing-down, will be put under pressure through the study's awareness of this contemporary 'presencing', even as it explores the nuanced intertextualities and literary historical transformations necessarily found in contemporary poetry.

A reconsideration of contemporary poetry in light of changing socio-political perspectives on environment seems timely.[9] David Wheatley's *Contemporary British Poetry* (2015), for instance, pulls out a clear link between contemporary poetry's social implications and Romantic legacies, as Wheatley argues that 'ecopoetics' continues the Romantic theme of 'artist as saviour'.[10] Wheatley qualifies this by noting that:

> Readers have learned to be sceptical of artists' messianic delusions, but as contemporary poetry seeks a public role for itself, ecopoetics is a prime arena for its reconnection with the Romantic legacy […]. Ecopoetics overcomes the false division of art and activism and offers a transformative medium for how we relate to the world around us.[11]

These sentiments echo the conjunctions of socio-political context, literary representation and material reality found in recent approaches to nature writing. Since 1990 there has been a rise in critical approaches to geographical and environmental writing as well as a simultaneous increase in landscape writing, as the potential correlation between 'art and activism' has gained momentum.[12] For instance, the Association for the Study of Literature and the

[9] Twenty-first-century inroads into changing environmental policy can be found in the growing success of the UK Green Party, for instance, which can in part be attributed to increased dissatisfaction with the major political parties. See John Harris, 'The Green Party Surge', *The Guardian*, 25 October 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/oct/25/green-party-surge-bristol-west> [accessed 22 April 2015].
[10] David Wheatley, *Contemporary British Poetry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.136.
[11] Wheatley, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.136, p.138.
[12] This is particularly apparent in non-fiction prose. Kathleen Jamie, *Findings* (London: Sort Of Books, 2005), Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places* (London: Granta Books 2010 [2007]),

Environment (ASLE) was founded in 1992, and the turn towards spatiality and geography in cultural studies can be marked by the influence of Edward W. Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (1989).[13] Furthermore, nature writing has actually gained popular foothold since Gifford's statement that 'nature poetry is having a bad time' in 1995.[14] This can, then, be potentially attributed to growing socio-political concern around climate change, partly owing to the emergence of the environmentalist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which saw the founding of Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and the Ecology Party (the Green Party).[15] In terms of literary culture, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) is generally heralded by ecocritics as taking the first step towards a dialogue between ecological science and literature, as Carson's critique of modern pesticides is couched in pastoral and literary conventions.[16] Such representations of environmental concerns are therefore based in physical reality and lived experience.

Tim Robinson, *Connemara: Listening to the Wind* (London: Penguin, 2006), Tim Robinson *Connemara: The Last Pool of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 2009 [2008]), Tim Robinson, *Connemara: A Little Gaelic Kingdom* (Dublin: Penguin, 2011), Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (London: Vintage, 2012 [2011]), Simon Armitage, *Walking Home: Traveling with a Troubadour on the Pennine Way* (London: Faber, 2012), Kathleen Jamie, *Sightlines* (London: Sort Of Books, 2012), Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015).

[13] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989). Other key texts include Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

[14] Recently, 'New Nature Writing' has seen an increase both in critical acclaim and popularity: see Jason Cowley, ed., 'The New Nature Writing', *Granta* 102 (Summer 2008).

[15] Gary Haq and Alistair Paul detail how 'over a ten-year period (1961-1971), many major environmental organisations were established. These included the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in Switzerland […] and in North America, the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) (est.1967), FoE (est.1969), NRDC (est.1970) and Greenpeace (est. 1971)'. Gary Haq and Alistair Paul, *Environmentalism Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.7-8, p.11.

[16] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964 [1962]). In the opening pages of his guide to ecocriticism Greg Garrard calls *Silent Spring* 'the founding text of modern environmentalism', noting that the text 'begins with a decidedly poetic parable', and that it 'relies on the literary genres of pastoral and apocalypse'. Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2012 [2004]), p.1, p.2.

Certainly, Harriet Tarlo recognises in her anthology of landscape poetry that 'there does seem to be a growing momentum to landscape writing and this perhaps reflects the growing political and ecological importance of our relationship to our environment'; yet whether poets are writing poetry about the environment because of political concern or whether such poetry is garnering attention because of current cultural conditions is indeterminable, particularly given the limited gains of environmental politics.[17] In some ways this goes against a more common narrative of poetry 'making nothing happen', to paraphrase the infamous assertion by W.H. Auden.[18] In *Poetry and Privacy* (2013) John Redmond goes so far as to suggest that the twentieth-first century has, 'in public life as well as in literary life, […] entered a period of deleveraging and disavowal, of recanting and retrenchment'.[19] However, evidence of increase in nature writing and geographical and environmental critical thinking puts limits on any sense of 'retrenchment', particularly given that a correlation between public interest and poetic output cannot be easily drawn out. Rather than attempt to disentangle the relationship between poetic agendas and public ones, this thesis tackles socio-political context and literary aspects jointly.

The plethora of both critical and public attention to environment signals an ideal point at which to reassess the relationship between the material

[17] Harriet Tarlo, 'Introduction', in *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry*, ed. by Harriet Tarlo (Exeter: Shearsman, 2011), pp.7-18, p.7. Carl Death concedes that 'the massive growth in environmental awareness and governance since the Stockholm UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 has been paralleled by increasing environmental degradation and precious few successes to sustain our faith'. Carl Death, 'Critical, Environmental, Political: An Introduction', in *Critical Environmental Politics*, ed. by Carl Death (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp.1-13, p.2.

[18] W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1994 [1976]), pp.247-249.

[19] John Redmond, *Poetry and Privacy: Questioning Public Interpretations of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (Bridgend: Seren, 2013), p.7.

landscape and poetics, with 1990 onwards signalling a compounding of the development of environmental thinking and the advent of literary geography and ecocriticism.[20] Each of the chapters in this thesis responds to a particular theme in environmental and geographical thought, ranging from the tension between the urban and the rural to the relationship between generic places and specific sites, to unstable definitions of borders and boundaries, before ultimately reaching to the friction between human and non-human bodies and the wider environment. By focusing on these common and conflicting themes found within literary geography and ecocriticism, the interlinked critical approach of the thesis encourages a fresh perspective on conventional understandings of nature poetry.[21] Contemporary poetry which is concerned with representations of the environment will be seen to function not as a mirror for critical and theoretical understandings of landscape but instead as refracting, elucidating and frequently challenging straightforward notions of place and environment.

It is the contrary and yet mediating forces in poetry of place and environment from which this thesis takes its impetus, meaning that an understanding of poetry as a dialogic medium is vital. Raymond Williams defines 'mediation' in *Keywords* (1976) as:

[20] Early influential literary geographical texts include Soja's *Postmodern Geographies*, Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), which brought cartographical readings of literary texts to prominence, and J. Hillis Miller's *Topographies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995). Ecocriticism's advent is generally marked by Karl Kroeber's *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and Bate's *Romantic Ecology*.

[21] Ecocriticism is loosely defined by Timothy Clark as 'the study of literature and the environment', Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.1. More explicitly, Richard Kerridge posits that 'the fundamental task for ecocritics is to evaluate texts from the viewpoint of environmental concern, and by doing so introduce environmental criteria into general cultural debate', bringing a decidedly political agenda to literary ecocriticism. Richard Kerridge, 'Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre: Urgency, Depth, Provisionality, Temporality', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.361-376, p.361.

> [n]either neutral nor "indirect" (in the sense of devious or misleading). It is a direct and necessary activity between different kinds of activity and consciousness. It has its own, always specific forms. […] All "objects" […] are mediated by specific social relations but cannot be reduced to an abstraction of that relationship; the mediation is positive and in a sense autonomous.[22]

Attending to the mediating potential of poetry, to the gap between world and text, encourages a productive shift towards recognising the friction between description and metaphorical transformation in representational modes. Williams's definition of 'mediation' also notes its initial meaning as 'interceding between adversaries, with a strong sense of reconciling them', suggesting a thematic concept of mediation as bridging between two things, such as between literary geography and ecocriticism, or between experimental and mainstream poetry.[23] Certainly the simultaneously complementary and distinctive relationship between geographical and environmental approaches reinforces this sense of mediation. Whereas 'environment' can be defined, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, as a loose conception of 'the natural world or physical surroundings in general', 'geography' evokes a general sense of environment, specific material and physical investigations, and a number of disciplinary interventions.[24] 'Mediation', then, creates a focus on both poetic and disciplinary negotiations and dialogues.

Oswald's and Sheers's poetry anthologies themselves reveal a contentious division between notions of 'environment' and 'geography'. Oswald argues for poems that 'don't pronounce any one ecological message'

[22] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976), p.172.
[23] Williams, *Keywords*, p.170.
[24] *Oxford English Dictionary*, *'Environment, n'*, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 30 October 2014].

but which are still attuned to 'the feeling of nature pulling a man back into the ground'.[25] Sheers, in contrast, ties representation to place, creating a distinction between the materiality of nature and landscape: 'landscape is what happens to nature when we turn up; when her hills, forests and seas are passed through the prism of our imaginations to be refracted again as a painting, a view, a memory. It is our perception that brings landscape into being'.[26] As well as operating within a conventional association of nature with the feminine, Sheers suggests that it is human perception which produces 'landscape' 'when we turn up', a definition which clashes with Oswald's interpretation that nature produces poetry.[27] It is in this way, then, that my study will interrogate the frictions, divisions and correlations between geography and environment, refracted specifically through an interdisciplinary dialogue between ecocriticism and literary geography. In fact, the literal translation of geography is 'earth writing', fruitfully illuminating a point of contact between writing about place and the non-representational potential of the material earth itself.[28] Recently, Tim Ingold has pushed the correspondence between writing and materiality further, creating an entangled convergence between lived material experience and representation, searching for 'a way to overcome the entrenched division between the "two worlds" of nature and society, and to re-

[25] Alice Oswald, 'Introduction: A Dew's Harp', in *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet*, ed. by Alice Oswald (London: Faber, 2005), pp.ix-x, p.x.
[26] Sheers, 'Introduction', p.xviii.
[27] Ecofeminism, and particularly the work of Donna Haraway, debunks the link between the feminine and the natural. Haraway details how 'certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions […], [the] domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female'. Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.7-46, p.35.
[28] Neal Alexander and David Cooper, 'Introduction: Poetry and Geography', in *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-war Poetry*, ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.1-18, p.1.

embed human being and becoming within the continuum of the lifeworld'.[29] Although Ingold's aim is to bring ethnographic practice and methodology to bear on geography and anthropology, it is this simultaneous conjunction of and conflict between the physical and the representational which this thesis takes as its central tenet.

Taking his definition of mediation further, Williams adds that mediation is 'a means of transmission, or agency as a medium'.[30] 'Mediation' not only navigates between two opposing or even complementary forces but also signals the form of that negotiation: the processes of poetics. Furthermore, 're-mediation' suggests a continuation of the notion of presencing, of ongoing poetic engagements and a sense of transformation and change. This thesis therefore pays attention to poetic mediation and re-mediation. In so doing it refutes the conventional distinction between two post-war poetry camps: the traditional and experimental, whose divisions burgeoned during a period described by Peter Barry as the 'poetry wars'.[31] In recent years this binary has come under scrutiny, as Helen Bailey points out:

> It is often assumed that […] [the] "dirtiest brawl" was played out by two principal groups of poets in the 1970s: the "avant-garde" and the "mainstream". However, this is a somewhat crude view that fails to take into account the individuality of poets and the unique nature of their poems as modes of expression at particular moments in history. […] The tendency to seek order through binary oppositions is an instinctive sense-making method frequently employed by critics and theorists […] in order to present complex ideas, debates and literary approaches as manageable components. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of this tendency to simplify, since there is a real danger of over-looking poets, poems or aspects of poetry, both in the past and the

[29] Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p.4.
[30] Williams, *Keywords*, p.170.
[31] Peter Barry, *Poetry Wars: British Poetry of the 1970s and the Battle of Earls Court* (Cambridge: Salt, 2006).

> present, that have been (or are being) sifted out of literary debates and "canons" because they do not fit comfortably within such parameters.[32]

For Bailey, the reduction of poetry into two opposing modes restricts the capacity and complexity of poetics. Rather than suggesting that the two categories be merged, however, she calls for a consideration of 'the individuality of poets and the unique nature of their poems […] at particular moments in history'. This echoes the driving force behind this thesis, which intends to unpick conventional generic distinctions by attending to individual poetics as well as relevant contexts. Williams's emphasis on mediation as 'agency as a medium' thus helps to attend to the wider mediating processes of contemporary poetry rather than associating environmental poetics with specific forms and modes. The potential of this reframing of generic boundaries extends to larger issues around the lyric form and Modernist modes. Wheatley, for example, argues that 'the challenge of nature is, among other things, a challenge of form. For some critics the lyric line traceable from Edward Thomas is the natural form for the British tradition, an identification that would doubly confirm the alienness of modernism', suggesting that there is a clear division between Modernist and Romantic form by using 'natural' to imply the inherent appropriateness of the lyric.[33] This thesis aims to reveal the ambiguities found within such apparent distinctions, suggesting that Romantic and Modernist influence on contemporary poetry does not form a straightforward demarcation between traditional lyric poetry and Modernist

[32] Helen Bailey, 'Two Poetries?: A Re-examination of the 'Poetry Divide' in 1970s Britain', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* ed. by Peter Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.130-150, p.131, p.148.
[33] Wheatley, *Contemporary British Poetry,* p.6.

experimentation, but instead allows contemporary poets to take on 'the challenge of form' through reflexive engagements with mediation.

Furthermore, the destabilisation of poetic categories is maintained by the way in which the multiple poetries in this study share a common focus on landscape and environment. Such an approach follows on from Neal Alexander and David Cooper's assertion in *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-war Poetry* (2013) that:

> [g]eography […] provides a kind of common ground […] on which the often divisive sundering between so-called "mainstream" and "experimental" poetic camps ceases to be quite so pronounced. Although their methods may appear to be very different, post-Romantics and neo-Modernists often turn out to have shared preoccupations with the relations between place and identity, humans and non-humans, nature and culture, art and the world.[34]

The thesis will continue the exploration and querying of the perceived boundaries between types of poetry through its varying attention to geography and environment. It is in this vein that it aims to form a starting point for thinking about environment and place poetry's inscriptions, re-inscriptions, and paradoxically, disorientations. Comparing and contrasting differing types of poetry, such as the Faber-published Alice Oswald and the self-publishing and Carcanet-published Thomas A. Clark, lets the study strikes a simultaneous balance and contrast. Although bound by its periodic timeframe, it deliberately takes an open approach to contemporary poetry, incorporating studies of twelve poets in order to address the multiple and contingent approaches to environment and place. Each literary representation of environment and place necessarily mediates between multiple and contradictory paradigms, yet the

[34] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction: Poetry and Geography', p.2.

thematic approach of each chapter identifies a particular idea as a fulcrum. This allows the thesis to remain focused on poets who take particular themes of environment and place as their subject matter, but still recognises the variation and juxtapositions within such categories. The selection of poets and texts therefore responds to each theme rather than attempting to provide an exhaustive study of contemporary poetry of place and environment, which could potentially include works as formally diverse and contrasting as Seamus Heaney's *Seeing Things* (1991) and Peter Larkin's *Leaves of Field* (2006).[35] Instead, the focus on the natural and the artificial, site and place, Severn Estuary poetry and body and environment lets the thesis tackle the varied modes of contemporary poetics whilst remaining within clearly defined parameters of both content and timeframe.

Reflecting Williams's 'mediation' as 'interceding between adversaries', the first chapter intervenes between the categories of 'natural' and 'artificial', reacting to longer understandings of the distinction between 'city' and 'country' or 'urban' and 'rural' poetry. In fact, Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) has simultaneously influenced and undermined the continuation of a binary understanding of nature and culture: 'the relation of country and city is not only an objective problem and [a] history, but has been and still is for many millions of people a direct and intense preoccupation and experience'.[36] For Williams, the dichotomous relationship between the country and the city has affective implications, suggesting that the binary does not form a straightforward opposition but instead is an entanglement of human and non-

[35] Seamus Heaney, *Seeing Things* (London: Faber, 1991), Peter Larkin, *Leaves of Field* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2006).
[36] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), p.3. Another important text which challenges such distinctions is William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

human relations and understandings. Furthermore, rebalancing the conflict and connection between the natural and the artificial destabilises longer traditions of associating certain poetry with specific environmental regions and areas. Key 'city' poets Roy Fisher, Barry MacSweeney, and Zoë Skoulding are thus understood in this context as not only 'urban' poets, but as poets sensitively aware of the blurred realities and unstable categories of the natural and the artificial.[37] Doreen Massey, for instance, notes how 'what […] geological history tells us is that this "natural" place to which we appeal for timelessness has of course been (and still is) constantly changing.'[38] This process and flux, then, reflects the interlinking of ecocriticism and literary geography, which itself mirrors larger trends in geography. Sarah Whatmore's *Hybrid Geographies* (2002) argues for 'other modes of travelling through the heterogeneous entanglements of social life that refuse the choice between word and world by fleshing out a different conception of fabric-ation', as she aims to readdress the tension between nature and society within geographical scholarship.[39] Whatmore's non-representational approach attempts to 'entangle' the 'spatial practices of science, law and everyday life', going some way to challenging the Cartesian distinction between nature and culture.[40] The chapter will therefore begin to reveal how contemporary poetry deliberately creates disorientation and destabilisation rather than adhering to reductive dichotomies.

[37] Roy Fisher, *Birmingham River* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Barry MacSweeney, *Hellhound Memos* (London: The Many Press, 1993) and *Pearl* (Cambridge: Equipage, 1995), Zoë Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008).
[38] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p.133.
[39] Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies: Natures Cultures Spaces* (London: Sage, 2002), p.3.
[40] Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies,* p.4.

The second chapter, on 'site and place', similarly negotiates between two prevalent categories in geographical thought. Rather than focusing on a generalised sense of place in poetry, it highlights the hitherto marginalised work of Alec Finlay and Thomas A. Clark, and re-appropriates Peter Riley's *Alstonefield* (1995) as potential 'site-specific' poetry.[41] Finlay, Clark and Riley all engage with a particular region or place, suggesting that their texts could be identified as being located at a specific point. However, this chapter considers a more nuanced understanding both of the generalities of 'place' and the specificity of 'site' in contemporary poetry's engagements with environment and nature. Just as the opening epigraph from Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts* (1966) simultaneously attempts to 'inscribe' words on the landscape and places them under erasure, the 'site and place' chapter negotiates the uncertain link between the 'events' of writing and performance. The Romantic theme and method of inscription can thus be read as an echo within site-specific writing, whilst still being understood as refracted by the unstable senses of site and place which contemporary poetry presents. Indeed, whereas John Kenneth Mackay argues that Romantic inscription metaphors attempt to be accurate representations of reality, stating that 'topos, meditation, and attempts to represent place precisely and "realistically" are all […] co-present in the Romantic and post-Romantic inscriptive mode', Finlay's, Clark's, and Riley's negotiations between encounters with specific sites and wider considerations of place serve to contest how far writing can mediate directly between

[41] Peter Riley, *Alstonefield: Stanzas Unfinished* (London: Oasis/Shearsman, 1995), Thomas A. Clark, *The Path to the Sea* (Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2005), Thomas A. Clark, *From Sea to Sea* (Fife: Moschatel Press, 1990), Thomas A. Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2009), Thomas A. Clark, *To Scalasaig* (Fife: Moschatel Press, 2000), Thomas A. Clark, *By Kilbrannan Sound* (Fife: Moschatel Press, 2012), Alec Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak* (Derbyshire: Derby Arts Development Group,2010).

landscape and poem, furthering the thesis's exploration of the paradox of poetic mediation.[42] The chapter thus takes further steps towards re-conceiving generic conventions in nature poetry.

This movement between two concepts is continued in the third chapter, which unpacks the notion of 'border' poetry, responding both to geographical interest in borders and boundaries and to ecocritical attention on the shifting complexities of ecology. It focuses on Severn Estuary poetry, encouraging a precise approach to borderlands and elucidating the socio-political and literary implications of the estuary. Again, a non-binary interpretation is essential, approaching the estuary from the Welsh perspective of Robert Minhinnick, the English viewpoint of Frances Presley, and the deliberately ambiguous approach of Philip Gross, as the chapter offers the potential of borderland poetry as a genre.[43] Literary responses to the Severn and the Bristol Channel developed from Geoffrey of Monmouth's tale of the drowning of Habren and Sabrina in *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136), before being compounded in the seventeenth century in John Milton's *Comus*: *A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634) and Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612), and in the early twentieth century in Ivor Gurney's Gloucester poems.[44] The Severn Estuary festival in 2009 marked a twenty-first century extension of such historical and literary legacies, and twenty-first century approaches to the river shift between

[42] John Kenneth Mackay, *Inscription and Modernity: From Wordsworth to Mandelstam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p.5.
[43] Frances Presley, *Myne: New and Selected Poems and Prose 1976-2005* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2006), Robert Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2002), Philip Gross, *The Water Table* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2009).
[44] John Milton, *Comus: A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle 1634* (London: E. Harding and W. West, 1799). Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (London: Humphrey Lownes, 1612). Of particular interest is Gurney's poetry written during 1922-1926, including 'The Sea Borders', 'By Severn', and 'While I Write'. Ivor Gurney, *Collected Poems,* ed. by P. J. Kavanagh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.118, p.145, p.167.

convention and their own contemporary cultural and social representations.[45] In this chapter the consideration of Severn Estuary poetry will mediate between the physical reality of the water and its poetic representation, analysing how contemporary poetry manages the friction between the materiality of the waterway, poetic representation, and these literary heritages.

The attempt to unsettle such metaphorical 'borders' is pushed further in the final chapter, which examines the intricate relations between the material body, landscape, and the 'body' of textual representation itself.[46] Oswald, John Burnside, and Jo Shapcott each traverse the potential line between bodily phenomenology and poetics, and the chapter notes how intertextuality and metamorphosis can act as an enduring theme in poetry of the body.[47] In so doing it reframes the ecocritical attention on bodily immersion, an undermining of any distinction between the human body and the world, and instead considers how 'metamorphosis' acts as a metaphor for transformation both within the text and intertextually. The chapter examines how the body figures in representations of labour, gardening and illness, reframing bodily activities. It continues the key aim of attending to formal processes in poetics by considering how each poet attempts to oscillate between materiality and metaphor. Geographical theory has long been preoccupied with how the human body interacts with the environment. Bertrand Westphal points out in *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2007) that the body's relationship to environment, its phenomenology, is far from straightforward: 'the relation to

[45] Alice Oswald, *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* (London: Faber, 2009).
[46] *Oxford English Dictionary*, *'Body, n'*, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 22 May 2014].
[47] Jo Shapcott, *Tender Taxes: Versions of Rilke's French Poems* (London: Faber, 2001), Jo Shapcott, *Of Mutability* (London: Faber, 2010), Alice Oswald, *Dart* (London: Faber, 2002), John Burnside, *The Hunt in the Forest* (London: Cape Poetry, 2009), John Burnside, *The Asylum Dance* (London: Cape Poetry, 2009 [2000]), John Burnside, *Selected Poems* (London: Cape Poetry, 2006), John Burnside, *The Light Trap* (London: Cape Poetry, 2002).

the world operating through the senses is variously understood'.[48] Phenomenology provides not merely a way of addressing the relationship between the body and the world but a repositioning of the relation of physical reality to the intangible and ineffable. It is therefore through this geographical attention to multiple and unstable phenomenological interpretations of place that the chapter grapples with the larger issue of representation. This is a thread which works its way throughout the study, querying and considering in the process the relationship between the physical environments and places and the task of poetic representation, accepting the paradoxes and disorientations that contemporary poetry reveals.

1.2 Literary Geography

In *The Country and the City* Williams emphasises the relationship between an affective understanding of place and its history, arguing that 'on the actual settlements, which in the real history have been astonishingly varied, powerful feelings have gathered and have been generalised'.[49] In a similar fashion, Heaney's essay 'The Sense of Place' in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (1980) explores the distinction between literal place and its implication in imagination and the human unconscious. Heaney states that:

> Irrespective of our creed of politics, irrespective of what culture or subculture may have coloured our individual sensibilities, our imaginations assent to the stimulus of the names, our sense of place is enhanced, our sense of ourselves as inhabitants not just of a geographical country but of a country of the mind is cemented. It is this feeling, assenting, equable marriage between the geographical country

[48] Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism*: *Real and Fictional Spaces,* trans. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 [2007]), p.133.
[49] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.1.

> and the country of the mind, whether that country of the mind takes its tone unconsciously from a shared oral inherited culture, or from a consciously savoured literary culture, or from both, it is this marriage that constitutes the sense of place in its richest possible manifestation.[50]

Heaney links the affective landscape, the 'feeling assenting' collaboration between individual and place, with what he calls 'the country of the mind'. The metaphor deliberately combines geography and consciousness, with Heaney concluding that a sense of place cannot fully be experienced without the 'marriage' of the mind, metaphor, and more literal implications of place itself. His point that 'the country of the mind takes its tone unconsciously from a shared oral inherited culture, or from a consciously savoured literary culture, or from both' emphasises the influence of literature and culture on the imaginative interpretation of place. Heaney's tie between affect and landscape remains attentive to other literary legacies: his sense of 'manifestation', of place as both intangible and representational, unites the notion of *genius loci* with a more contemporary awareness of the instabilities and politics of place.[51] This thesis will therefore recognise that literary influences and 'debt' are interrelated, as it points to the legacy of other literary modes on contemporary poetics whilst still recognising post-1990s poetry's cornucopia of influence.

Heaney's 'sense of place', then, emerges from a metaphorical understanding of geography as well as a literal one, whilst drawing on longer poetic legacies: it is a literary geography. This friction between the physical landscape and its textual representation forms the cornerstone of this thesis, as

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[50] Seamus Heaney, 'The Sense of Place', in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber, 1984 [1980]), pp.131-149, p.132.

[51] McKay puts the connection between inscriptive poem, representation and the voice of the 'spirit of place' under pressure in Romantic lyric poetry. He offers the definition as: "genius loci" topos - in which the voice of some "spirit of the place" […] either informs or directly "performs" the appellation […] in attenuated or displaced form, in inscriptive lyrics of the late eighteenth century and beyond'. McKay, *Inscription and Modernity*, p.3.

it uses literary geographical theory to refigure interpretations of contemporary poetry of place and environment.. Its attentiveness to place allows for a re-conception of environment in literature, one which is not necessarily bound by overt environmental agendas, or what Matthew Jarvis calls 'literary manifestations of "green" politics'.[52] Instead, Alexander and Cooper describe the coming together of literary and geographical thinking as:

> A clearer and suppler understanding of how the affective and political aspects of space condition not only the content but also the languages and forms of literary texts. Equally and oppositely, literary texts are acknowledged to have an important role in constructing and reconstructing the meanings of place.[53]

As Alexander and Cooper suggest, literary geography is dependent on and informed by the mutually reinforcing relationship between materiality and text.

Literary geography developed from what is often called 'the spatial turn', which emerged out of cultural and human geography, leading humanities and social sciences towards considerations of the social and political implications of place and space.[54] By the 1980s, geography was beginning to look towards cultural artefacts as a way of re-interpreting physical geography. Indeed, John Wylie describes how the spatial turn has led to a productive exchange of ideas between geography and the humanities:

> Through the late 1980s and early 1990s […] some new cultural geographers began to turn towards the interpretative techniques of literary and cultural theory, and hence to conceptualise landscape as text in a new and distinctive fashion. Instead of being a historical

[52] Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*, p.7
[53] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction', p.1.
[54] Robert T. Tally points out that the spatial turn is, appropriately, difficult to pinpoint in time, stating that '[although] it would be difficult, and misleading, to identify a particular date or moment when this occurred, a recognizable spatial turn in literary and cultural studies (if not the arts and sciences more generally) has taken place'. Robert T. Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.11, p.12.

> record, the landscape-text – here composed of both the material landscape "itself", and its representation in art, maps, texts and other imagery – is understood as being organised around questions of power and authority.[55]

Wylie details how cultural geography encourages a consideration of 'landscape-text'. Although the notion that the text is also a landscape is deeply metaphorical, Wylie's point reflects the geographical turn to metaphor. This shift is significant for literary studies: Sarah Luria, for instance, notes 'the power of literary techniques to enrich and alter our sense of geography is concentrated in what is perhaps literature's most creative site: metaphor'.[56] It is for this reason that 'place' is brought under consideration rather than 'space': as Tim Cresswell points out, 'space […] has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning – as a "fact of life" which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human life', whereas place 'is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world.'[57] By attending to the metaphorical possibilities of texts, literary geography and the spatial turn deliberately focus on uncertain forms of representation and depiction rather than mimicry. As Wylie suggests, landscape and text can be understood as being in interplay, as both 'material landscape "itself", and its representation' in cultural mediums, an interaction which forms the backbone of this study.

The emphasis on spatiality emerged from a postmodern attention to time and space. This created a shift away from a nineteenth-century focus on

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[55] John Wylie, *Landscape* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007) p.71. See *GeoHumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place,* ed. by Michael Dear, Jim Ketchum, Sarah Luria, and Douglas Richardson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities,* ed. by Stephen Daniels, Dydia DeLyser, J. Nicholas Entrikin and Douglas Richardson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), and Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism*: *Real and Fictional Spaces,* trans. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 [2007]) for prime examples of the growing interest in the intersection between geography and the humanities.

[56] Sarah Luria, 'Spatial Literacies', *GeoHumanities,* pp.67-70.

[57] Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.10, p.11.

time and instead towards a consideration of space. Robert T. Tally Jr. describes how:

> Whereas the nineteenth century appeared to have been dominated by discourses of time, history, and teleological development, and a modernist aesthetic seemed to enshrine temporality as the most important dimension, […] after the Second World War, space began to reassert itself in critical theory. […] The "spatial turn", as it has been called, was aided by a new aesthetic sensibility that came to be understood as postmodernism, with a strong theoretical critique provided by poststructuralism.[58]

Interweaving literary geography and ecocriticism is an effort to address Dominic Head's call for an interaction between postmodern and environmental concerns, a focus which maintains an attention on physical materiality and the reality of the surrounding world. Head argues for a recognition of the potentially productive paradox between close reading and ecocriticism, which he calls 'the (im)possibility of Ecocriticism'.[59] His use of parenthesis in the essay title signals the relationship between language and ecocriticism, suggesting that a post-structural approach is entirely appropriate:

> The contradictory nature of this formulation may be an appropriately provisional one for the era of postmodernity, and for enabling the critical uncovering of the incoherences and contradictions that are always involved in the designation and interpretation of "literature".[60]

The contradiction inherent in a simultaneously material and textual approach to literature is, as Head suggests, productive, and in fact mirrors 'the

[58] Tally, *Spatiality*, p.3.
[59] Dominic Head, 'The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism', in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (London: Zed Books, 1998), pp.27-39, p.38.
[60] Timothy Clark points out the tension between ecocriticism and post-structuralism: 'a persistent target of environmental critics, especially in the 1990s, was a view of language which they attributed loosely to "postmodern", "deconstructive" or "post-structuralist" theory.' Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.46. Head, 'The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism', p.38.

incoherences and contradictions' which are inevitable in literary analysis. The interlinking of literary geography, ecocriticism, and close textual analysis thus continues to challenge any clear demarcation between nature and culture. As Tarlo points out in *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry* (2011), 'the word "landscape" is a compound, of the land itself and the "scape" which acknowledges interventionist human engagement with land', creating movement between culture and nature, between text and world.[61]

Literary geography, then, allows for a constructive approach to environment and literature, one which is not necessarily bound by a preoccupation with poetry's ability to save the earth.[62] An approach which is aware of the associations and conflicts between world and text is therefore particularly receptive to the notion that the designation 'place' is not necessarily stable. Lawrence Buell's consideration of 'place' in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), for instance, argues that:

> Place is succinctly definable as space that is bounded and marked as humanly meaningful through personal attachment, social relations, and physiographic distinctiveness. […] Place connotes not simple bounded and meaningful location but also dynamic process, including the shaping of place by outside as well as internal influences.[63]

This definition of place in process recalls Cresswell's influential statement that 'places are never finished but always the result of processes and practices'.[64] Place is not merely spatial, a container or location of human activity, but an interrelated set of experiences: indeed, Tally Jr.'s *Spatiality* (2013) deploys the term 'geocriticism' as an expansive and processual way of considering the

[61] Tarlo, 'Introduction', p.7.
[62] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2001), p.251.
[63] Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.145.
[64] Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, p.37.

relationship between geography, spatiality, literature, and the social world. He states:

> Geocriticism […] is broadly understood to include both aesthetics and politics, as elements in a constellation of interdisciplinary methods designed to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the ever-changing spatial relations that determine our current, postmodern, world.[65]

Tally's emphasis on interdisciplinary methods encourages an intertwining of place and environment, a mediating methodology which this thesis aims to continue.

Geocriticism directs a significant portion of its approach to the relationship between representation and materiality. Westphal, for example, states that 'the representation fictionalizes the source from which it emanates. Representation, which is re-presentation, amounts to a staggered updating of this source in a new context.'[66] Representation is understood as neither fully realistic nor fully imaginary. For geocritics, the relationship between space, place, and representation is deeply entwined, and Westphal adds how 'the description of the place does not *reproduce* a referent; it is discourse that *establishes* the space', suggesting that the text itself could be read as a space or place within its own right, recalling Wylie's 'landscape-text' metaphor.[67] It is this ongoing process and movement between materiality and metaphor, between the world and its representation, which likewise forms a hallmark of this thesis. Geocriticism's post-structural attention to physical geography, abstract space, and the processes of representation encourages a consideration of the paradoxes inherent in environmental writing. Indeed the key word in

[65] Tally, *Spatiality*, p.113.
[66] Westphal, *Geocriticism*, p.76.
[67] Westphal, *Geocriticism*, p.80.

Heaney's essay 'The Sense of Place' could be argued to be 'sense' rather than 'place', as 'sense' evokes the affectivity and phenomenology, the 'feeling' for geography and place, as well as meaning an elusive gesture towards the knowable.[68] Therefore, a geocritical attention to geographical and environmental representations in contemporary poetry accepts and engages with the 'sense' of both the represented and the literal world.

Attending to the relations between representation and the world precipitates a necessary engagement with other traditions and modes of representation. Indeed, Heaney's essay traces 'touchstones' through literary history as a way of considering his own formulation of simultaneous literary and place-identity. He responds to Matthew Arnold's notion of literary touchstones, transforming Arnold's emphasis on 'excellence' by using touchstones as a way of linking together landscape and literature.[69] For instance, when discussing W. B. Yeats, Heaney notes how:

> Arnold's touchstones were literary, drawn from the whole field of European poetry, but it is typical and significant, I think, that first in the hierarchy of Yeats's recollections is an experience that was obviously local and deeply involved with his apprehension of the spirit of a place.[70]

These touchstones, then, are both literary and 'deeply involved with […] apprehension of the spirit of a place'. The 'touchstones' of this thesis therefore form a simultaneously cohesive and fragmented poetic dialogue between the past and the present, both in terms of place-identity and literary legacies..

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[68] The *OED* states 'a more or less vague perception or impression *of* (an outward object, as present or imagined)'. *Oxford English Dictionary*, *'Sense, n'*, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 19 May 2014].

[69] Matthew Arnold, *English Literature and Irish Politics*, ed. by R.H. Super (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1973), p.168, p.187.

[70] Heaney, 'The Sense of Place', p.136.

In fact, there has recently been a specific rise in geographical analyses of poetry. Alice Entwistle's study *Poetry, Geography, Gender: Women Rewriting Contemporary Wales* (2013), for example, explores the intersection between Welsh identity and place. She describes how:

> The term [interstitial] can be applied as readily to textual as to territorial space(s), to material as to metaphoric forms of expression, as writers track the dynamic processes of cultural individuation through the complex contact zones of Wales's ethnographic and sometimes psycho-social terrain.[71]

Like Cresswell, Entwistle aligns her approach with the idea of 'processes'. For Entwistle, the interstitial 'contact zone' between 'geological, socio-historical and textual/linguistic markers' can be undone, allowing for a re-conception of Wales and 'its altering sense of geopolitical selfhood'.[72] A contact zone elicits the potential interplay between types of landscape as well as modes of representation, bringing cultural and material implications together. This idea of 'process' serves to re-inscribe the Cartesian binary between representation and materiality, offering up a paradoxical tension between both linguistic 'markers' and geological reality. The notion of place in process in relation to poetry is also considered in Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding's edited collection *Placing Poetry* (2013).[73] In the introduction, Davidson states that:

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[71] Alice Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender: Women Rewriting Contemporary Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p.18.

[72] Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender,* p.46. Entwistle's use of 'contact zone' recalls James Clifford's notion of museums as 'contact zones', as areas in which cultural objects come into play with the performative aspect of museum space. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1997), pp. 188– 219. As a term 'contact zone' can also be traced back to Mary Louise Pratt's use of the term to 'refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict'. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.6.

[73] *Placing Poetry*, ed. by Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013).

> [p]lacing comes to take on a number of possible meanings, present coincidentally. The poem is actively placed in its context while it also produces the place it is in. Poetry is both kept in its place, as well as always challenging its inclusion and exclusion. It moves between different places through the process of translation, and shifts between contexts. The sedentary implications of place are replaced by the active intentions of "placing", an action that, while it suggests a "place" of rest, is always in movement.[74]

Davidson shifts the emphasis on place in process to the process of poetry itself, suggesting that poetry and place both evoke this productive movement. Entwistle's monograph and Davidson and Skoulding's collection, then, reveal a growing interest in the relationship between place, landscape and contemporary poetry.

Alexander and Cooper's edited collection *Poetry and Geography* similarly offers a decisive insight into recent poetry's depictions and representations of space and place. They recognise that 'places do not simply exist but are made or remade by forces and processes that are at once historical, social and cultural'.[75] They consider how contemporary poetics reveal place as, contrastingly, either stable and fixed or as unstable and in process, pointing out that 'the tension between these representational poles remains imaginatively productive for contemporary poetry, though the general tendency is to emphasise process and flux'.[76] Despite the variety of poetic responses to place, and despite these recent scholarly attentions to geography and poetry, Alexander and Cooper note that 'one conspicuous feature of the spatial turn in literary studies is a tendency to privilege prose fiction and non-fiction over other kinds of writing, particularly in work on the modern and

[74] Ian Davidson, 'Introduction', *Placing Poetry*, p.1.
[75] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction: Poetry and Geography', p.5.
[76] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction', pp.5-6.

contemporary periods', adding that their own volume hopes to 'act as a catalyst for a much more wide-ranging critical endeavour'.[77] The emerging work of Entwistle, Cooper and Alexander, and Skoulding and Davidson reveals a growing sphere of literary geography which attends specifically to contemporary poetics.[78] This thesis similarly aims to push at generic frontiers, working against distinctions between specific types of poetry and larger questions about convention, and taking the potential for interstitial connections and intersections between geography and literature further. These interactions between place and poetry create a base from which this thesis grows, developing on current emerging cultural and economic trends yet still remaining focused on the potential intersection between literary geographical and ecocritical approaches. Deploying a geographical method, then, begins to push at the generic boundaries of what 'nature poetry' means for contemporary poetics.

1.3 Ecocriticism

Vital developments in political and social theory and environmental consciousness have contributed to the development of the literary critical arm of environmentalism: ecocriticism. Since the rise of environmentalism during the 1960s, the concurrence of both political progress and stagnation in environmental policy has continued to contribute to social and cultural

[77] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction', p.2.
[78] Terry Gifford's *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* takes a more conventional ecocritical approach to contemporary nature poetry, asking 'does the urgency [of the environmental crisis] override the aesthetics [of poetry]'? Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry*, 2nd edition (Nottingham: CCCP, 2011 [1995]), p. 10.

awareness. Incidents and events ranging from 'Brent Spar' in 1995 to the United Kingdom adopting the first Climate Change Act in 2008 provide contextual evidence for the link between the growth of literary ecocriticism and such socio-political realities.[79] These social-political developments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries highlight ecocriticism's integral bond to the material and social reality of environmental degradation, elucidating readings of literary texts which are frequently tied to environmental politics.[80] Strikingly, this means that ecocriticism fundamentally has to negotiate the relationship between physical environment and cultural representation: as a form of cultural criticism, it is usefully placed to work with both the literal and the metaphorical. In contradistinction to Redmond's assessment of contemporary poetry as in a state 'of recanting and retrenchment', it is therefore important for this thesis to maintain a critical focus on the social and political resonances of poetry of environment as well as its metaphorical transformations.[81]

Jarvis discerns between literary geography and ecocriticism decisively, describing how:

> My agenda here is far more to do with Welsh cultural identity than it is to do with "green" politics: the ultimate concern of this book is the rhetorical construction of Welsh environments – not literature and environmental crisis, not literary manifestations of "green" politics, nor again literature analysed in the light of ecological science.[82]

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[80] Kerridge asks: 'how good is this novel, poem, play or work of non-fiction from the viewpoint of environmental priorities?', adding that 'the basic hope is that environmental criteria will become an expected part of debate about all kinds of new artistic work, and that this will be a sign of a general shift in cultural values and – most importantly – in everyday behavior [sic]'. Kerridge, 'Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre', p.361. Kerridge's emphasis on 'environmental priorities' demonstrates the tension between literary analysis and the pressure of environmental politics, espousing a necessary social urgency.

[81] Redmond, *Poetry and Privacy*, p.7.

[82] Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*, pp.6-7.

In contrast, this study negotiates the correlations and collisions between geographical and ecocritical viewpoints rather than drawing a divisive line between the two. It therefore utilises the fact that ecocriticism as a field is notoriously fluid. Recent thought, for instance, has debunked any straightforward notion of a first and second wave of ecocriticism (the first encapsulated by anti-Enlightenment thinking and the second by forays into environmental science and ecology).[83] Greg Garrard states that:

> [e]ven the metaphor of first and second wave [ecocriticism] is considered problematic […]. The emphasis on nature writing and Romantic poetry, which was never total even in first-wave criticism, has been supplemented in more recent years by extremely wide-ranging cultural analysis.[84]

Garrard's point about the 'extremely wide-ranging' potential of ecocritical analysis leaves a productive space for accepting and moving beyond the influence of Romantic writing on first and second wave ecocriticism, a space which this study aims to increase. The potential richness of ecocriticism therefore presents an ideal point from which to reframe readings of contemporary poetry of environment, particularly given the social and political changes and developments since 1990.

Interestingly, it is geocriticism which appears to go some way to interlinking the differing focal points of 'ecocriticism' and 'literary geography', by attending to material, political and cultural concerns. For

[83] Clark summarises how 'environmentalist thinkers […] must divorce the project of human liberation from that of the exploitative conquest of nature that mars mainstream conceptions of "progress" and "modernisation", and which is generally attributed to the Enlightenment'. He notes that ecocriticism is 'engaged provocatively both with literary analysis and with issues that are simultaneously but obscurely matters of science, morality, politics and aesthetics'. Clark, *Literature and the Environment,* p.102, p.8.

[84] Greg Garrard, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism,* ed. by Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.1-24, p.2, p.3.

instance, Westphal traces the development of geocriticism from principles of ecocriticism, pointing out that 'ecocriticism has reintroduced the question of the referent, a reflection upon the eventual links between *realia* and representation', although he notes that geocriticism is more attuned to issues of space and place.[85] Westphal defines the three tenets of geocriticism as '*spatiotemporality* (no spatial analysis may avoid temporal concerns); *transgressivity* (no representation is stable […]), and *referentiality* (any representation is linked with the referential world).'[86] This triad is useful for an approach which ties a geographical slant with ecocriticism, encouraging an awareness of the potential interaction between representation and instability.

Ecocriticism has therefore paved the way for the consideration of the relationship between representation and physical reality, a tenet which is also so vital for geocritical approaches. Yet ecocritical analysis, particularly historically, has remained wedded to a focus on materiality rather than on the potential of metaphor. Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) uses the concept of inscription to consider the balance between text, inscription, and environmental materiality, arguing that 'self-consciousness is the key to the inscription [poem]: it is always a kind of self-performing text', although Bate has still been held up as a key proponent for an understanding of poetry as mimicking environmental processes.[87] For instance, in *The Song of the Earth* (2001) Bate considers Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the relationship between presence and representation, noting that for Ricoeur, 'the act of inscription […] severs the link with the immediate life-world of the speaker. The written text

[85] Bertrand Westphal, 'Foreword', in *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies,* ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.ix-xvi, p.xi.
[86] Westphal, 'Foreword', p.xv.
[87] Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p.90.

thus takes on a semantic autonomy'.[88] Rather than traverse the fraught negotiation between text and world, in contradistinction Bate posits that:

> Most writing tells us about "world": travellers' reports, geographical textbooks, historical monographs and other "descriptive accounts of reality" serve to "restructure for their readers the conditions of ostensive reference". […] Literary and especially "poetic" writings, however, seek to do something different. […] This idea may then be given an ecological inflection: works of art can themselves be imaginary states of nature, imaginary ideal ecosystems, and by reading them, by inhabiting them, we can start to imagine what it might be like to live differently upon the earth.[89]

Bate's point is that literature, particularly poetry, does not merely create 'descriptive accounts of reality' but instead is an 'imaginary ideal ecosystem'. The notion that poetry is the 'song of the earth' attempts to suggest that nature poetry is not descriptive or representative of the environment, but that it is the environment itself. This elides the productive intersections and clashes between poetic processes and the physical world, and is, ironically, what Jarvis calls 'being reduced to a process of mimicry'.[90] Because of Bate's influence on ecocritical thought, the link between the physical environment and literature has remained, driving ecocriticism towards materiality. This is increasingly evident in the recent emergence of 'new materialist' ecocriticism, which, as Pippa Marland points out, works on 'the premise that there is a shared materiality between the human and the non-human world that renders obsolete the distinctions between human and environment, moving beyond the construct of "nature" altogether'.[91] Rather than suggest that human and non-human relations can be brought neatly together through their shared materiality, this

[88] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.249.
[89] Bate, *The Song of Earth*, p.250, p.251.
[90] Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*, p.8.
[91] Pippa Marland, 'Ecocriticism', *Literature Compass* 10:11 (2013) 846-868, p.865.

thesis corresponds with Westphal's geocritical emphasis on the idea that no representation is stable and yet is still linked to the referent world, bringing a post-structural awareness of textual instability and contingency to bear on ecocriticism's attention to physical and political realities.

At the same time, and in spite of ecocriticism's relative youth as a theoretical field, its application has tended to be heterogeneous and fluid.[92] This heterogeneity can, in part, be attributed to the complexity inherent in nature itself, in both physical and cultural terms.[93] Like the notion that place itself is a process, Williams's definition of 'nature' in *Keywords* notes that:

> Any full history of the uses of nature would be a history of a large part of human thought […] Nature is a word which carries, over a very long period, many of the major variations of human thought, often, in any particular use, only implicitly yet with powerful effect on the character of the argument.[94]

Nature is therefore historically and continually bound up with cultural and human interpretation. It is the potential limit between physical nature and the representation of 'nature' which, as seen in *The Song of the Earth*, forms both a cornerstone and a point of contention in ecocritical analysis. Richard Kerridge, for example, argues that the environmental crisis 'reveals the world, after all, despite the claims of postmodernists, to be a coherent totality', adding that 'the real, material ecological crisis […] is also a cultural crisis, a crisis of

[92] Buell points out that 'the environmental turn in literary studies is best understood […] less as a monolith than as a concourse of discrepant practices', meaning that the multiple discursive strands of ecocriticism have the potential to provide varying modes through which to reassess nature writing. Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.11.
[93] Williams, in fact, points out that 'nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language'. Williams, *Keywords*, p.219. See also Clark, *Literature and the Environment* p.6, Jarvis, p.8. Kate Soper takes Williams's statement as the opening gambit for her discussion of nature and 'nature' in *What is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p.1.
[94] Williams, *Keywords*, p.186, p.189.

representation.'[95] Kerridge's form of ecocriticism draws a deliberate connection between materiality and representation, a link which is simultaneously part of and yet troubled by this thesis. Head, like Buell, notes how 'different kinds of ecocriticism are necessary and desirable'.[96] This multiplicity directs the thesis, which is particularly receptive to the notion that a postmodern or formalist analysis can conjoin with attentiveness to environmental materiality and pressing socio-political concerns, avoiding a straightforward descriptive response between text and environment. Rather than a prism-like refraction of the world, representation, as Head argues, should be addressed through 'a reappraisal of textuality and its perception.'[97] It is in this line of thought that Jarvis argues that 'the nature that is on view through the operation of human discourse is never natural – by which I mean that it is always cultural.'[98] My study, then, still remains dedicated to this sense that poetic representation of environment and place is natural in content yet cultural in form.

1.4 Mediation and Form

Jarvis's point that 'rather than being reduced to a process of mimicry – which will always, of necessity, be entirely partial – each act of writing the environment is, at its core, an argument about how the world should be seen' suggests that contemporary poetry proposes one individual representation or

[95] Richard Kerridge, 'Introduction', in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (London: Zed Books, 1998), pp.1-9, p.3, p.4.
[96] Head, 'The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism', p.38.
[97] Head, 'The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism', p.30.
[98] Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*, p.9.

perspective on environment.[99] Yet this still emphasises both the distinctiveness of each representation, which provides 'an argument about how the world should be seen', as well as the partiality of that representation. 'Writing the environment', then, negotiates between physical reality, environmental politics and the fact that each representation also marks a cultural intervention. This concept of representation which simultaneously forms its own 'core' as well as a partial mediation between environment and text reflects the non-dualist argument of the thesis itself. It is because of this emphasis on poetic form that Bunting's *Briggflatts* is an ideal epigraph for the study. In fact, Tarlo associates the 'radical' approach to form and landscape found in her chosen poets in *The Ground Aslant* with Bunting, citing him as a particularly Modernist precursor to the types of poetry included in her anthology.[100] In this way *Briggflatts* acts as a poetic signpost for the types of Modernist and neo-Modernist poetries Tarlo presents, providing an intricate entanglement of landscape, history and personal memory whilst continually eliding any straightforward sense of these. Yet *Briggflatts* can still be appropriated into a longer tradition of nature writing. Ian Gregson describes how '*Briggflatts* is at times much more purely a nature poem than anything Wordsworth wrote because it evokes natural things for their own alien sake,' arguing that *Briggflatts* ultimately creates a 'unique hybrid of the modernist (or retro-modernist) and the Wordsworthian'.[101] Both Tarlo's and Gregson's understandings of *Briggflatts* reveal a provocative tension between Gregson's suggestion that the work is 'more purely a nature poem' than Romantic

[99] Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*, p.8-9.
[100] Tarlo, 'Introduction', pp.7-18.
[101] Ian Gregson, 'Bunting's Rueful Masculinity', in *The Star You Steer By: Basil Bunting and British Modernism*, ed. by James McGonigal and Richard Price (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp.109-122, p.115, p.111.

conventions allow, and the sense that at its heart *Briggflatts* is a Modernist poem, responding to conventions of sound, impersonality, and unstable histories.[102] *Briggflatts* therefore presents an appropriate starting point and literary precursor for poetry which appears to destabilise any cohesive sense of 'nature poetry'.

Briggflatts again recalls Romantic inscription, the development of which Geoffrey Hartman attributes to Wordsworth's early poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, arguing that Wordsworth 'made the nature-inscription into a free-standing poem, able to commemorate any feeling for nature or the spot that had aroused this feeling'.[103] Wordsworth's inscription poems, although not literally inscribed on the landscape, were deliberately rooted in a specific location. Bunting's use of inscription, on the other hand, is decidedly ambiguous, and his 'inscriptions' are not necessarily loco-specific.[104] Instead, *Briggflatts*'s recurring imagery of the mason's trade both affirms and undermines the act of writing on and about the landscape:

> Silver blades of surf
> fall crisp on rustling grit,
> shaping the shore as a mason
> fondles and shapes his stone.[105]

Bunting's simile of the sea shaping the coastline like the mason's carving on stone links environmental forms of inscription with linguistic representation.

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[102] Michael H. Whitworth emphasises the Modernist tendency to 'enjoy sound for its own sake', Michael H. Whitworth, *Reading Modernist Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), p.82. See also Bunting's own essays on sound in *Briggflatts:* 'A Note on *Briggflatts*' and 'The Poet's Point of View', both in *Briggflatts*.

[103] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.32. See *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), 'Poems on the Naming of Places' in particular: William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads,* ed. by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2005), pp.261-270.

[104] Indeed, although *Briggflatts* is strongly associated with Northumberland, it is also decidedly international in its scope.

[105] Bunting, *Briggflatts,* p.31.

At the same time, 'fondles and shapes his stone' recalls the inherent sexuality of the poem, extending the image of inscription into a negotiation between bodily form and environmental materiality. The sibilance and soft assonance echo the transience of the imagery, confirming Bunting's assertion that 'the fundamental thing in poetry is the sound'.[106] Bunting's use of inscription therefore contests how far writing can mediate directly between landscape, the human figure and the poem.[107] *Briggflatts* moves from the assertion that 'pens are too light' to leave any lasting trace or weight of meaning, to conflicting and fleeting images of both landscape and writing.

The forming and reforming, 'shaping the shore', is reflective of the act of poetic production and Bunting's own repeated tropes. The 'slowworm', for instance, weaves its way through the narrative of the poem, recalling the woven strands of the art of the Lindisfarne manuscript.[108] *Briggflatts* uses the imagery of the Lindisfarne gospels to create an intricate weaving of ambiguous autobiography, environment and poetics:

> Tortoise deep in dust or
> muzzled bear capering
> punctuate a text whose initial,
> lost in Lindisfarne plaited lines,
> stands for discarded love.[109]

The 'discarded love', the speaker's adolescent romance, is represented in the 'plaited lines' and narrative strands of the poem. The memory is simultaneously 'lost' in the delicate patterning of the Lindisfarne manuscript letter, both inscribed within the text and frustratingly absent: 'love is a vapour,

[106] Bunting, *Briggflatts*, p.44.
[107] Mackay, *Inscription and Modernity*, p.5.
[108] Bunting, *Briggflatts*, p.13, p.15, p.16, p.25.
[109] Bunting, *Briggflatts*, p.20.

we're soon through it'.[110] Alexander points out that 'paradoxically, writing aspires to a permanent record of impermanence' in *Briggflatts,* as the poem explores the limits and connections between memory, writing, and place, as in section four: 'surf and the text carved by waves/ on the skerry.'[111] Bunting's appropriation of inscription, then, is not a straightforward act of permanent memorial, even though the text itself marks its ongoing presence as a physical object.

This friction between the written word and imaginative representation in *Briggflatts* links to Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the notion of inscription, through which he pulls apart the relationship between language and meaning. Unlike Bunting's tension between materiality, metaphor and poetic threads, Derrida's understanding of inscription is based largely in metaphor:

> Inscription, as I would define it […] is not a simple position: it is rather that by means of which every position is of itself confounded (différance): inscription, mark, text and not only thesis or theme – inscription of the thesis.[112]

Derrida's metaphor of inscription is not a fixed 'position', but instead is used to elucidate the simultaneous presence and absence that occurs in language, much like 'différance'.[113] This means that a word both stands for what it names and is also obfuscated by the continual displacements of meaning that occur in language. 'Inscription' becomes not just an act of inscribing on the landscape,

[110] Bunting, *Briggflatts,* p.18.
[111] Neal Alexander, 'The Idea of the North: Basil Bunting and Regional Modernism', in *Regional Modernisms,* ed. by Neal Alexander and James Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp.200-221, p.210. Bunting, *Briggflatts,* p.27.
[112] Jacques Derrida, *Positions,* trans. by Alan Bass (London: The Athlone Press, 1981 [1972]), p.96.
[113] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1967]), p.65.

but a metaphor: it does not simply mark a text or a location, but reveals the tensions between signifier and signified. Linguistic inscription thus has the potential to be an ongoing process of re-inscription, as text which is both produced and producing, text which 'inscribes and overflows the limits of […] discourse'.[114] Therefore, inscription can be shifted into metaphor, away from a conventional act of permanent recording or topographical description. Bunting's image of the first initial of a manuscript as punctuated by 'tortoise deep in dust or/ muzzled bear capering' transforms the initial letter from the first letter of a word to a drawn image on the page, but, more importantly, also into metaphor: the inscription on the page is simultaneously fixed and 'lost in Lindisfarne plaited lines'. Like Derrida's awareness of the slippage between representation and what is represented, inscription in *Briggflatts* forces an ambiguity between image, text and metaphorical meaning. The initial of the manuscript is both sign and signified: it 'stands' literally, on the page, as well as metaphorically, for 'discarded love'.

Paying attention to how contemporary poetry negotiates this tension and flux between representation and the non-representational environment creates a focus not necessarily on formal differences, but on how landscape poetry offers a nuanced, shifting, and complicated traversal of text and world, which is granted particular attenuation in light of the urgency of environmental change. The ending of *Briggflatts*, for example, appropriately refuses any clear closure of its narrative. It culminates in a coda:

> A strong song tows
> us, long earsick.
> Blind, we follow

[114] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.60.

rain slant, spray flick
to fields we do not know.

Night, float us.
Offshore wind, shout,
ask the sea
what's lost, what's left,
what horn sunk,
what crown adrift.

Where we are who knows
of kings who sup
while day fails? Who,
swinging his axe
to fell kings, guesses
where we go?[115]

By finishing with a question Bunting frays the edges of the narrative tapestry of the poem. Recalling his depiction of the transience of inscription, Bunting uses the 'autobiographical' poem to query the veracity and permanence of memory, ultimately concluding by avoiding resolution. The speakers in the coda are deliberately lost both in place and in time. This irresolution, of the contrary yet mediating forces and potential paradox in poetry of place and environment mirrors the argument of this thesis. As Tally notes, 'earth writing' evokes a conjunction of geography, environment, and writing: '*langscaping* […] discloses how places and landscapes are *presenced* in literature – that is, how they are brought before our senses', a bringing together of environmental and geographical concern with poetic processes.[116] This 'presencing' is unstable, avoiding description and instead refracting the mediation or re-mediation between poetry and world. It is, then, important for any interpretation of contemporary poetry to remain continually attentive to the

[115] Bunting, *Briggflatts*, p.33.
[116] Robert T. Tally Jr., 'On Geocriticism', in *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.1-9, p.4.

traces of representation, geography, and environment, granting each reading its own ‘sense of place’.[117]

[117] Heaney, ‘The Sense of Place’, pp.131-149.

2 The Natural and the Artificial

2.1 'Cities come and go like forests'

Contemporary poetry which is concerned with representations of place and environment is all too easily divided into either 'natural' or 'artificial' categories. Once such example of generic reduction can be found in the work of Fisher: the opening line of 'Talking to Cameras' in his *Birmingham River* (1994), 'Birmingham is what I think with', is perhaps the most frequently cited line of his poetry.[1] In spite of the complexities and nuances of Fisher's output, the line has been understood as neatly surmising Fisher's poetry of place. This is reflected in Barry's identification of Fisher as a significant, if not *the* city poet: 'Roy Fisher is a kind of laureate of the urban-prosaic, […] the quintessential city poet.'[2] Because Fisher was born in Birmingham and lived there for most of his life before moving to Derbyshire in 1982, his Birmingham heritage could be interpreted as a basis for his representations of the urban, particularly given the strong association between Birmingham and the industrial revolution.[3] Yet, as John Kerrigan suggests in 'Roy Fisher on

[1] Roy Fisher, *Birmingham River* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
[2] Peter Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) p.4. See also Clive Bush, 'In Sight and Time: Some Patterns of Appearance in Roy Fisher's Poetry', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13:1 (2000) pp.107-128, p.107, and Sean O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse: Essays on Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1998).
[3] Peter Robinson, 'Introduction', *The Thing about Roy Fisher*, ed. by John Kerrigan and Peter Robinson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp.1-15, p.7. Such an association, in fact, should be made only tentatively: Eric Hopkins argues that in the mid-eighteenth century 'industry in Birmingham was already firmly based on efficient productive methods, geared to expanding markets. It did not require a technological revolution for it to enjoy a prosperous future later in the century', also qualifying that 'Birmingham became the home of one of the greatest agents for change in the Industrial Revolution' following the development of steam

Location', there should be fresh urgency in reconsidering whether 'Birmingham is what I think with' necessarily evidences that Fisher's output is limited only to the artificial, the man-made and the urban.[4] This chapter, therefore, reconsiders the representation of the natural and the artificial in the work of Fisher alongside that of MacSweeney and Skoulding, asking how far they 'think with' and represent the natural and the artificial.

Recognising Williams's point that 'nature' is 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' is vital for a reframed approach to natural-artificial relations.[5] It is in this way that the complexity of 'natural' discourse and terminology encompasses, mirrors and refracts the physical reality of nature itself. Conversely, 'artificial' can be understood as that which is human-made and constructed: 'opposed to the natural'.[6] These two terms appear to pull in directions away from each other, yet representations of environments are not necessarily straightforwardly 'natural' or 'artificial', but rather a multi-faceted integration of both, echoing Williams's understanding of the complexity of nature both in language and in the world. Fisher himself puts the term 'nature' under pressure in 'Talking to Cameras' in *Birmingham River:*

> Spirit
> filtered through brickwork. Counter-Nature,
> caught into the sculpture and leased out
> like the Nature that drips all down
> the front of La Sagrada Familia.[7]

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power towards the end of the century. Eric Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998 [1989]), p.21.

[4] John Kerrigan, 'Roy Fisher on Location' in *The Thing about Roy Fisher*, ed. by John Kerrigan and Peter Robinson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp.16-46. Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.11.

[5] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1988), p.219.

[6] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Artificial, *adj.*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 11 May 2012].

[7] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p. 15.

'Spirit/ filtered through brickwork' mirrors the way in which natural-artificial representations themselves are mediated by the 'filter' of the poem. 'Counter-Nature', for instance, is 'leased out', the lexicon tying artificial imagery to economic terminology. The lengthy enjambment also reflects Fisher's fraying of natural-artificial distinctions, as it ties the artificial imagery of 'Counter-Nature' to the simile of 'Nature': the way in which the architectural form of Gaudi's church creates the appearance of rain dripping down architecture. This sense of architecture imitating nature reinforces the paradox of incompletion and spectacular art, of past and present, particularly given that La Sagrada Familia itself is both a World Heritage Site and yet still incomplete.[8] At the same time, the reference to the church in Barcelona shifts *Birmingham River* between the localised depiction of Birmingham and more international references. The sense of local and global and natural-artificial symmetry reflects how a neat line cannot be drawn between 'natural' and 'artificial' structures, as Ingold points out:

> There can be no absolute distinction between 'natural' and 'artificial' structures. Buildings, like other environmental structures, are never complete but continually under construction, and have life-histories of involvement with both their human and non-human inhabitants.[9]

Ingold's point that buildings are like 'other environmental structures' echoes the way in which Fisher blurs the intricate architecture of La Sagrada Familia with raindrops, refuting any severing of 'Nature' from 'Counter-Nature'.

Fisher's merging of the natural and the artificial, however, does not result in complete erasure, as any attempt to unsettle a conventional dichotomy

[8] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.12.
[9] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), p.154.

must operate within the very terms it disputes. For example, Judith Butler observes how 'the act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of […] [a] binary results in a consolidation of each term,' as a reappraisal of the relationship between the natural and the artificial remains mutually determined by both concepts.[10] This entanglement also potentially mirrors the complex realities of geography and environment, an approach that is particularly well evidenced in Whatmore's *Hybrid Geographies* (2002), as she works to debunk distinctions between the human and the non-human in physical terms.[11] Whatmore argues that the natural and the artificial, and by extension nature and society, form 'heterogeneous entanglements'.[12] It is this understanding of the entanglement of the natural and the artificial which creates a basis for a reconsideration of the 'city' poetry of MacSweeney, Skoulding and Fisher. In fact, the concept of a 'city' is similarly as fluctuating and nuanced as that of 'nature': Lewis Mumford's seminal *The City in History* (1961) begins by noting that 'no single definition will apply to all its manifestations and no single description will cover all its [the city's] transformations, from the embryonic social nucleus to the complex forms of its maturity and the corporeal disintegration of its old age.'[13] The 'complex forms' of the natural and the artificial are therefore embedded in historicity and multifarious senses of time, and the poets in this chapter use their own complex forms, utilising the apparent contemporaneity of the city to compare, contrast, or mingle with the nostalgia associated with rural environments. By paying attention to the

[10] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.31.
[11] Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies,* (London: Sage, 2002).
[12] Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies,* p.3.
[13] Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (London: Penguin Books, 1991 [1961]), p.11.

natural-artificial entanglements and uncertain depictions of time, this chapter will reframe the understanding of Fisher, MacSweeney and Skoulding as straightforward city poets.

2.2 Natural-artificial entanglements

Fisher's sequence *Handsworth Liberties* (1975-1978) represents an imaginary-real limitless city that is simultaneously bounded by the signification of the place name title. The first poem begins:

> Open –
> and away
>
> in all directions:
> room at last for the sky
> and a horizon;
>
> for pale new towers in the north
> right on the line.
> It all
> radiates outwards
> in a lightheaded air
> without image;
>
> there is a world.[14]

Fisher's early work was fixated by city spaces, particularly those located in and around Birmingham: Handsworth is his birth-place. Yet here is a depiction of not just a specific area of Birmingham but 'a world', one which pulls 'in all directions'. Although the 'new towers' could be identified as Edgbaston's Perrott's Folly and Waterworks, the poem is still ambiguously located, as 'without image' slips between the imagery within the poem and the city itself.

[14] Roy Fisher, 'Handsworth Liberties', *The Long and the Short of It: New Poems 1955-2010* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books 2013 [2012]), pp.270-277, p.270.

The city paradoxically is a 'room' for sky and horizon, refuting a depiction of confined city space, and ultimately fluctuating between environmental elements. Two decades after the publication of *Handsworth Liberties,* the short collection *Birmingham River,* as pointed out by Robinson, crystallised Fisher's growing preoccupation with the Birmingham cityscape: 'the slogan-idea that "Birmingham's what I think with" […] had by 1991 already become a metaphor and synecdoche for the poet's way of processing any landscape, point of view or representation'.[15] In Fisher's work, 'Birmingham' begins to shift between the literal physical city and its metaphorical interpretations, paradoxically 'without image'. Certainly, Matthew Sperling argues that 'Fisher should be not just included in […] discussions of ecological poetry, but central to them', challenging the association of Fisher's work with 'city' writing, suggesting that he 'puts the social and the economic back into "eco" in a genuinely cogent way', and opening up interpretations of Fisher's poetry to more nuanced considerations of the tensions between the city and nature.[16]

This potential nuance is particularly well demonstrated in the sequence 'Six Texts for a Film', which was originally written for a film about Fisher by Tom Pickard.[17] In the opening stanzas of 'Talking to Cameras', the first poem in the sequence, Fisher connects internal thought constructions with the construction trade in Birmingham, developing the room-city connection found in *Handsworth Liberties*:

[15] Peter Robinson, 'Roy Fisher's Spatial Prepositions and Other Little Words', in *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-War Poetry*, ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.204-216, p.214.
[16] Matthew Sperling, 'Water', in *An Unofficial Roy Fisher*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2010), pp.161-169, p.162.
[17] Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p.202.

> Birmingham's what I think with.
>
> It's not made for that sort of job,
> but it's what they gave me.
>
> As a means of thinking, it's a Brummagem
> screwdriver.
>
> […]
>
> It's instant, and it's obstinate,
> and it's nobody else's future.
> The screw dies in the attempt.
> But you can be sure, if it's Birmingham,
> that everything'll be altered
> by the time you'd have wanted it again.
> This isn't Yorkshire, or Paris.[18]

'Brummagem', local dialect for 'Birmingham' as well as meaning 'counterfeit', implicates the tools of industry with loco-specificity. The image of craft recalls the Greek etymology 'poiesis', meaning poetry as 'making'. Barry describes this section of the poem as 'remarkable', noting that 'one of the remarkable aspects of this remarkable announcement is the way it figures poetry-making as a craft, but conspicuously *not* an old rural craft. […] In fact, it might be more accurate to say that it sees poetry-making as *trade* rather than a craft'.[19] Barry draws out a distinction between rural craft and city trade, suggesting that Fisher's metaphor fits more appropriately with urban processes than allegedly natural ones.

If, as the metaphor suggests, thinking is a 'Brummagem/ screwdriver', then this additionally extends into a metaphor for poetic craft and composition, wherein 'Birmingham' offers the speaker a tool for poetic craft which ultimately falls flat: 'the screw dies in the attempt'. Fisher's reference to

[18] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.11.
[19] Peter Barry, '"Birmingham's what I think with": Roy Fisher's Composite-Epic', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13:1 (2002) 87-105, p.92.

construction, then, points historically and literally to the worked and working landscape of Birmingham, whilst still maintaining a metaphorical gesture towards the poem itself as crafted and worked. Furthermore, the representation of Birmingham is paradoxically uncertain, 'counterfeit': '[b]ut you can be sure, if it's Birmingham,/ that everything'll be altered/ by the time you'd have wanted it again'.[20] Barry notes that Fisher depicts the 'city as a place of peculiarly fraught interaction between the personal, the social and the political', and the shifting concept that 'everything'll be altered', as Barry further recognises, compounds Fisher's representation of Birmingham as a site of 'continual loss and change', of ongoing alteration and entanglement.[21] This element of continuing transformation ties to Birmingham itself: John Money's history of Birmingham in the late eighteenth century concludes that 'Birmingham and its surrounding area achieved the adaptation of traditional values to urban and industrial life, if not with theoretical perfection, then at least with appreciable practical success,' attributing Birmingham's identity to dialogic natural-artificial relations rather than to a singular, industrial influence.[22] Fisher similarly destabilises the conventional understanding of Birmingham as a solid industrial centre, as 'Birmingham' evokes not a straightforward representation of a fixed city space but forms a metaphor for ongoing, transformative and potentially destructive processes of craft,

[20] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.11.
[21] Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p. 8, p.9.
[22] Money's study looks to resituate Birmingham's history in the wider geographical and historical context of the West Midlands: 'Birmingham's situation, not at the hub of any previously recognisable area of its own but at the meeting point of the three counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire, meant that, even as it grew, so there developed a balancing tension between the new centre and the older influence and example of the country capitals, the cathedral cities of Lichfield and Worcester and the city of Coventry. The results of this were as conspicuous a feature of regional consciousness as was the simple growth of Birmingham, and an even more characteristic one'. John Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760-1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p.282, pp.1-2.

composition and change, developing the concept of the artificial into a sense of artifice.

Dating from the publication of *City* in 1961, Fisher's work has itself been under a continual process of evolution and transformation, as Barry recognises:

> His method […] is in the main to produce a palimpsest in which the same poetic ground is worked and then re-worked, with older bits recycled, and newer ones added cumulatively, a process of cultural accretion which mimics the way cities themselves grow and change.[23]

Barry interlinks contemporary recycling processes with 'growth': the textual palimpsest is an organic metaphor for growth and cultural change. As demonstrated by Fisher's consistent revisions to his (mostly) collected poems, *The Long and the Short of It: Poems 1955-2010* (2012), the palimpsest metaphor emphasises the way in which a manuscript can be erased and written over.[24] This creates metaphorical layers of text, an appropriate image for Fisher's compositional technique as well as his representations of landscape. *Birmingham River* similarly presents a negotiation between landscape and cultural representation. In 'Six Texts for a Film', 'First Terms' initially appears to represent a stable artificial cityscape: '[l]ow/ over infinite city/ one urban sky that all its horizons share', recalling the expansive space depicted in the

[23] Roy Fisher, 'City', in *The Long and the Short of It: New Poems 1955-2010* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books 2013 [2012]), pp.27-46. Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p.196.

[24] Fisher dates *City* as '0000' in *The Long and the Short of It* in order to paradoxically represent its simultaneously unfinished, timeless and fixed state within the text. Fisher states in the acknowledgements to the collection that 'these poems no more amount to a biography than I do; and my habits of working on projects from time to time over long periods and my heterodox approach to the methods I use would make an arrangement that seemed chronological [sic] false: so nothing of the kind is here attempted,' *The Long and the Short of It*, p.421.

opening of *Handsworth Liberties*.[25] Over the city, the sky is transformed into an urban, artificial entity rather than a natural one, and in a parallel shift the 'horizons' of the city are all-pervasive and never-ending. In 'First Terms', Fisher's coral-city simile, '[t]hey'll tell you the place developed/ like a coral reef', affirms his exploration of the friction between natural and city space:

> Earth plots variously cut
> in the floor: pitches, dog-walks machined
> in tough grass: social soil.
>
> Country's nothing but a single island
> lapped in City, a benign
> fistula where it all pulls open
> by a few miles in every direction.[26]

Again, Fisher intertwines his depictions of landscape with writing metaphor, as 'plot' suggests narrative trajectory. 'Plot' also evokes the restrictive connotations of civil planning, responding to the ambiguities between 'plotted' architecture and plots of land.

'Pitches' additionally suggests business discourse as well as the artificiality of man-made football pitches, and 'pitch' as tree resin or tarry substance. Rather than the city being created from the earth or on the earth, here the image of the natural plots being cut into the 'floor' of the city suggests an infinite and uncertainly 'plotted' city, merging and mixing the natural and the artificial. Recalling Fisher's palimpsest-like revisions, the city is infinite not only in space, with its horizons, but also in time, as the city is seen as the original earth or 'floor': 'island' and 'lapped' suggest that 'City' is in fact water or sea. The tension between 'country' and 'city' is further destabilised by

[25] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.21.
[26] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.21.

the image of a 'benign/ fistula', a bodily metaphor meaning pipe-like ulcer, a specific image that contrasts with the larger lapping sea of 'city'. This phenomenological ambiguity refutes any clear distinction between the human and the non-human as well as country and city. The relationship between the country and city in Birmingham has historically been fraught: Eric Hopkins suggests that Birmingham's growth can be attributed as much to rural developments as well as industrial ones, arguing that the region was expanding well before the industrial revolution: 'Birmingham's industry not only stood poised for expansion in the 1750s but was developing fast in the following decade even before the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in the Lancashire textile industry in the 1770s'.[27] Fisher points out in his prose writing that the Birmingham he has known personally has also been one of ongoing change, discussing his return to Birmingham in the 1950s as follows:

> The reconstructions were then just starting, late and slow. Demolitions and excavations looked casual and piecemeal though on an epic scale. For a while they seemed to express and add to the older city, while in reality they were signalling its end. All the options still seemed open. […] By the mid 1960s, when my work involved my travelling all over the city by car briskly, day after day, it was clear that the entire place was on the move along with me.[28]

'First Terms', then, picks apart the binary of the rural and the urban, as Fisher's ambiguous lexicon presents Birmingham as a simultaneously natural and artificial space, one which is rooted within the history of the city itself and yet still constantly evolving. Furthermore, capitalising 'Country' and 'City' ironically highlights the distinction between the natural and the artificial, as well as intertextually connecting with Williams's *The Country and the City*

[27] Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, pp.21-22.
[28] Roy Fisher, 'Brum Born', in *An Easily Bewildered Child: Occasional Prose 1963-2013* (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2014), pp. 48-50, pp.49-50.

(1973).[29] Williams's work signals an earlier form of thinking about the relations between the country and the city, as Fisher integrates his own natural-artificial entanglements with textual as well as historical legacies and realities.

Fisher therefore transforms the natural and the artificial by interweaving literal and metaphorical boundaries in 'First Terms', and in 'Talking to Cameras' he takes this further by connecting the history of Birmingham city to its geology:

> you evolve Book City, just
> as it evolved itself: rock, water,
> forest, settlers, trade. Then
> property, sewage, architects, poets.[30]

The repetition of 'evolve' emphasises the potential tie between the natural history of Birmingham and its urban development. Barry notes how in this poem:

> [the] "cultural" reading of the progress of civic development modestly elevates the poet's own production of "Birmingham" to primary status, so that the generative, metal-bashing impulse which had "congealed" […] is now made to flow again, in the form of poetic "word-bashing", a penetrative and revitalizing force which can be like a new nature.[31]

Linking back to the civic metaphors of 'pitches' and 'plots', Barry suggests that Fisher's poetry is almost directly implicated in the metaphorical construction of a city. Yet at the same time the image of 'Book City' forms a material link between the city and nature. Fisher thus mediates between environment and poetry, emphasised by the word 'poets' in the list of city-

[29] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973).
[30] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.13.
[31] Barry, '"Birmingham's what I think with": Roy Fisher's Composite-Epic', p.96.

related ‘evolution’, with the deeper implication of challenging the standard association of Birmingham with the industrial revolution.[32]

Playing off Plato’s expulsion of poets from his ideal city in *Republic* (c.350 BC), Fisher attributes the art of poetry to the growth of societal processes whilst paradoxically signalling an intertextual critique of utopian notions of city-states. A city’s intertwined cultural, natural and artificial processes defines how that city is constructed and understood, and it is in this way that Fisher reveals the implication of nature, industry, culture and literary heritage in the metaphorical and material construction of ‘Birmingham’. Fisher’s palimpsest-like ‘Book City’ thus creates layers of meaning which extends to artistic processes more generally, as ‘Talking to Cameras’ continues:

> What hand, what eye. Indeed. To have made
> a work of art that’s at the same time
> the by-product of a spastic purpose,
> oozing as miraculous drops
> from a sort of spirit into a sort of matter,
> gathering in pools, trickling to fill
> wrinkles, indentations, then congealing as
> masonry: factories, floods of houses,
> shallowing as they spread, converted
> again to spirit in the understanding.[33]

The ‘spirit/ filtered through brickwork’ of La Sagrada Familia earlier in the poem is also a ‘by-product’ of artistic creation, changing from the figurative to the more literal: ‘from a sort of spirit into a sort of matter’. Shifting from

[32] Hopkins describes how Birmingham thrived economically before the advent of the industrial revolution: ‘by the mid-eighteenth century Birmingham had long been an industrial centre specializing in metal work. […] The original reason for this concentration on the metal industries is clear enough […] it was the availability of iron ore and coal close at hand on the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire coalfield’. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town,* p.4.
[33] Fisher, *Birmingham River,* p.15.

present participle verbs ‘oozing’ and ‘gathering’, the metaphor implies movement between construction and completion, the ambiguity reflecting Fisher’s own tendency towards revisionist poetic composition. ‘What hand, what eye’, and the knowing ‘indeed’, recalls William Blake’s ‘The Tyger’ in *Songs of Experience* (1794).[34] It is through Blake that Fisher’s ‘filtered’ mediation extends to intertextual awareness, with ‘London’ acting as a particularly useful point of comparison:

> How the Chimney-sweeper’s cry
> Every blackning Church appals,
> And the hapless Soldier’s sigh
> Runs in blood down Palace walls[35]

Like the ‘spirit’ and ‘the Nature that drips all down/ the front of La Sagrada Familia’ in ‘First Terms’, Blake’s metaphor moves between the built environment of the city, bodily phenomenology and affectivity. Fisher’s ironic concession to Blake underscores the close link between art and writing as well as pointing to Blake’s ambiguous depictions of the relations between creator and creation. Responding to Blake’s intertwining of art and poetry in his illuminated manuscripts, ‘Book City’ and the tie between art and artifice allows Fisher to link his representations of Birmingham to a literary as well as contextual history. Fisher’s Birmingham, ‘Book City’, is ‘a work of art’ yet at the same time a ‘by-product’, moving between spiritual and physical matter and between ‘factories’ and ‘floods of houses’.

‘Talking to Cameras’ traces the natural history of Birmingham, contrasting it with its contemporaneity:

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[34] William Blake, ‘The Tyger’, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2005), p.121.
[35] Blake, ‘London’, *Selected Poems*, p.124.

> If you get systematic,
> and follow power around, you arrive
> at bedrock out of a book. Sandstone
> by Keuper, soft, so friable
> it rubs back into sand under your thumb.[36]

Fisher's metaphor of getting to 'bedrock out of a book' stems from Birmingham's geological history. Barry points out that in Birmingham 'the local sandstone bedrock is "out of a book" because it is named "Keuper Marl" (it is also known as Mercia Mudstone), and it has the qualities of porousness and friability mentioned, which cause notorious engineering problems'.[37] Although the Keuper Sandstone is the geological basis for the city centre, Fisher's recognition of its 'friable' instability is extended into dialogue between art and nature: 'Sandstone by Keuper' suggests a work of art as well as a type of sandstone, a tension between nature and culture.[38] The basis of Birmingham is, then, rendered materially unstable. Yet this instability reaches into meaning and signification: Michael Hodder points out that this type of sandstone is also known as 'Bromsgrove Sandstone', a provocative shift between the artistic imagery evoked by 'Keuper Marl' and the locational nomenclature signalled by 'Bromsgrove'. The sandstone itself also undergoes a reversion of history, as it 'rubs back into sand' instead of being compacted into stone over time. The sibilant 'sandstone', 'soft', 'so', 'rubs' and 'sand' creates a soft alliteration which reflects the rubbing of sand, and the stuttering phonemes in the adjective 'friable' echoes the process of crumbling, of breaking apart. In this way the materiality of the stone reverberates into the

[36] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.12.
[37] Barry, '"Birmingham's what I think with": Roy Fisher's Composite-Epic', p.93.
[38] Michael Hodder, *Birmingham: The Hidden History* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2004), p.11.

poem, creating a tension between form and environment, as Fisher's deliberate sibilance calls attention to the artifice of the poem. At the same time, Fisher revises the more conventional understanding of Birmingham as a decidedly industrial and modern city, as Hodder alludes: 'sometimes the city is regarded as having no past before the eighteenth century, almost as if it had suddenly fallen out of the sky sometime during the industrial revolution'.[39] *Birmingham River*'s geological imagery both points to and undermines traditional understandings of the city, attending to longer historical shifts and developments.

'Talking to Cameras' therefore reveals how the intertwined relationship between the natural and artificial reframes the dichotomy of the country and city. Indeed, Fisher's use of natural history and comparisons between classical imagery, art and contemporary presencing demonstrate that city poetry and nature poetry do not exist in an either/or relationship:

> The artwork's the figure of authority. Swung
> on a green rail somewhere, with a low brick wall
> under your feet, you hear
> a moment in your life tell you that.
>
> Ignore it; or go looking for it
> behind all its names. Never
> in the centre. Not the old centre,
> nor any of the new ones. Suspect
> repeated shifts of centre.[40]

Birmingham River unpicks the relationship between the 'old centre' of the medieval bull ring and the new 'ones', both a destabilising of any centre-periphery relationship as well as creating a multiplication: there are 'repeated shifts of centre', challenging city boundaries. Mumford points out that Plato's

[39] Hodder, *Birmingham: The Hidden History,* p.9.
[40] Fisher, *Birmingham River,* p.16.

city-state was not clearly bounded: 'while Plato set a strict limit to the size of his city, he did not show how it was to be kept within bounds', both literally and metaphorically.[41] Similarly, Fisher challenges the notion that Birmingham has any delimited edges or boundaries. He calls this a 'paradox' of nature and the city rather than unification:

> There are people who know me for my writings about urban landscapes and city life and who find it impossible to square that knowledge with the fact that I now live, not as a lifelong denizen of those streets, but in a quite remote and wild place in the Derbyshire hills. But it's the paradox I was given as a child – the sensation of having been born in a state of exile from some unknown countryside – which forced me to stare so hard at all the particulars of my city surroundings.[42]

Transforming and undermining the apparently straightforward statement that 'Birmingham is what I think with' in the opening line of 'Talking to Cameras', here Fisher recognises how the influence of a family veneration of nature in an urban space results in a way of thinking about the natural world whilst staring 'so hard' at the urban world. His poetry therefore oscillates between distinct and yet interlinked representations, as the depictions of the natural and the artificial are constructed and reimagined poetically through slippages, merges and blurrings: as in 'First Terms', a 'slaggy lacework' of the city over-lays its natural 'bedrock'.[43]

It is in a similar vein that MacSweeney's alleged 'city' poetry attends to the relationship between city boundaries and nature, but he roots this in a consideration of personal boundaries. In the first poem in *Hellhound Memos* (1993), for instance, a speaker cries 'all aboard and welcome', inviting us along for a journey of madness and despair, with an undercurrent of

[41] Mumford, *The City in History*, p.211.
[42] Roy Fisher, *Interviews Through Time* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2000), p.16.
[43] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.21, p.12.

alcoholism.[44] MacSweeney first made his appearance in the poetry scene in the 1960s, although the significant texts *Hellhound Memos* and *Pearl* (1995) were published over thirty years later.[45] Conventional readings of MacSweeney's late work tend to focus on what Barry calls MacSweeney's 'personal hell of alcoholism', despite the fact that the poet can also be understood as a writer intensely concerned with environmental instability.[46] MacSweeney has typically been seen to partition his representations of landscape into separate categories, as Barry describes, noting how he 'constantly juxtaposes images of run-away urban materialism with […] rural escape'.[47] MacSweeney's environments in the two texts do appear to be tied to specific landscapes: Newcastle in *Hellhound Memos* and the Allen Valley in Northumberland for *Pearl*, and Andrew Crozier's obituary for MacSweeney notes the importance of fixed, located place in MacSweeney's work, describing his landscape representation as 'self-consciously local, either to the city or the region'.[48] Yet MacSweeney's depictions of landscape do not fall neatly into two opposed concepts, either in terms of form or of content. *Pearl* appears to present a rural idyll in which, as Jarvis describes, 'the memory of young love is […] inextricable from notions of taking pleasure in the organic world of lake, wind and clouds'.[49] Despite the apparent juxtapositions both within the texts and in

[44] Barry MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', *Conductors of Chaos: A Poetry Anthology*, ed. by Iain Sinclair (London: Picador, 1996 [1993]), pp.223-242, p.225. As Barry points out in *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, this edition of *Hellhound Memos* is the most readily available full edition of the text, p.68.
[45] Barry MacSweeney, *Pearl* (Cambridge: Equipage, 1995).
[46] Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p.67.
[47] Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p.71.
[48] Andrew Crozier, 'Barry MacSweeney', *The Guardian*, 18 May 2000. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/may/18/guardianobituaries?INTCMP=SRCH> [accessed 5 August 2013]
[49] Matthew Jarvis, 'Barry MacSweeney's Moorland Romance', in *Culture, Creativity and Environment: New Environmentalist Criticism*, ed. by Fiona Beckett and Terry Gifford (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp.181-196, p.189.

their intertextual relations, the dichotomy of what Jarvis calls the 'environmental aesthetics' of *Pearl* and the 'brokenness' of *Hellhound Memos* is not as straightforward as appears.[50]

Hellhound Memos, which consists of eighteen mostly untitled poems, has been considered to be a text of contemporary urban decay, a sequence which Barry suggests 'conjures up not just the lost lands of the inner city, but a despoiled rural dystopia as well'.[51] Certainly images such as 'open up these/ stolen microwaves. I turn them on and breathe' suggests a preoccupation with apocalypse and self-destruction in the artificial world of the city, in contradistinction with what appears to be awe of the natural environment: 'sky so very vast and blue. Puny we'.[52] *Hellhound Memos* is situated in the city of Newcastle, as revealed by the place name references to Hood Street, Scotch Corner and Gallowgate.[53] Despite this apparent specificity, MacSweeney represents a figurative urban dystopia in the last poem in the sequence:

> Vapour rises from the ducts and flues, ashen and feathered
> against the Batman cape sky like smoked bone, ascending
> wounded inside the theoretical bruising, burdened
> with the small matter of mankind and the grit
> in its windows and eyes[54]

Like Fisher's destabilised city boundaries, here the landscape of the city is not bound by city limits but instead is interminable: the 'vapour' from the factories is long lasting and pervasive, as it ascends 'wounded' into the figurative 'theoretical bruising' of a cloudy sky.[55] The second stanza opens 'the world with hate and envy raging', creating slippage between Newcastle, the

[50] Jarvis, 'Barry MacSweeney's Moorland Romance', p.194, p.186.
[51] Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p.70.
[52] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.227, p.230.
[53] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242, p.235, p.238.
[54] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.
[55] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.

environment and an affective representation of the world.[56] The poem becomes in Barry's terms 'urban generic' rather than 'urban specific', as MacSweeney calls attention to generic artificial architecture, the 'ducts and flues' of industry as well as specific place names.[57]

The metaphor of 'the Batman cape sky' blends high and low registers together and layers the metaphor with an additional simile: the smoke is 'like smoked bone'. This creates an image of an artificially darkened sky, but the sky itself is also artificial, a 'Batman cape'. Simultaneously MacSweeney's vocabulary evokes the natural world, as the vapour is not just smoke particles, but is 'feathered'.[58] The feathering connects the evanescent smoke with the notion of lightness, the flight of a bird, or the feathered edges of a cloud. The non-human and the human are sutured together, as the pronoun 'its' in 'grit/ in its windows and eyes' could refer to either humanity or the city itself, and the simile of industrial vapour as like 'smoked bone' further blurs the boundary between industry, the human with the non-human.[59] The stanza connects the artificial with the natural, as MacSweeney uses the language of bodily injury, 'wounded', and 'bruising', to intertwine the city's processes with its human inhabitants. 'Burdened/ with the small matter of mankind' suggests ironically that the city is overbearing, as well as the fact that the 'grit' is everywhere: for MacSweeney not only are both the human and the non-human affected by the vapour from the chimneys, but the images actually intermingle, putting the city

[56] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.
[57] Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p.54. Barry distinguishes between 'urban-specific' and 'urban-generic' by associating specificity with the act of place naming. This can, of course, be extended to place naming in 'nature' poetry. MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.
[58] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.
[59] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.

limits under pressure.[60] In Jarvis's understanding, it is this interconnection and friction which prevents MacSweeney's poetry from being either straightforwardly 'green' or urban:

> Whilst MacSweeney's North-East may demand that the human and the non-human be thought of together, it does so in a way which declares that closing the human-nature divide is never a matter of simply retreating into some sort of unproblematic green space. Rather, MacSweeney's North-East binds together release, beauty, and struggle. It is a place where a degree of identification with the non-human may be achieved – but where, at the same time, the diverse marks of humanity and human conflict are absolutely unavoidable.[61]

Jarvis suggests that MacSweeney's depictions of landscape do not resolve the human/non-human binary but instead bring the two together into productive conflict. This conflict mirrors MacSweeney's depiction of the calamitous nature of both society and the individual, as he destabilises the notion of an artificial city by refusing to separate the human and non-human experiences clearly, blurring the line between the specific and generic, a 'theoretical bruising' of Newcastle.[62]

Therefore instead of an 'urban dystopia' or a 'monstrous' city that can be contrasted with the rural idyll in *Pearl*, *Hellhound Memos* demonstrates the difficulty in determining an either/or relationship of nature and the city, or the human and the non-human. Rather than the singular assumption that the artificial city is a destructive force, what William Cronon calls 'corrupt and unredeemed', an awareness of environmental pollution filters into MacSweeney's poetics, as in 'Garbled Manifest – No Hellhole Unturned':

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[60] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.
[61] Matthew Jarvis, 'Hard Hats in Heather: Barry MacSweeney's North-East', in *Reading Barry MacSweeney*, ed. by Paul Batchelor (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2013), pp.47-62, p.62.
[62] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.

> An absolute permutation of high-strung
> misery threads the clouds today. Then the acid rain
> comes down relentless, Bladerunner-style, breaching
> levee and harbour wall. Groyne froths beneath its fall.[63]

MacSweeney's environmental concern here is both tempered and transformed by cultural awareness. The film *Blade Runner* (1982) acts as a cultural reference point, linking the poem to figurative dystopian science fiction and eliding landscape mimicry.[64] The acid rain, although returning to its 'natural' source in the River Tyne, breaches the 'levee and harbour wall', both of which are artificial, human-made structures. The levee, designed to prevent the river from bursting its banks, maintains the water within a bounded space, whilst the 'harbour wall', a wall of human settlement, 'shelters' the human inhabitants from the acid rain. Yet the acid rain is still 'relentless', a mixture of artificial chemicals and water and simultaneously affecting both natural and artificial structures, as the image calls attention to the negative influence of industry on natural processes. In this way MacSweeney's depiction of the 'city' is a nuanced negotiation of the fraught dynamics of natural and artificial processes, personifying the environment as an affective landscape as well as a material reality.

Like his depiction of 'acid rain', MacSweeney's representation of entanglement is further compounded by the pathetic fallacy in 'Garbled Manifest – No Hellhole Unturned', which states that 'an absolute permutation of high-strung/ misery threads the clouds today'.[65] The speaker fails to 'overcome/ my love for alcohol in favour of language', suggesting that

[63] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), p.8, MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.238.
[64] *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, directed by Ridley Scott (London: Warner Home Video, 2007 [1982]).
[65] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.238.

individual experience is tied to the 'hellhole' natural-artificial landscape: 'beck/ running redundant lead ore waste and human blood'.[66] The title 'Garbled Manifest' evokes both the rhetoric of the intoxicated speaker as well as a more figurative depiction, with 'manifest' suggesting temporary manifestation rather than a permanent or fixed notion of either the city or the poem. The 'redundant' stream is simultaneously pointless and unemployed, running with lead ore, industrial or human waste, and 'human blood', a merging of industrial and natural imagery which is enforced by the lack of separating punctuation. MacSweeney's environment in 'Garbled Manifest – No Hellhole Unturned' is therefore a 'garbled' landscape, a representational natural-artificial 'hellhole' of the persona's imagining, both figurative and 'manifest'.

Although 'Garbled Manifest – No Hellhole Unturned' suggests that MacSweeney's speakers represent consistent persona who construct interconnections between self and landscape, MacSweeney's depictions of the individual self are notably fluid. Indeed, John Wilkinson describes MacSweeney's 'alternative persona' as 'unstable', providing another way of re-reading the singular poet-alcoholic persona in *Hellhound Memos.*[67] The third poem opens:

> Me the multiplex moron, multigenerational
> multiplicity, many-fingered man with a violet
> shell suit, stolen BMW and a rack of E. I'm here!
>
> I used to be nowhere, now I'm all over the place.[68]

[66] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.238.
[67] John Wilkinson, *The Lyric Touch* (Cambridge: Salt, 2007), p.84.
[68] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.227.

The 'me' is simultaneously a single figure and 'multiplex […] multiplicity', refusing to be identified as a stable entity either in person or in location: 'I'm all over the place'. Barry describes this speaker as 'scandalising, reckless and electrifying […], descending on his helpless urban environment like a force of nature'.[69] Appropriately, Barry's interlinking of the urban environment with natural metaphor reflects the simile at the close of the poem: 'I come down like slate-grey rain. That's all. No God available'.[70] 'Slate-grey' evokes the pervasive greyness of an urban centre, the slate roofing of human settlement, slate as material stone and the uniformity of the weather. The persona's voice therefore develops in a trajectory from the bright exultation of 'many-fingered man with a violet/ shell suit, stolen BMW and a rack of E. I'm here!' to coming down from the high of Ecstasy, intertwining the pathetic fallacy of 'I come down like slate-grey rain' with the speaker's falling emotions and physical experience with the falling rain.[71] The finality of 'no God available' confirms the speaker's sense of being 'all over the place', as MacSweeney fractures the 'multiplex moron' into a persona intensely aware of his/her environment, going beyond the subjective interiority of confessional modes.[72] Instead, MacSweeney's multiple personae affirm the contradictory states of modernity. As Marshall Berman notes in *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982), 'to be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, and transformation of ourselves and the world – and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we

[69] Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, pp.69-70.
[70] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.227.
[71] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.227.
[72] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.227.

are'.[73] Despite MacSweeney's apparently consistent 'I' voice, the lack of a constant persona is well represented in the sequence as a whole by the numerous 'characters', including Robert Johnson, Anne Sexton and 'the Jesus Christ Almighty'.[74] The speaker in the third poem, then, reflects the 'multigenerational' modes of modernity, battling with individual and collective experience and eliding a whole or even wholesome perspective.

This fragmentary depiction of individual-social experiences mirrors the unstable depictions of the cityscape. In *Hellhound Memos* the sense that, as Jarvis states, 'brokenness is inextricable from the imagination of that which has been built by human beings' suggests a link between 'broken' human psychology and the apparent brokenness of the landscape.[75] Yet by the final stanza of the whole sequence there is a shift into pathos:

> Snow blurs the moon
> and the sky is whipped by the blizzard's tail.
> It is all like smoke
> in the swiftly changing hands of the trees.[76]

The snow 'blurs', erases, covers over and mingles with the artificial vapour and industrial smoke from the beginning of *Hellhound Memos*. The 'swiftly changing hands of the trees' reflects the changing season through a merging of human and natural forms as well as simultaneously evoking the image of drugs 'changing hands' of dealers in the streets, with the fleeting moment of a drug

[73] Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010 [1982]), p.15.
[74] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.234.
[75] Jarvis, 'Barry MacSweeney's Moorland Romance', p.186.
[76] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.

deal contrasting with the longevity of trees.[77] In the transformation from the description of vapour in the first stanza to the simile of 'like smoke' in the last, MacSweeney intermingles the natural and the artificial, representing a layering over of the landscape with smoke and then snow. The enjambment of 'smoke/ in' and juxtaposition of short and long line lengths and metre points to the layering of the landscape: the 'smoke' is textually separated from the trees. The metaphor 'blizzard's tail' recalls the 'feathered' smoke in the first stanza, a blurring of seasonal, industrial and animal imagery. The snow therefore covers over, erases and yet still tangles with the 'metropolis':

> The world with hate and envy raging
> surveys its wild forsaken boots, and the lanceolate leaves, still
> fragrant, ready for the pan, are quivering under the fjord blasts tonight.
> Sleet penetrates the weave.[78]

Like Fisher's 'slaggy lacework' of Birmingham, an image which reflects both the geology and industry of the city, here 'sleet penetrates the weave' of the landscape. MacSweeney's ambiguous shifts between perspectives are, then, reinforced by the dialogue between forms of environment: the 'world' is deliberately non-specific, encompassing both the natural and the artificial.

MacSweeney calls the city presented in this poem a 'Fauvist metropolis': one which cannot be represented realistically, but which can only be understood through expressionist metaphor and simile, a modernist 'falsedom'.[79] 'Fauvist' evokes a mode of French art from the early twentieth century. This artistic allusion to other forms and periods of art challenges

[77] The poem is unstable textually, also; the *Wolf Tongue* edition of *Hellhound Memos* states 'heads' (2003, p.192) in the last line, whereas the *Conductors of Chaos* collected version prints 'hands' (1996, p.242), a heterogeneity spanning across MacSweeney's textual editions.
[78] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.
[79] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242.

realistic depiction in MacSweeney's work: Fauvism deliberately focused on moving away from representational impression. For instance, Sarah Whitfield notes that:

> Fauvism was not a school of painting […] but a restless search for style. […] The act of painting itself was at the heart of the matter. Fauvism was the first "movement" to insist in explicit terms that a painting is the canvas and the pigments. The idea that a picture is the sum of the marks made on the canvas rather than a mirror held up to life, or to nature, or to literature accounts for the chief characteristics of the first true Fauve paintings being composed of briskly applied strokes, patches and dabs of brilliant colour.[80]

The emphasis on a Modernist-style attention to image thus links to MacSweeney's own preoccupation with figurative rather than realistic representation, a focus on form and impression over content. This is particularly evidenced in address and perspective, as in the tenth poem in the sequence, where the stable lyric voice is put under pressure:

> Alone without lipstick she said in the lit doorway:
> I cannot speak in cogent sentences but still you will not terrify me.
> I have seen all of the films and you are not worse than them.
> I have been to the top of the cairn for you, northern prince,
> and I died every inch of the way.[81]

The 'she', 'I' and 'you' are unstable in this poem: it is not clear whether the female speaker is addressing the 'I' voice of the first stanza, who states 'I am not fit to wear/ winking reflections like Aidan's fingernails'.[82] 'Aidan' refers to Aidan of Lindisfarne, the first bishop of Northumbria, as MacSweeney intertwines contemporary reference with a historical figure, creating another layer of individual presence. The poem further reveals multiple perspectives

[80] Sarah Whitfield, *Fauvism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p.8, p.9.
[81] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.233.
[82] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.233.

and personae: the line 'nothing will bring me back' could refer either to the initial speaker or the female speaker in the middle of the poem as well as Aidan or, potentially, the speaker's lost identity.[83]

Making the connection between MacSweeney's Fauvist landscape and the form of his poetic address therefore reinforces his underlying exploration of modernity. Indeed, Scott Brewster suggests that 'the anonymous, detached, elusive speaker who hides behind myths, masks and personae is indicative of the modernist poetics of impersonality […] the modernist gaze is fleeting and furtive, mimicking the restless mobility of urban modernity'.[84] This understanding of the instability of the lyrical 'I' in twentieth and twenty-first century poetry makes the connection between 'masks and personae' and 'urban modernity'. MacSweeney's poetry of natural-artificial environments in *Hellhound Memos* can therefore be seen to reflect Berman's notion of 'the maelstrom of modern life', as MacSweeney's use of figurative, hallucinatory poetics reimagines any perceived distinction between the artificial and the natural in his work.[85] MacSweeney's figurative and exploratory poetics of Newcastle are, like Fisher's depictions of Birmingham, deliberately uncertain. His metaphorical ambiguities suggest that the distinction between the urban city and rural nature is not necessarily clear-cut. Instead, it is the depiction of the elusive Fauvist environment which enables MacSweeney to challenge environmental or individual stability.

Presenting the city as a figurative and unstable environment is also a vital part of Skoulding's poetic processes. Skoulding grew up in Suffolk in England prior to settling near the Menai Strait near Bangor in Wales, and she

[83] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.233.
[84] Scott Brewster, *Lyric* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.98, p.100.
[85] Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air,* p.16.

recognises the multiple perspectives that this background gives her, stating in her essay 'Absent Cities: Text, Performance, and Heterotopia' that 'as an English-born writer living in Wales I am conscious of the histories of interaction between cultures.'[86] Skoulding's dual place-identity helps her to explore relations between England and Wales as well as between types of place and modes of representation. Entwistle points out that Skoulding's representations of place can be tied to identity politics in Wales, noting how 'the ambiguously semi-devolved […] landscape of post-millennial Wales shadows Skoulding's poetic walking/wandering (and reading) of her own cultural-political hinterland'.[87] Skoulding's understanding of this 'cultural-political hinterland' creates negotiations between England and Wales, emphasising ambiguity and providing a starting-point for her particular representations of geographies and environments. This transformative focus on borders between places therefore extends to the relations or boundaries between the natural and the artificial.

Skoulding's *Remains of a Future City* (2008) depicts an imaginary city, constructing its figurative landscape through intertextual references and a sense of what Ian Gregson identifies as 'postmodern geography'.[88] Yet at the same time, the text is apparently wedded to located environments, as demonstrated by Skoulding's compositional technique of walking in one landscape whilst reading a map of another.[89] These tenuous thresholds between one thing and

[86] Zoë Skoulding, 'Absent Cities: Text, Performance, and Heterotopia', in *Performing Poetry: Body, Place and Rhythm in the Poetry Performance*, ed. by Cornelia Gräbner and Arturo Casas (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp.247-262, p. 260.
[87] Alice Entwistle, 'Taking Place; Deixis, Collaboration and the Gender Politics of the Aesthetic', in *Placing Poetry*, ed.by Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp.69-91, p. 82.
[88] Zoë Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008). Ian Gregson, *The New Poetry in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 137.
[89] Zoë Skoulding, 'Wandering Where I am', *Poetry Wales*, 42/3 (2007), 23-27.

another can be seen in ‘The House Through Which the Weather Passes’. In this poem weather impacts on the resistances of a house: ‘there’s no protection/ here at the window’, either for the human inhabitant or for the house itself.[90] The window is a threshold, an opening between the artificial structure and the rain in the atmosphere. The mutable boundaries in the poem are not only limited to the open framing space of the window, however:

> No roof
> no ceiling can stop
> these walls of rain
>
> And when the wind comes
> the house shivers
> its reeds and timbers
>
> open at every pore
> and trembling
> in premonitions of shift[91]

The house shivers anthropomorphically, as well as simultaneously shivering like a leaf ‘open at every pore’, conflating the surface of a leaf with human or non-human skin, which itself forms a permeable boundary between the body and the world. The absence of punctuation and the fragmented form means that the poem looks unstable, with the lines moving in ‘premonitions of shift’. Gaston Bachelard recognises in *The Poetics of Space* (1964) that ‘house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them’, and in a similar way ‘The House Through Which the Weather Passes’ suggests that the outside environment links with the human body and the house, with the simile ‘it all comes in/ like the sound of rain/ rushing into an ear’ showing how

[90] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p. 19.
[91] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p. 19.

phenomenological imagery undermines distinctions between outside and inside.[92]

The house appears to act as an artificial barrier and yet the rain too forms metaphorical porous 'walls', with the layering of the short lines reflecting the intertwining of the natural and the built environment as well as the fragility of the house's structure. Bachelard argues that houses are impervious to outside influence: 'our houses are no longer aware of the storms of the outside universe,' whilst in Skoulding's poem the house is not only 'aware' of external influence, but distinctions between inside and outside are radically undermined.[93] Skoulding's representation of the tenuous boundary between the natural and the artificial is connected to how far the body itself can act as a border, as she suggests: 'the issue at stake is the notion of boundaries and their social construction, or the way in which the self is constructed in relation to its environment.'[94] As well as the 'social construction' of imaginative boundaries, in 'The House Through Which the Weather Passes' these 'boundaries' are linked to the human body's phenomenological corporeality, as the speaker walks in 'vapour and breath', moving through the rain in the house as well as the condensation caused by breath: 'the cloud misting/ interior glass'.[95] Here, Skoulding's house-as-body and body-as-house metaphors reveal the potential porosity and instability of both human forms and artificial structures, transforming environmental distinctions into metaphorical possibility.

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[92] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1964]), p. xxxvii., Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p. 19.
[93] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 27.
[94] Zoë Skoulding, 'Cathedrals of Sand: Textual Cities', in *Nutopia: A Critical View of Future Cities*, ed. by Malcolm Miles and Jennie Savage (Devon: University of Plymouth Press, 2012), pp.116-128, p. 124.
[95] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p. 19.

The figurative potential of what Entwistle calls Skoulding's 'opening up [of] the gap between actual and signified' also encourages disorientations of site-specificity, cartography and environments.[96] In *Remains of a Future City* the three dual-place poems 'Forest with A to Z of Cardiff', 'Preselis with Brussels Street Map' and 'Llanddwyn Beach with Directions for Copenhagen' all imagine Welsh landscapes both with and through the perspective of another place.[97] Skoulding argues that reimagining relations between places links to Welsh national identity, suggesting that 'the sense […] of being in two places at once is related to a question about Wales and its doubleness in terms of English-language and Welsh-language cultures.'[98] Skoulding metaphorically recreates the complexities of language-use in Wales by layering places over each other, using the potential clash between two locations to mirror the tensions between Welsh and English. Yet despite the apparent loco-specificity of the dual-place poems, Entwistle still points out how 'none [of the poems] constructs Wales in geopolitically, let alone culturally, monolithic or homogenous terms'.[99] 'Forest with A to Z of Cardiff' thus challenges borders between places as well as the apparent line between the natural and the artificial:

> From the station I turn right and right
> again into plantation woodland
> flickers of deep light
> a horsefly's drone
>
> numbs traffic
> I bring gridlock
> with me and the forest
> falls in line between

[96] Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender*, p.151.
[97] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, pp.49-51.
[98] Skoulding, 'Cathedrals of Sand', p. 122.
[99] Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender*, p.157.

nowhere and nowhere[100]

Both the forest and Cardiff are reimagined, with the speaker walking in a forest in the Preselis Hills, whilst apparently navigating by using a map of Cardiff.[101] The speaker shifts between two elusive places: 'nowhere and nowhere', destabilising distinctions between the forest and Cardiff. Paradoxically, 'nowhere' linguistically signifies and yet erases any clearly identified location.

In her prose piece 'Wandering Where I am', published in *Poetry Wales* (2007), Skoulding calls this method 'a kind of evocation of a ghost city that heightens our sense of what this place is, as well as what it isn't.'[102] Certainly, the gridded and state-maintained 'plantation woodland' is compared with the 'gridlock' of traffic and the A to Z grid of the map, and the forest 'falls in line' with these artificial lines, comparing and contrasting the boundary lines of the city's limits with the regimentation of the woodland. Skoulding points out how 'the countryside is locked into the same networks of power as everywhere else', as she likens the order of the A to Z map with the restraint placed on forests through woodland management.[103] 'Nowhere and nowhere' therefore mirrors the unstable locations as well as the indeterminate relationship between types of environment, with the poem eliding types of landscape together to the point of erasure whilst still attempting to inscribe them representationally. For instance, Skoulding's 'map' here is still decidedly metaphorical, shifting from the apparently objective work of cartography to an understanding of 'mapping'

[100] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p. 49.
[101] Skoulding, 'Cathedrals of Sand', p. 120.
[102] Skoulding, 'Wandering Where I am', p.24.
[103] Skoulding, 'Wandering Where I am', p.24.

as a means of subjective representation.[104] Daniel Weston points out, in fact, that 'the term "mapping" no longer denotes only a particular mode of representing place in geometric and symbolic form, but now includes varying forms of representation in dialogue with a whole range of experiences,' developing on Franco Moretti's early interventions into the relationship between mapping and representation.[105] In 'Forest with A to Z of Cardiff' Skoulding's Situationist-like *détournement* of conventional map-use unsettles delimitations between Cardiff, the forest and imaginary representations of place.[106] In 'Wandering Where I am', Skoulding adds that 'distances shrink and expand, and in everyday experience locations are pulled into unexpected conjunctions and dislocations that the rational overhead viewpoint of a map can never reveal.'[107] 'Forest with A to Z of Cardiff' reframes the apparent objectivity of cartography, using 'mapping' to present 'unexpected conjunctions and dislocations' between places and types of landscape. As well as creating what Gregson identifies as a sense of 'placelessness', Skoulding's spatial layers challenge borders between places, paradoxically locating the poems in two places and simultaneous environments.[108]

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[104] Tally describes in *Spatiality* how 'the map offers a fictional or figurative representation of the space in which we find ourselves, and the reassuring "You are here" arrow or dot or other marker provides the point of reference from which we can both imagine and navigate the space', providing a key example of the way in which cartography slips between accurate representation and imaginative interpretation. Tally, *Spatiality*, p.2.

[105] Daniel Weston, '"I know this labyrinth so well": Narrative Mappings in the Poetry of Ciaran Carson', in *Poetry & Geography: Space and Place in Post-War Poetry*, ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.105-119, p. 106. Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800-1900* was an important stepping stone for literary cartography. He states that like mapping, 'literary form appears […] as the result of two conflicting, and equalling significant forces: one working from the outside, and one from the inside.' Franco Moretti, *An Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), p.5.

[106] Ivan Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a New Urbanism', in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp.1-8.

[107] Skoulding, 'Wandering Where I am', p. 23.

[108] Skoulding, 'Wandering Where I am', p.23. Ian Gregson, *The New Poetry in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 137.

Similarly, ‘Llanddwyn Beach with Directions for Copenhagen’ uses walking to consider relations between Wales and mainland Europe, between seascape and city:

> rain runs in your pockets an email print-out in shreds
> an estuary of ink seeps damp in every fibre
> melts location in this city you can’t fathom
> as the edge of land softens into sea
> you do not choose this road but
> walk to the left beside the building on your right[109]

As with ‘Forest with A to Z of Cardiff’, Llanddwyn beach is refigured through ‘directions’ for Copenhagen, with the central lacuna in the stanzas emphasising the doubled-up spatiality of the poem. The rain infiltrates the body and clothing of the speaker, ‘damp in every fibre’, and also blurs the ink of the directions on the ‘email print-out’. Walking links with textual metaphor, as the ‘estuary of ink’ merges with an image of the intertidal zone of an estuary. Skoulding interrogates prescriptive walking, as a speaker interjects: ‘you do not choose this road but/ walk to the left’. This suggests that movement is a way of challenging the limitations of cartographic borders and walking directions, and Skoulding notes in ‘Border Lines’ in *Poetry Wales* (2007) that ‘drawing borders on a map can neglect the everyday patterns of movement that are an essential aspect of any border.’[110] The poem’s challenging of borders evokes the social parameters of walking created by enclosure and access rights, what Rebecca Solnit calls ‘boundary lines of ownership that break the land into pieces’.[111] The process of walking in the imaginary and spatial configurations

[109] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p. 51.
[110] Zoë Skoulding, ‘Border Lines’, *Poetry Wales*, 42/4 (2007), 40-44, p.40.
[111] Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 162.

of Copenhagen and Anglesey/Ynys Môn challenges these 'boundary lines of ownership' through revealing contrasts and unpredictable line patterns: 'from the middle of the square by the town hall/ sleet and sand whipped into your face'.[112] Skoulding's simultaneous compositional mode of walking and representation of walking is, she suggests, 'a way of being deliberately in between, of moving through the contradictory space between here and there (or global and local, Welsh and English, human and non-human) and seeing what's underfoot.'[113] For Skoulding, then, walking provides a means of negotiating between places as well as between environment and the body: 'face the edge of your body where is it becoming/ streaked on the page'.[114] Using walking 'directions' which are entangled with phenomenological experience and environmental processes illustrates the border-crossing potential of walking, eliding any clear distinction between cityscape and environment.

2.3 Temporal entanglements

Putting natural and artificial distinctions under pressure encourages a reframing of the notions that the city is contemporaneous and that rural environments are inherently nostalgic. For instance, the relationship between the past and the present in *Hellhound Memos* and *Pearl* is threaded through with a paradoxical attention to both the role and the limits of language in constructing and understanding the natural-artificial world. MacSweeney uses language as a modern mode in *Hellhound Memos*, 'it is as if I am in B&Q', as

[112] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p. 51.
[113] Skoulding, 'Wandering Where I am', p.24.
[114] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p. 51.

well as a form of nostalgia in *Pearl*, as 'the ancient tongue of literacy, before/ language was poisoned to a wreckage'.[115] Both *Hellhound Memos* and *Pearl* fluctuate between idealisation of a previous 'ancient tongue' and MacSweeney's undeniable and contradictory modern register.[116] Despite MacSweeney's explorations of the relations between cultural modernity and nostalgia in both collections of poems, it is language as mediation which prevails in his representations of the natural and the artificial and the past and the present: Clive Bush describes *Pearl* as 'about language and author/ity in every sense'.[117] MacSweeney's hallucinatory language is integral to his depictions of memory, environment and landscape, and this is demonstrated by a tense awareness of the fragility of language in *Pearl*. In fact, *Pearl* is an adaptation of the medieval poem of the same title, as Jarvis points out: 'the entire sequence is enveloped by the fourteenth-century alliterative poem of the same name, which provides a kind of literary frame in which MacSweeney's work operates', as MacSweeney's movement between modernity and nostalgia is compounded by literary allusion and adaptation.[118] Gillian Rudd notes how the medieval *Pearl*'s representation of landscape entangles the natural and the artificial. She states that 'the pearl with which this poem famously begins encapsulates the two worlds of nature and artifice', as the pearl, 'unlike the gemstones that make up the walls of the New Jerusalem' do not need to be shaped or cut by the human hand.[119] She adds that 'human artifice comes into

[115] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.235, Barry MacSweeney, 'Pearl', *The Book of Demons* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1997 [1995]), pp.11-33, p.12.
[116] MacSweeney, 'Pearl', p.12.
[117] Clive Bush, *Out of Dissent: A Study of Five Contemporary British Poets* (London: Talus, 1997), p.543.
[118] Jarvis, 'Hard Hats in Heather: Barry MacSweeney's North-East', p.61. Sarah Stanbury, ed., *Pearl* (Michigan: Western Michigan University, 2001 [c.1400]).
[119] Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.170, p.171.

play only when piercing them for threading or when setting them, at which point the skill is to create a jewel which is seen to enhance the natural beauty of the pearl without overpowering it.'[120] The object of the pearl, then, which itself is a result of a growth inside the organic matter of an oyster, acts as a useful metaphor for the entangled relationship between the natural and the artificial.

As well as this medieval connection, Bush sees MacSweeney as 'situating himself in the English Romantic tradition, whose terms and achievements he carries down to and renews for the twentieth century'.[121] *Pearl* could certainly be read as a text of pastoral inclinations, a type of affective pastoral which Williams describes as 'the rural innocence of the pastoral', creating what appears to be juxtaposition between *Pearl* and *Hellhound Memos*.[122] In *Pearl,* the speaker retreats and returns into the Northumberland landscape, as detailed by Jarvis:

> MacSweeney recalls his childhood in the 1950s, concentrating specifically on time spent in the northern English hamlet of Sparty Lea. The geographical arena of this poetry is the wild moorland of the Northumberland Allen Valley, through which MacSweeney wanders with his first love, Pearl, a mute girl he teaches to read and write.[123]

In 'No Such Thing', MacSweeney appears to position the Northumberland landscape in which *Pearl* is located against a contemporary urban present.[124] The speaker's remembrance of his 'first love' goes some way to explain the idealised nostalgia of the poem:

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[120] Rudd, *Greenery*, p.171.
[121] Bush, *Out of Dissent: A Study of Five Contemporary British Poets*, p.304.
[122] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.46.
[123] Matthew Jarvis, 'Barry MacSweeney's Moorland Romance', in *Culture, Creativity and Environment: New Environmentalist Criticism,* ed. by Fiona Beckett and Terry Gifford (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp.181-196, p.188.
[124] MacSweeney, 'Pearl', p.15.

> Grassblade glintstreak in one of the last mornings
> before I come to meet you, Pearl,
> as the rain shies. How bright and sudden the dogrose,
> briefly touched by dew[125]

Unlike the pervasive 'smoked bone' vapour found in the opening of *Hellhound Memos,* here the figurative imagery evokes a shining or glowing landscape: the grass glints, the rain has not come and the dogrose is shiny with dew. In potential contrast with *Hellhound Memos* the element of pastoral, of a return to an untouched idyllic natural environment, is intertwined with an individual persona's experience of romantic love.

The lines 'we crushed a head brew/ of grass and fern/ and loved the slate grey rain' in 'Pearl and Barry Pick Rosehips For The Good Of The Country' repeat the symbolically loaded slate-grey rain of *Hellhound Memos,* yet here 'slate' does not connect with the city, and the rain in 'No Such Thing' 'shies' away from the poem.[126] Yet despite the apparent juxtaposition of the pastoral-like environment in *Pearl* and the cityscape in *Hellhound Memos*, these intertextual echoes between *Hellhound Memos* and *Pearl* begin to demonstrate how MacSweeney's work does not present a polarisation between the 'present' of *Hellhound Memos* and the 'past' of *Pearl.* In fact 'No Such Thing' in *Pearl* creates a temporal paradox, as the speaker in the poem is present 'now' in Northumberland, expressing his love to Pearl, whilst still recollecting and recalling the memory from 'the sieged estate':

> Sky to the west today, where you are, Pearl, is
> a fantastic freak bruise which hurts the world.
> Coward rain scared of our joy refuses to come.
> Deep despair destroys and dents delight

[125] MacSweeney, 'Pearl', p.15.
[126] MacSweeney, 'Pearl', p.26.

> now that I have pledged my future to you, Pearl,
> from the edge of the roaring bypass, from
> the home of the broken bottle and fiery
> battleground of the sieged estate.[127]

Again, 'fantastic freak bruise' intertextually nods to the 'theoretical bruising' of the sky in *Hellhound Memos,* as MacSweeney troubles any clear distinction between the two environments in the texts. Furthermore, conflating the natural landscape of the past and the Newcastle cityscape of the present reflects on the tensions between the natural landscape of moorland in *Pearl* and the experience of the city. Barry comments on how:

> In the sequence, different time periods seem to fuse. […] So the city of Newcastle, to which it frequently looks, is the city of the 1990s period of the writing not the 1950s of the setting, and it is a city de-industrialised, its social cohesion lost in the shift of resources from north to south, and the beginning of the age of out-sourcing, service industries and precariously levered speculative finance.[128]

MacSweeney's refusal to separate these elements recognises that the natural landscape in *Pearl* is reconfigured and experienced forever, through memory: nature is not lost but recreated and reimagined through the lens of the present 'battleground' of the city.

This ambiguity between the past and the present is extended through MacSweeney's transformational representations of heaven and hell in both texts, furthering the friction between figurative imagery and situated place in the 'Fauvist' *Hellhound Memos.* In *Hellhound Memos* the title alone evokes a unification of hellish experience and the 'memo' of writing, here demonstrated by the second poem in the sequence:

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[127] MacSweeney, 'Pearl', p.15.
[128] Peter Barry, 'Mapping the Geographies of Hurt in Barry MacSweeney and S.J. Litherland', in *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-War Poetry,* ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.33-48 p.36.

> Sunk at my crossroads, hellhounds baying
> broken from chains, lips, jaws
> slavering with death notice, rape
> on my left and right, filthy money, yellow Jerusalem.[129]

Artificial contemporary experience is portrayed as a 'crossroads', at the point between Jerusalem and hell or heaven, which is textually echoed ten years later in Peter Riley's *Alstonefield* (2003): 'Hell/ hound at the crossroads, pulling everywhere'.[130] 'Rape' evokes both sexual assault and yellow rape seed, troublingly conflating the metaphorical hell of trauma with natural imagery. The title of the collection itself signals the friction between the present and the past, with the mythological 'hellhound' contrasting with the contemporaneity of a written or spoken 'memo', which, at the same time, forms a truncation of the word 'memory'. Barry notes the familiar association between hell and the city in MacSweeney's work, whilst also pointing out that MacSweeney uses 'an "urban" metaphor for the act of writing'.[131] Indeed, like Fisher's Brummagen screwdriver in 'Talking to Cameras', in the third poem of *Hellhound Memos* MacSweeney intertwines poetic creation with ship-building through an image of a blowtorch:

> I can scorch a line, a beautiful
> blue and true line through the hull of your lives
>
> and must say I like it better so. I adjust my visor
> accordingly. Cut, cut, cut. It's my dark, dark memo,
> almost a badge.[132]

[129] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.226.
[130] Peter Riley, *Alstonefield: A Poem* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003), p.50.
[131] Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p.25.
[132] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.227.

Recalling Romantic inscriptive modes, the speaker scorches 'a line' into the landscape (and at the same time, the ship) whilst calling attention to the lines of the poem and to the narcotic and law enforcement image evoked by 'blue and true line'. Like Fisher's 'Brummagen' screwdriver, MacSweeney's ship-building image implies a working landscape of the industrial revolution, even as the poem elides any clear context. It serves to emphasise the act of writing whilst still being limited: it is a 'dark memo, almost a badge', neither a permanent material object nor an entirely transient 'memo'. The linguistic slippage between hell and hull (also evocative of the city of Hull), and the 'magenta heat' suggests a hellish landscape, but rather than associating hell with the city alone, MacSweeney transforms inscription as a Romantic mode, encouraging a reading of *Hellhound Memos* which is not necessarily limited only to a representation of the city as hell.

This dichotomy between the city as 'hell' and the country as 'heaven' is further destabilised in *Pearl.* Jarvis observes that *Pearl* is representative of heaven, of New Jerusalem, as 'the pearl maiden […] becomes the focal point for the discovery of heaven'.[133] The heaven-like landscape in *Pearl* finds its basis in the medieval version of the poem, as Rudd describes: 'the narrator [in *Pearl*] moves from an actual garden into a dream landscape which is a form of Paradise on earth containing woods, a hill and a river, and thence to a sight of the city of the New Jerusalem […] before finally being returned to the original garden'.[134] MacSweeney's *Pearl* appears to similarly trace relations between an 'actual' landscape and the imagined heavenly recollection of an idealised

[133] Jarvis, 'Barry MacSweeney's Moorland Romance', p.190.
[134] Rudd, *Greenery*, p.170.

natural landscape. Indeed the present moment is a form of hell for the Pearl persona, particularly in 'Pearl Alone':

> In the byre alone I weep
> at the imagined contrivance
> of straps and wires
> locking my loll-tongue gargoyle head.[135]

The natural landscape offers Pearl no relief from her mute state and it is only for the 'MacSweeney' persona in the poem that the natural landscape and Pearl combine to produce a heaven-like, nostalgic experience. Pearl instead is figuratively muzzled, a 'gargoyle'.[136] MacSweeney does not, therefore, distinguish between the heavenly nostalgic nature of *Pearl* and the contemporary artificial hell of *Hellhound Memos.* This goes against the conventional link between nature and happiness: Timothy Clark suggests that 'thinkers have increasingly come to question deeply ingrained presuppositions that the "natural" […] necessarily names a condition of balance, harmony, stability and health'.[137] The distress of MacSweeney's Pearl persona reveals how the surrounding natural idyll does not necessarily evoke 'balance, harmony, stability and health' alone, and nor does it present a straightforward pastoral retreat, as it fluctuates between the past and the present to create natural-artificial entanglement.[138] Again, there is no clear demarcation between either types of landscape or their affective interpretations. As Jarvis recognises, 'the environmental aesthetics of MacSweeney's poetic are clearly not ecocentric, because the landscape of "Pearl" is a canvas on which human past is written for the sake of human future – a process which is, in effect, nothing

[135] MacSweeney, 'Pearl', p.22.
[136] MacSweeney, 'Pearl', p.22.
[137] Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p.14.
[138] Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p.14.

less than a metaphoric colonisation of ex-urban, semi-wild, or wild space'.[139] Jarvis's use of multiple geographical terms to describe *Pearl*'s landscape is appropriate, as MacSweeney continually shifts his representations between the human and the non-human. In 'Pearl Alone' MacSweeney's 'metaphoric' concerns present a landscape which is not ecocentric but is instead a convergence of human suffering, ecstasy, industry and the non-human.

Artificial representations in *Hellhound Memos* are, to an extent, filtered through a preoccupation with modern culture, as evidenced again in the opening of the third poem:

> Me the multiplex-moron, multigenerational
> multiplicity, many-fingered man with a violet
> shell suit, stolen BMW and a rack of E. I'm here![140]

The repetition of the prefix 'multi' in the first two lines and the image of the 'many-figured man' reinforces MacSweeney's preoccupation with the multi-faceted influence of modern culture. Certainly, the experience of the fragmented speaker is connected to commercial modernity, from the 'multiplex' cinema building to the technology of the BMW and the chemistry of ecstasy, what Barry terms 'runaway urban materialism'.[141] MacSweeney's cultural references therefore mark out an attention to experiences of modernity. Berman describes how 'modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish'.[142] For Berman, modernity represents a plethora of

[139] Jarvis, 'Barry MacSweeney's Moorland Romance', p.194.
[140] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.227.
[141] Barry, *Contemporary Poetry and the City*, p.71.
[142] Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, p.15.

contradictions. This 'modern' paradox can be identified in MacSweeney's 'multi' lines and decelerating rhythmic pace here, as he creates a tension between monotonous alliteration, the complexity of culture and the apocalyptic 'permanent darkness' at the end of the poem.[143] MacSweeney's blurring of the human and the non-human in *Hellhound Memos*, through the 'grit' in the eyes of both humanity and the city, therefore presents a form of environmental entanglement as well as an awareness of what Berman calls modern 'paradox and contradiction'.[144]

Yet despite MacSweeney's apparent modernity, this contemporaneousness is still tied to historical conceptions of environment. The deep consolidation of natural/artificial and rural/urban binaries is intricately related to long traditions of environmental thinking and writing, as Cronon recognises: 'we learned our city-country dichotomy from the nineteenth-century Romantics, who learned it in turn from pastoral poets stretching back to Virgil'.[145] As well as the friction found within *Pearl*'s medieval heritage and representations of modernity, MacSweeney intertwines contemporary cultural experience with Romantic nostalgia, as in 'for PBS one day early' in *Hellhound Memos*, a poem commemorating the day before Percy Bysshe Shelley's birthday:

> The very low odour tough acrylic formula
> of B&Q Safe Paint with satin gloss finish
> is venal. Civilization too good a word for it.
> Percy, why won't anyone leave us alone?[146]

[143] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.227.
[144] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.242, Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, p.13.
[145] Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, p.17.
[146] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.228.

MacSweeney's intertextual transformation reverberates into the following poem in the sequence: 'and where, under this heaven, is my Mary?', evoking both Mary Shelley and the Virgin Mary.[147] The two poems, whilst separate, form a dialogue, moving from the representations of B&Q in the first poem to 'please spill me the dew from cusloppe's rim' in the next. The archaic spelling of 'cusloppe' here mirrors the way in which both *Pearl* and *Hellhound Memos* continually slip between older and newer modes of language. In this way MacSweeney's reference to Shelley reveals literary and cultural understandings of his own twentieth-century environment, refusing to clearly demarcate between Romantic forms of nature and the present state of the city. *Hellhound Memos*'s nuanced cultural awareness does not undermine its attention to natural environments but reinforces the unstable ambiguities in MacSweeney's Romantic and medieval intertextuality as well as his deep preoccupation with the difficulties of modernity.

Indeed, although MacSweeney's multiple and unstable voices reflect the contingency of modernity, this is a mode of modernity which is not necessarily 'urban', further compounding the movement between older conceptions of nature and modern ones. As Jarvis observes, there is a 'connection between the brokenness of the central character and a broadly negative experience of landscape and environment' which is enforced by a lack of consistent characterisation.[148] In this way, then, MacSweeney's unstable and unwilling personae are modern fragmented identities whom are also attentive to natural environments. In 'Shaking Minds with Robespierre', for instance, the speaker cries:

[147] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.229.
[148] Jarvis, 'Barry MacSweeney's Moorland Romance', p.183.

> O to be a snowflake, whipped in by easterlies,
> soaking gardens and allotments until the lupin and peony seeds descend;
> I want to be bright shining
> as cuticles in the Dunton nursery.
> Bright as Aidan's eyes.[149]

The speaker makes a plea for anonymity which is at the same time an appreciation of the natural world. For the persona, the urge to be something other than 'disposable' is sought through a shift from the human to the non-human, as well as in a nostalgic yearning for childhood physicality in the 'Dunton nursery'.[150] The poem interconnects the politics of the French Revolution, English royalty and the speaker's urge to be 'bright as Aidan's eyes', as Aidan of Lindisfarne, the Apostle of Northumbria, again provides a link to the significance of place-identity and history.[151] MacSweeney's reference to Robespierre responds to the eighteenth-century preoccupation with revolution, enlightenment and social change, evoking a sense of modern progress which perhaps lies in contrast with more conventional notions of Romantic depictions of nostalgia and nature. MacSweeney's 'multigenerational multiplicity' of personae encourages multiple and fluid perspectives on his landscapes rather than enforcing dualisms, as the poems move between intense modernity, Romantic context and medieval intertextuality. Using *Pearl* as a reference point allows MacSweeney to traverse the apparent boundary between the natural and the artificial within provocatively shifting time frames. It is in this way that *Pearl* and *Hellhound Memos* demonstrate a nuanced dialogue and oscillation between modernity,

[149] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.236.
[150] MacSweeney, 'Hellhound Memos', p.236.

nostalgia and literal and figurative landscapes, remaining mired in awareness of physical environmental degradation.

Fisher's negotiations between the natural and artificial friction in Birmingham are similarly and necessarily rooted in historicity. In contrast with MacSweeney's metaphorical and linguistic explorations, Fisher develops on his destabilisation of fixed place, of 'centre' and landscape by making continual references to other cities and historical monuments, as evidenced by his representation of La Sagrada Familia in 'Talking to Cameras'.[152] A particularly striking slippage between the Birmingham of the past and the Birmingham of 1994 occurs through Fisher's comparison between the medieval market and the Bullring:

> Seven hundred years ago
> an earlier model of the idea, set up
> on land above the Bull Ring by the proprietors,
> did business as an Enterprise Park
> for freed serfs. Similar rules apply.
>
> And it stays centred
> on the same spot[153]

Bush suggests that Birmingham carries connotations of newness, stating that '[Birmingham is] of recent growth, a child of the industrial revolution,' yet here Fisher elides the distance between historical Birmingham and the present-day city, closing the historical gap between 'seven hundred years ago' and the early planning stages of the Bullring: 'an earlier model of the idea'.[154] Indeed, Hodder points out that 'archaeological evidence […] suggests that the town of Birmingham was a new creation of the twelfth century,' highlighting the

[152] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.15.
[153] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.15.
[154] Bush, 'In Sight and Time: Some Patterns of Appearance in Roy Fisher's Poetry', p.112.

relationship between the medieval history of Birmingham and its 'newness' in the twelfth century.[155] Like MacSweeney, Fisher's historical framing includes medieval resonances, bringing alternative narratives of Birmingham's development to bear on his representations and challenging the standard association of Birmingham with the industrial revolution. He directly compares the medieval market of Birmingham to the twentieth-century Bullring shopping mall, seeing the same type of authority and business rules in the current model as in the historical one.[156] Fisher links the idea of the medieval 'freed serfs' to the contemporary shoppers in the Bullring, critiquing capitalist structures by revealing their underpinning history.

Barry discusses how Fisher's later work 'broadens, both historically and geographically, becoming […] urban/regional rather than just urban, with a strong sense of the interaction between the city and its hinterland.'[157] This recognises how Fisher is preoccupied with the history of place, as by comparing modern day Birmingham to medieval Birmingham Fisher is able to develop on 'thinking' only with Birmingham city. His reference to the medieval market reveals Birmingham as a site of growth, constructed through layers of change throughout time. There is a sense that the city offers multiple perspectives of history, as Paul Ricoeur recognises: 'a city brings together in the same space different ages, offering to our gaze a sedimented history of tastes and cultural forms'.[158] Like the 'sedimented' sandstone underlying Birmingham, Ricoeur's metaphor brings together the artificial city with geological history. This can also be seen in Fisher's *City*, a poem which Barry

[155] Hodder, *Birmingham: The Hidden History*, p.83.
[156] Appropriately, the Bullring has since been remodelled, opening in 2003.
[157] Barry, *Contemporary Poetry and the City*, p.198.
[158] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.151.

describes as 'the most powerful literary account […] of the almost nationwide experience in mid-century Britain of urban loss and destruction.'[159] *Birmingham River*, then, continues Fisher's project of comparing and contrasting the past and the present of Birmingham through the lens of natural/artificial blurrings, despite his own argument that his nature poetry is 'mainly incidental'.[160]

Fisher intertwines the contemporary with the mythological in 'Talking to Cameras', comparing the underground canals and rivers in Birmingham to Tartarus, the underworld:

> Is it the primal ocean, condemned
> and petrified? Is it a giant
> lagoon in Tartarus, petrified,
> redeemed, made habitable?[161]

Fisher's typical repetition here signals the double implications of 'petrified': both human fear and the process of being converted into stone, shifting between metaphorical personification and a watery yet stony depiction of the canals. Like the allusions to Blake and Plato found in the same poem, Fisher's comparison of the canals of Birmingham to the underworld moves his representation of water into deeper metaphor and intertextuality. Working with Blake lets Fisher compound the link between art and representation, whilst Plato's *Republic*, like MacSweeney's use of the medieval *Pearl,* creates resonances regarding utopian depictions of landscape. The canals of the

[159] Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p.197.
[160] Roy Fisher, '"Come to Think of It, The Imagination": Roy Fisher in Conversation with John Kerrigan' in *News for the Ear: A Homage to Roy Fisher*, ed. by Peter Robinson and Robert Sheppard (Exeter: Stride, 2000), pp.96-120, p.98.
[161] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.13.

underworld evoke an other-worldly depth to his representation which mirrors Fisher's own mining into the history of Birmingham.

In comparison, other river and canal spaces in Fisher's poetry emphasise the more literal and material presence of a mixture of the natural and the artificial within the river itself.[162] Recognising that canals form the base of Birmingham's transport and industrial networks, Fisher shows how the waterways can act as a representation of the merging of the natural and the artificial. Fisher's awareness of the conflicted contemporary presence of the canals in Birmingham echoes the way in which canals have tended to be overstated in their role in Birmingham's growth: Hopkins notes that 'canal building accelerated rather than created industrial growth in the Birmingham area; industrial activity was already substantial before the construction of the canals.'[163] Indeed, the eponymous 'Birmingham River' plays off this historical ambiguity: 'Where's Birmingham river? Sunk./ Which river was it? Two. More or less.'[164] The dialogic question-and-answer form is not resolved: 'sunk' does not locate the rivers in Birmingham, and 'two', does not identify their names. Fisher's obfuscations unsettle the situated place name title, as the poem ambiguously traces the history of two rivers, the Tame and the Rea, through Birmingham:

> History: we're on our tribal ground. When they
> moved in from the Trent, the first English
>
> entered the holdings and the bodies of the people
> who called the waters that kept them alive
>
> Tame, *the Dark River*.[165]

[162] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.17.
[163] Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, p.30.
[164] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.17.
[165] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.17.

Like the journey of a river, here the 'first English' are tracked through the landscape. Fisher unsettles any distinction between the human and the non-human, as the 'bodies' 'tame' and name the river Tame, enforcing power over it through linguistic signification, even as they are still dependent on it both physically and economically.[166]

The history of the River Tame and River Rea echoes twentieth-century conditions in Birmingham:

> Sank out of sight
>
> under streets, highways, the back walls of workshops;
> collected metals, chemicals, aquicides. Ceased
>
> to draw lines that weren't cancelled or unwanted; became
> drains, with no part in anybody's plan.[167]

The 'natural' condition of water is challenged, as Fisher emphasises the artificial pollutants within it. These industrial pollutants have become stagnant, as the canals have 'ceased' to form part of Birmingham's working landscape. The River Tame was heavily polluted due to the industry in Birmingham and the surrounding Black Country areas it passed through, and thus the Celtic etymology of its name, 'Dark River', takes on new significance. Rather than creating difference between the two waterways, 'sunk' suggests not just their location underneath the landscape but their presence in human understanding of the city: the rivers, once such an important part of Mercian history, are hidden in contemporary Birmingham.

[166] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.17.
[167] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.17.

In the poem's refusal to clearly distinguish between the Rea and the Tame the rivers become 'drains' on economic processes as well as weighed down with pollution. The River Tame is directed into canal-like channels which have become 'no part in anybody's plan', further slipping between representations of river and canals,[168] Fisher's interest in civics is revealed in the notion of 'plan', as the poem challenges how far city planning can align with the organic processes of urban landscapes. The canals in Birmingham have long been attributed to the city's industrial success, and the 'collected metals, chemicals, aquicides' refers to the condition of canals as well as rivers, which, as Hodder summarises, 'transported fuel, raw materials and finished products for Birmingham's industries and became foci for industrial development' in the eighteenth century.[169] By the time of the publication of *Birmingham River* these canals would have no longer been in use as heavy industry, and earlier works *City* (1961) and *A Furnace* (1986) were also published after the demise of functional canals.[170] Ralph Pite notes that 'canal historians point to the long, cold, winter of 1962-63 […] as the end of the waterways as a carrier of goods', suggesting that *City* could be responding to the social and industrial transformation.[171] Yet for Fisher the canals still remain an important part of Birmingham, signalling the fraught and complex history of the contemporary city. His depiction of canals transforms traditional rural

[168] Hodder, *Birmingham: The Hidden History*, p.152, Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.17.
[169] Hodder, *Birmingham: The Hidden History*, p.152. Hopkins describes how the Birmingham Canal Act of 1768 allowed Birmingham to become 'the centre of a network of canals which spread over the West Midlands, giving cheap transport for heavy goods and raw materials'. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, p.29.
[170] Roy Fisher, *A Furnace* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1986). In fact, Hopkins traces the decline of Birmingham's canal system from the advent of steam transport, particularly during its peak between 1845-6. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town*, p.78.
[171] Ralph Pite, 'Roy Fisher's Waterways' in *An Unofficial Roy Fisher*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2010), pp.113-126, p.113. Fisher, *The Long and the Short Of It*, p.393.

nostalgia by granting industrial systems an element of affective memorialisation: the canals and rivers are 'drains' on resources. Fisher thus puts rural representations of 'nature' under pressure, refusing to present either nostalgia or modernity as a solid 'centre':

> This pair of big split pebbles set in the path
> governed. Two, to be on the safe side –
> I've always been a two-moon man.[172]

Fisher's depiction of two stones in his childhood home in Handsworth in 'Talking to Cameras' recalls the two paths of rivers: 'To touch/ the centre keeps everything round it/ fluid', as *Birmingham River* refutes any clear concept of centre.[173] Instead, he manipulates the tensions between the present-day rivers and their history, as he traces their presence in the contemporary landscape.

'Abstracted Water' also takes impetus from ambiguous representations of waterways:

> Abstracted water, captive for a while,
> becomes abstract, a proposition in hydraulics,
>
> slops through lock-machines, goes level,
> carries coal, parties, makes money,
> slides back into Nature, used.[174]

Fisher entangles economics, industry and natural processes: the lock in the canal transports coal, social parties and 'makes money'. The water of the canal is 'used' both literally and figuratively, and is simultaneously held 'captive' by the canal until abstracted through the lock. 'Abstract' also signifies poetic processes, of 'abstract' rather than material configurations. Here again the

[172] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.14.
[173] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.14.
[174] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.22.

natural and the artificial are elided together, as the water in the canal becomes complicit in the processes of heavy industry. This poem follows 'Birmingham River' and 'First Terms' in the *Birmingham River* sequence, suggesting a linear progression through time, and the use of the present-tense 'becomes' links to the presence and historicity of canals in contemporary Birmingham: 'Nothing much fronts/ the canal'.[175] Indeed, this 'frontage' onto the canal is the explanation that Pite gives for Fisher's progression from a focus on roads and railways in *City* to the canals in *Birmingham River:* the 'redevelopment of waterside districts in Birmingham', which was beginning in 1994, brings the disused canals to a fresh perspective, economically and socially.[176] Despite the transformation of the canals as a site of heavy industry to light commercial industry, Fisher deliberately interlinks the canals' present status to the beginnings of industrialisation: 'The Cut's a notion, an idea cleaner than a river, and closed at both ends'.[177] Paradoxically, 'cutting' a canal is to create it, evoking an image of a transport system which is at the same time closed off and delineated into specific channels and paths, unlike the apparently unrestrained windings of a river.

By referencing canal cutting the poem shifts back to eighteenth-century Birmingham:

> Sunlight
> under bridges stays enclosed,
> lattices to and fro. There's a law
>
> dirt grows out of.[178]

[175] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.22.
[176] Pite, 'Roy Fisher's Waterways', p.115.
[177] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.22.
[178] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.23.

The initial image of sunlight shining through lattices under canal bridges is transformed by the word 'enclosed', which evokes the history of enclosure. Here, then, the final lines of 'Abstracted Water' also take on socio-political significance: 'There's a law/ dirt grows out of' evokes how the law of enclosure resulted in further industrialisation and 'dirt'.[179] Once again this recalls Romantic concerns, and Clark notes a 'context of a lingering peasant economy in the process of being destroyed by the enclosures, the loss of common land to imposed laws of private property,' with Fisher responding to city planning and law-making both contemporaneously and historically.[180] Fisher's 'city poetry', then, unsettles the tenuous boundary between the natural and the artificial in order to reconsider enclosure's influence on twentieth-century landscape poetry, moving beyond an environmental narrative of loss, a balance between what Stephen Daniels and Briony McDonagh call 'narratives of appropriation and dispossession'.[181] 'Dirt' grows out of legal processes, suggesting both the implications of enclosure and the impact on the material earth itself, recalling Fisher's emphasis on 'paradox' rather than unification or straightforward linking. Therefore Fisher's 'thinking' with Birmingham (re)negotiates between the natural and the artificial as well as the past and the present, creating a paradoxical representation which refuses to be clearly identified as either urban or rural, historical or contemporaneous.

These elusive or unstable identifications of types of environment can also be found in Skoulding's *Remains of a Future City.* The collection crosses thresholds between the literal and the metaphorical, as well as between past,

[179] Fisher, *Birmingham River,* p.23.
[180] Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment,* p.21.
[181] Stephen Daniels and Briony McDonagh, 'Enclosure Stories: Narratives from Northamptonshire, *Cultural Geographies* 19:1 (2012) 107-121, p.107.

present and future, as Skoulding creates figurative 'remains' of a future city. Yet she signals this imagined formation by referencing specific buildings and architecture: there are walls, houses, towers and castles detailed in the titles of the poems.[182] The titles are taken from Ivan Chtcheglov's 'Formulary for a New Urbanism'.[183] Skoulding responds to Chtcheglov's specific and yet imaginary 'Formulary' in both *Remains of a Future City* and in her 'Absent Cities' essay, finding it significant (in the latter) that 'while appearing to invite an innocent, immediate approach to the city, Chtcheglov's text in fact creates multiple connections with other places'.[184] As well as taking impetus from Chtcheglov's ambiguous cityscape in the title of her poems, Skoulding's use of walking as both a means of navigation through place and a writing method also follows on from Chtcheglov's text. 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' states that 'the main activity of the inhabitants will be CONTINUOUS DRIFTING. The changing of landscapes from one hour to the next will result in total disorientation'.[185] This creates a sense of *dérive*, which Skoulding defines in her academic work as:

> An awareness of the role of the body in space […]. The figure of the walker in the city may recall the nineteenth-century Baudelairean *flâneur*, or the twentieth-century psychogeographer whose *dérive* through the urban unconscious, beginning with Guy Debord and the situationists of the 1950s, continues into contemporary literature.[186]

[182] For instance: 'The Old Walls' p.13, 'The New Bridge' p.14, 'Library' p.20, 'Castle' p.21, 'Temple' p.36, 'Tower' p.38, as well as the more generic 'The Death Quarter' p.26, and 'The Sinister Quarter', p.32.
[183] Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a New Urbanism', pp.1-8.
[184] Skoulding, 'Absent Cities', p. 256.
[185] Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a new urbanism', p. 7.
[186] Zoë Skoulding, *Contemporary Women's Poetry and Urban Space* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.3.

Indeed, Skoulding's dual-place poems appear to mimic Chtcheglov's 'disorientation', using the presence of the 'body in space' to call attention to the physicality of the landscape in contrast with the abstraction of the map.

Like 'Forest with A to Z of Cardiff', 'Preselis with Brussels Street Map' reconfigures the Preselis Hills in Wales through the lens of a map of Brussels:

> Up Europalaan under blue
> reach of sky bare feet in spongy moss
> I need a map to tell me where I'm
> not along the avenue de Stalingrad
> squeal of a meadow pipit[187]

The poem unsettles temporal boundaries, moving between two places at once. Entwistle points out that 'poised between the cartographical "there" of cosmopolitan Brussels and the apparently unmediated, more sensuously three-dimensional (and also bilingual) "here" of upland west Wales, this poem both honours and sends up the notion of site-specificity'.[188] Although *Remains of a Future City* can be positioned within specific landscapes, these sites are in flux, and this is reinforced by Skoulding's tentative approach to mapping and location. Skoulding's representation of cartography is paradoxical: the speaker needs a map to locate him/herself and yet simultaneously refutes the legitimacy of that map. 'Continuous drifting', then, is refigured in Skoulding's distrust of cartography and prescriptive forms of walking. Rather than 'total disorientation', Skoulding dismisses *flâneur*-like city wandering and instead points to international linkages, as she describes: 'my method involved writing in response to specific localities, often close to where I live in north Wales, but

[187] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p.50.
[188] Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender*, p.151.

also in various other European cities, then juxtaposing these texts with phrases from Chtcheglov's manifesto.'[189] Skoulding responds to 'continuous drifting' as an ongoing process of not just metaphorical and literal walking but in the continuous reverberations of the poetic text and its intertextual links.

In the third poem in the 'Columns' sequence, this drifting movement is mirrored by the poem's pace:

> from here the city blooms in
> columns striking the sun as
> rays crumple on impact and
> languages fuse on the tongue[190]

'Columns' forms textual columns which use the space on the page to attempt to mimic the materiality of architectural columns.[191] The lack of punctuation or end-stopped lines creates a flowing pace which contrasts with the regimented form of the columns. Yet this shape could also be representative of trees, and an earlier sequence called 'Through Trees' in *The Mirror Trade* (2004) uses the same technique to represent and reconsider the relationship between trees and text.[192] 'Columns' alludes to Bunting's *Briggflatts*: 'the lit/ streets dislocate the stars we/ steer by', suggesting that the street lights of the city simultaneously interrupt star navigation and provide it through the city's electric lighting system.[193] 'Dislocate' infers a lack of location as well dislocation as a bodily injury, a putting out of place. The reference to Bunting nods to *Briggflatts*'s own Modernist-Romantic friction, as the allusion confirms the negotiation of literary timeframes.

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[189] Skoulding, 'Absent Cities', p. 256.
[190] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p.46.
[191] See appendix 1.
[192] Zoë Skoulding, *The Mirror Trade* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), pp.31-36.
[193] *Briggflatts* states: 'the star you steer by is gone'. Bunting, *Briggflatts*, p.32.

Skoulding's representation of the natural-artificial columns is, then, reinforced and challenged through her poetics, as the column of text calls attention to the limits of how far a poem can mimic the environment. The poem responds to the tension between text and materiality to bring to bear, like Bunting, a sense of permanence and temporality in both environment and language:

> breath
> moves against white space
> grammar turns in this silence
> between buildings we walked
> thinking of nothing the leaves
> yellowed and fell when you
> left there was a gap where the
> words had been[194]

'White space' refers to the space on the page left 'white' by the rigidity and shape of the textual columns, the space between building structures, the white light of sunlight and an absence of knowing: 'thinking of nothing'. Language is implicated both in the formation of buildings and in the natural environment, but at the same time this representation is curtailed: 'there was a gap where the/ words had been'. Language here works as a re-mediatory force, and the unstable temporal mode is confirmed by the frequent shifts in tense. The concept of the body also filters through this 'column'. Whether human or non-human, it is the simultaneous connection and erasure of two figures which finally dissolves the separation between 'city' and language: 'we/ speak ourselves out of each/ other so give me your ears/ your eyes give me your

[194] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p.46.

mouth'.[195] *Remains of a Future City* therefore intertwines architectural, natural and bodily metaphor.

As seen in the dual-place poems, the focus on corporeality is developed through Skoulding's attention to walking and to how walking influences compositional processes, again pointing to the relationship between representation and mimicry. Skoulding's collaborative essay with Ian Davidson discusses how 'in contemporary Wales, the distinctions between rural and urban walking are increasingly blurred.'[196] In this way Skoulding and Davidson deliberately destabilise the Romantic notion of a straightforward walk through a natural environment. Skoulding's appropriation of both Situationist writing and walking themes therefore reinforces the ambiguities of her temporal representations. Entwistle notes how 'Skoulding's anachronising of Chtcheglov's title in *Remains* – positioning us beyond a "future" which is counter-intuitively already exhausted and over – holds at bay a once-radical aesthetics she finds passé as well as provocative'.[197] Therefore, Skoulding continually pulls apart the relationship between the materiality of walking and the elusive nature of language, as evident in 'Building Site':

> woods lie down on floors
> to bounce back
> every word, every word
> you speak
> with the long
> echo of your footsteps down into the mud.[198]

[195] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p.46.
[196] Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding, 'Disobedience: collaborative writing and the walk poem', in *Necessary Steps: Poetry, Elegy, Walking, Spirit*, ed. by David Kennedy (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2007), pp.28-36, p. 29.
[197] Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender*, p.154.
[198] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p.10.

Here, the sound of the speaker's 'every word' bounces off the wood in the building site/forest, yet the act of walking also helps to form what Murray R. Schafer calls a 'soundscape'.[199] The repetitive sound of the speaker's voice reverberates 'down into the mud', absorbing the sound and at the same time evoking the phenomenological experience of walking through mud. The processes of walking thus form a dialogue between past and present similar to Solnit's sense that 'past and present are brought together when you walk as the ancients did or relive some event in history or your own life by retracing its route'.[200] Skoulding takes the notion of 'reliving' further as her poetics suggest that walking creates links between the 'echo' of language, the object of the text and the sounds of the site itself, with the repetition of 'every word' linguistically but not physically recreating the echo. The compositional techniques remake and relive both landscape and representation, 'recycling' textual references. The poetry responds to the wandering metaphors and political implications in historical depictions of walking by refracting any stable understanding of either text or landscape. In 'Absent Cities', Skoulding describes how 'Building Site' has been performed 'along with recordings of construction work in Vienna and Prague', tying her poetic processes to the sounds of both the human voice and industry.[201] This 'site', then, metaphorically presents the site of the landscape, the site of the poem and more literally the site of the recordings.

These challenged boundaries between the natural and the artificial links to Skoulding's own concern for the environment, as she has glossed her work

[199] Murray R. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1994), p.8.
[200] Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p.xv.
[201] Skoulding, 'Absent Cities', p. 257.

as being preoccupied with ecological change. She argues that 'to think beyond the current ecological crisis requires new ways of imagining the relationships between cities and the non-human world.'[202] Skoulding's natural-artificial environments are, therefore, developed through a lens of environmental concern which privileges neither the city nor the country. Despite her concern for the environment, Skoulding's poetry is not 'ecopoetry' in Bate's sense. Bate suggests that ecopoetry aims to avoid the gap between language and environment, searching for 'a clearing beyond the dense undergrowth of the proposition that language is a self-enclosed system', instead asserting that 'works of art can themselves be imaginary states of nature, imaginary ideal ecosystems […] poetry is the song of the earth.'[203] 'Building Site', though, is concerned with 'unsettling the ground/ with every new inflection', with the natural-artificial 'building site' forming a linguistic soundscape, and vice versa.[204] This is not a poem formed by the 'song of the earth', but a complex negotiation between language, sound and text, as Skoulding traverses the boundaries between representations of the built environment and representations of forests, repeatedly pointing to the artifice of the poem itself. Entwistle calls this an 'attentive wandering of the densely packed networks of the "almost/not quite", urban/rural, national/international, virtual/actual cultural ecology of twentieth-first-century Wales'.[205] Therefore *Remains of a Future City* 'disorientates' insofar as it critiques temporal boundaries, links between places, the role of cartography and the distinction between the natural and the artificial. Skoulding's poetics is one which deliberately intertwines

[202] Skoulding, 'Cathedrals of Sand', p. 120.
[203] Bate, *The Song of the Earth,* p. 248, p. 250, p. 251.
[204] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p. 10.
[205] Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender*, p.158.

cultural and socio-political engagement with an attention to environment, as her compositional processes reflect the instability both of the text and the landscape.

2.4 The two stones

Fisher's two-stone image in *Birmingham River* mirrors the tense dialogue between the natural and the artificial that contemporary 'city' poets necessarily have to negotiate:

> Keeping
> a check on each other, rounded, odd-sized,
> needing the company,
> maybe they were the world's
> testicles, or its nipples, or
> its mismatched eyes, like mine; maybe its little
> buttocks or big toes. Playing safe,
> and liking to feel at home wherever I live,
> I keep them with me.[206]

The speaker keeps the two stones, a split version of the 'omphalos stone', the centre of everything, with him/herself at all times. Paradoxically, this disruption of the centre into two parts enables the speaker to 'feel at home' whilst still continually moving, suggesting that there is in fact no identifiable centre. Instead, the stones evoke 'the world', as Fisher uses bodily metaphor to intertwine the human and the non-human whilst still refusing any clear identification of what the centre of the body/world might be. This mutable depiction of two stones acts as a microcosm for the way in which *Birmingham River* traverses the relationships between nature and the city, between past and present, between centre and periphery.

[206] Fisher, *Birmingham River*, p.14.

It is in such a way that MacSweeney and Skoulding also challenge environmental binaries: from MacSweeney's Fauvist-like figurative landscapes and fraught tensions between modernity and nostalgia to Skoulding's disorientation of architectural structures, location and the poem's form. Indeed, Jarvis suggests that 'it seems that even the city itself can be transformed if it is understood within the larger environmental context of the non-human'.[207] Fisher, MacSweeney and Skoulding each reconsider and challenge the notion of a clearly identifiable cityscape, using natural-artificial imagery to debunk conventional oppositional categories of the rural and the urban. As well as transforming the 'city itself' through the lens of 'the non-human', then, the poets also do the reverse: they approach their representations of nature through their exploratory depictions of cities. As Williams points out at the close of *The Country and the City*, a reduction of the complexities of society to binary concepts should be avoided, and instead 'the persistence [of the notion of the country and city] depends on the forms and images and ideas being changed'.[208] Fisher, Skoulding and MacSweeney therefore affirm the significance of natural-artificial relations whilst at the same time transforming them, using their poetic processes to challenge representations and understandings of environmental stability.

[207] Jarvis, 'Barry MacSweeney's Moorland Romance', p.191.
[208] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.289.

3 Site and Place

3.1 'Where in the world/ or the wood are we?'

Developing on a destabilisation of the dichotomy of the natural and the artificial, contemporary poetry also pushes at the boundaries of what 'place' might signify. This is particularly well demonstrated by Riley's four-part pamphlet *Alstonefield: Stanzas Unfinished* (1995), which opens with a hand-drawn map of Alstonefield in the Peak District, accompanied by the following note: 'Alstonefield, usually spelled Alstonfield, is a limestone village in North Staffordshire at OS grid reference SK132556.'[1] In the full five-part version *Alstonefield: A Poem* (2003), the sentence continues, adding that the village is 'on high ground between the valleys of the rivers Dove and Manifold, close to the west edge of the former.'[2] In both editions Riley prefaces *Alstonefield* with multiple locating devices: the place name title, the map, the village name and the grid reference. Yet despite these identifiers, *Alstonefield: A Poem* does not straightforwardly engage with a clearly located place. Instead, Riley's playful alteration of the place name reflects how his poetic processes intertwine with his interest in challenging stable geographies, as the wide ranging place names challenge the apparent loco-specificity of the text, moving between the local to the global.[3] Riley's place names circle Alstonefield in a 'radius', situating the

[1] Peter Riley, *Alstonefield: Stanzas Unfinished* (London: Oasis/Shearsman, 1995), p.5. See appendix 2.
[2] Peter Riley, *Alstonefield: A Poem* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003), p.v. (This chapter will use the Carcanet edition for its analysis rather than the incomplete 1995 edition).
[3] Riley names the locality of Alstonefield, areas of the Peak District such as Wolfscote Dale and Beresford Dale, and his home town of Cambridge. The place names also extend from the

text around the edges and in the 'vicinity' of Alstonefield: the preface states that 'almost all the local place-names in the poem are in its vicinity, within a radius of about three miles'.[4] Thus although *Alstonefield* ostensibly appears to be loco-specific, it also deliberately puts this specificity under pressure. Additionally, the preface reveals how the premise and composition of the poem is rooted in Riley's own walking experiences: 'as I was strolling among the fields south of the village in the evening I suddenly had the distinct sensation that it mattered, this place'.[5] Riley's affective epiphany that Alstonefield 'mattered' comes not from an exploration of the village itself, but of the fields south of it, creating a bridge between two sites and bringing each to bear on the other. The sense of place in *Alstonefield* is therefore formulated through the poem's disorientations and ambiguities, refuting any fixed place or site. It is in this way that the themes of place naming and walking reveal interactions between precise location and more ambiguous representations of place, presenting an opportunity for a reframing of what both 'place' and 'site' might mean for contemporary nature poetry.

Certainly, contemporary poetry that engages with a specific place, location or region is frequently labelled 'poetry of place'.[6] Using 'place' as a macrocosmic term for the majority of poetry which takes geography,

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regional names of Mansfield, Derby, and Manchester, to Europe, spanning the nations of Italy, Holland, and Poland. Ultimately the names range as far as Africa, including Mozambique, Ba-Benzéllé, and Zäire. Riley, *Alstonefield*, p. 26, p.27, p.28, p.29, p.30, p.38, p.42, p.45, p.58, p.68, p.78, p.79, p.80, p.82, p.87, p.88, p.98.

[4] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.v. This sense of 'vicinity' is simultaneously autobiographical, as Riley lived near Alstonefield in the 1970s.

[5] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.1.

[6] Eric Falci, 'Place, Space, and Landscape', *A Concise Companion to Post-War British and Irish Poetry*, ed. by Nigel Alderman and C.D. Blanton (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p.219. Falci usefully traces post-war 'poetry of place' as emerging from the work of regional modernists like Basil Bunting, arguing that 'the importance of locality in later modernism […] was a mechanism for consolidating and extending the gains of modernism within an alternate frame, while also offering a looping path back to certain aspects of English pastoral poetry, particularly the work of William Wordsworth and Thomas Hardy, central avatars of place poetry in English', p. 203.

topography, environment, landscape, (and all the variants of these) as its subject maintains a simple yet ambiguous indication of the genre of place poetry. Indeed, Alexander and Cooper point out that 'if place can be defined as a spatial location invested with human meaning, then the poetics of place refers to the ways in which such meanings are produced, understood and contested in literary texts', suggesting that poetry of place is both dependent on and independent of this literal 'spatial location'.[7] Just as Riley's depiction of Alstonefield moves both within and out of the particular 'radius' of the village, contemporary poetics of place, as Alexander and Cooper detail, 'often equivocate between experiences of location and dislocation, convergence and dispersal, being and unselving'.[8] The possibility of 'unselving' threatens to dissolve any stable state of being or identity, an undoing of any singular lyric perspective. Therefore the disorientating capability of contemporary poetics creates potential for a consideration of how the relationship between place and site-specific locations, or the general and the particular, can be radically undermined. This means that a refreshed understanding of 'place poetry' can be uncovered, what Eric Falci calls 'both evacuation and reinvigoration' of the terminologies of place in poetry.[9] Riley's *Alstonefield*, Finlay's *White Peak/Dark Peak* (2010) and Clark's *The Hundred Thousand Places* (2009) and *The Path to the Sea* (2005) are all 'place' texts insofar as they engage with or respond to particular places or regions: Derbyshire for Riley and Finlay, and

[7] Neal Alexander and David Cooper, 'Introduction: Poetry and Geography', in *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-war Poetry*, ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.1-18, p.5.
[8] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction: Poetry and Geography', p.5.
[9] Falci, 'Place, Space and Landscape', p.219.

the Scottish Highlands for Clark.[10] Yet this chapter will suggest that the poets deliberately and consistently use their transformative poetics and 'unselving' perspectives to reimagine what the relationship between specific locations and wider places or regions might be.

Putting definitions and understanding of place under pressure is not reserved only for literature: Cresswell, for instance, points out that 'place is everywhere'.[11] If place is 'everywhere', then perhaps 'site' can be understood as meaning one particular position, a smaller location found within this more expansive sense of place.[12] It is because of this that it might be expected that definitions of 'site' and 'place' are mutually determined. Yet it is also this interdependency which means that the relationship between site and place cannot necessarily be clearly untangled. For instance, *Alstonefield* creates a pastoral retreat and return, moving between Cambridge and Alstonefield, with 'the solitary vale/ saying wait for me and I'll come back some day'.[13] Without the speaker's presence, this Staffordshire valley becomes 'solitary', but at the same time it is only at this point that it connects with the speaker: the interactions between Derbyshire, Cambridge and the speaker are determined by both movement and distance. Riley's depiction of the tension between individual locations and general place reflects the fluctuating definitions of the terms themselves: Jane Rendell observes that 'it is interesting to note how […] the desire to 'unfix' one term, be it space, place or site, usually involves the

[10] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak* (Derby Arts Development Group: Morning Star, 2010), Thomas A. Clark, *The Path to the Sea* (Todmorden: Arc Publications, 2005), Thomas A. Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2009).
[11] Cresswell, *Place*, p.2.
[12] Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'site', as a noun, as 'the place or position occupied by some specified thing. Freq. implying original or fixed position'. *Oxford English Dictionary*, '*Site*, *n*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 26 November 2012].
[13] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.42.

'fixing' of another term.'[14] Therefore readdressing the concept of 'place' through the lens of 'site' necessitates a two-way process, a continual movement between apparent ambiguity and specificity.

Ironically, definitions of site and specificity are frequently obfuscated. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has fifteen definitions of 'specific', and similar variations and repetitions occur within geographical and theoretical definitions.[15] For example, the place-philosopher Edward S. Casey initially suggests that site and location are essentially synonyms: 'when place has been subjected to simple location, it becomes […] "site".'[16] For Casey, 'site' is identified as merely a location within place, a synecdoche of place. Although site and place in Casey's later work *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1998) are still intertwined, he argues that 'place and space alike will find their most exact description as site-specification within a uniformly distributed plane of determination'.[17] Place and space become both connected and more easily identified through the notion that the concepts both involve an element of 'site-specification'. Yet Casey also notes that:

> Site does not situate. Space […] ends by failing to locate things or events in any sense other than that of pinpointing positions on a planiform geometric or cartographic grid. Place, on the other hand, situates, and it does so richly and diversely. It locates things in regions whose most complete expression is neither geometric nor cartographic.[18]

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[14] Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), p.20.
[15] *Oxford English Dictionary*, '*Specific, adj*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 26 November 2012].
[16] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a New Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p.65.
[17] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (London: University of California Press, 1998), p.201.
[18] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.201.

Despite the etymological link between 'site' and 'situate', the notion of site does not, in itself, necessarily denote clearly situated specificity. Instead 'place […] situates', as Casey's definitions move between 'pinpointing positions' and a wider sense of place as beyond cartographic representation or understanding. Although Casey's emphasis is on the potential of 'place' rather than 'site', his unsettling of the two categories reveals the significance of such ambiguities and nuances. Understanding place and site not merely as binary terms but instead as coming into friction and interplay will allow the concept of 'place' in poetry to be unpacked. These slippery interactions will be traced in contemporary poetry's ambulatory depictions of location, paying particular attention to poetry which refutes fixed location.

Alongside these oscillating understandings of place, site and space in geography, site-specific art and performance theory have also engaged with the concept of site, stemming from the Land Art movement of the 1960s. Artists and writers such as Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy and Ian Hamilton Finlay interlinked concepts of site-specificity in art and performance with sculpture and material engagement with the environment.[19] Nicholas Alfrey, Joy Sleeman and Ben Tufnell write that '[l]and art is […] best understood as an "attitude" to landscape. It describes how artists approached a subject that was both familiar and simultaneously in the process of being newly considered in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the light of space exploration and

[19] Jeffrey Kastner points out in the preface to *Land and Environmental Art* that Land Art 'projects are fundamentally sculptural (in the sense of creating in three dimensions) and/or performance based (in terms of their orientations towards process, site and temporality). […] It includes site-specific sculptural projects that utilise the materials of the environment to create new forms or to adjust our impressions of the panorama; programmes that import new, unnatural objects into the natural setting with similar goals; time-sensitive individual activities in the landscape; collaborative, socially aware interventions.' Jeffrey Kastner, 'Preface', in *Land and Environmental Art*, ed. by Brian Wallis and Jeffrey Kastner (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2005 [1998]), pp.10-17, p.12.

emerging ecological concerns.'[20] Riley, Clark and Finlay respond to this legacy of Land Art by engaging with its focus on the relationship between physical environmental engagement and representation. In fact, Lytle Shaw recognises in *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics* (2013) that:

> [The] odd oscillation between understandings of place as immobile, exterior and geographical on the one hand, and mobile, bodily and biographical on the other, prepares the way for site-specific art practices in the 1960s that, in closer dialogue with the linguistic turn in the humanities, begin consciously to explore the problems both of what, precisely, might count as a site and of how we might frame and present it in language.[21]

The tensions between place and site can therefore be explored in both material and linguistic terms in poetry.

Materiality, representation and the unstable concepts of fixity and time found in Land Art and performance are elucidated by attention to geography and place. In fact, the potential interaction between geographical and performative understandings of place and location can, as David Matless points out in conversation with the performer and academic Mike Pearson, create productive interplay between 'the autobiographical and the positional':

> Geography and performance studies carry different expectations concerning the ability or obligation of disciplines to move across different registers of material. In geography such a move, whether dramatic or subtle, might surprise or even offend disciplinary convention. […] In the traffic between disciplines geography might consider how performance technique offers other renditions of region, obliging shifts in the geographical register. [22]

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[20] Nicholas Alfrey, Joy Sleeman and Ben Tufnell, 'Introduction', in *Uncommon Ground: Land Art in Britain 1966-1979*, ed. by Nicholas Alfrey, Joy Sleeman and Ben Tufnell (London: Hayward Publishing, 2013), pp.11-12.
[21] Lytle Shaw, *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), p.9.
[22] David Matless and Mike Pearson, 'A Regional Conversation', *Cultural Geographies*, 19:1 (2012), 123-129, p.124.

Matless and Pearson inter-mingle their perspectives on 'region' to reassess what geographical 'fieldwork, local study, and survey' might mean when re-approached through an unsettled understanding of fixed location and site. Yet geographical field work, Land Art and experimental performance work often remain wedded to practice-based iterations of site, meaning that interpretations of site and place tend to be rooted in particular tangible and physical localities as well as lived and embodied experience. Although Nick Kaye understands performance theory as 'a reconsideration of the operation of language in relation to location and site', it seems that the metaphorical possibilities offered by contemporary poetry forms an appropriate and refreshing starting point for refiguring the relationship between site and place.[23] As Shaw points out, it is language which offers a crucial 'problem' for how site and place interact, and the mediatory role of poetry is particularly appropriate, taking Land Art's balance between representation and the physical landscape further. The poetry of Riley, Clark and Finlay therefore offers an intersection between the fixed concept of a literary text, physical landscapes and more metaphorical representations of environment and place, as each poet's interrogations of material sites and places reverberate into their formal poetic processes.

Comparisons can be drawn between the apparent fixity and permanence of a literary text and the idea of fixed, located 'dwelling' in the landscape. In fact, Martin Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling' has been key for ecocritical interpretations of literature, resulting in an understanding of nature poetry as

[23] Nick Kaye, 'Introduction: Site-Specifics', in *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place, and Documentation,* ed. by Nick Kaye *(*London: Routledge, 2000), pp.1-12, p.3.

permanently tied to particular places and types of environment.[24] Conventionally, the association between dwelling in place and literature can be found in Heidegger's 'Poetically Man Dwells'.[25] Heidegger argues that 'dwelling', which is also 'the existence of man', is necessitated by poetry, because: '[p]oetry first causes dwelling to be dwelling. Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through what do we attain to a dwelling place? Through building'.[26] Transforming *poiesis* from 'making' into 'building', Heidegger forms an interconnected understanding of human and non-human processes. For Heidegger, poetry is 'building' and 'dwelling on the earth', both the formation of place and place itself, revealing the paradoxical tension between the material and the linguistic: 'poetry does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it. Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling.'[27] Poetry and dwelling 'on the earth' are inextricably linked and yet not linked, as Heidegger argues that 'they remain distinctly in the distinctness of their nature […]. We can only say "the same" if we think difference'.[28] This dialectic is self-perpetuating, and so the sense that dwelling is self-reinforcing creates a level of fixity, as David Cooper notes: 'in Heideggerian terms […] dwelling is inextricably connected to notions of rootedness and situatedness; place is

[24] For instance, Garrard notes that '"Dwelling" is not a transient state; rather, it implies the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work.' Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p.108.
[25] Martin Heidegger, '…Poetically Man Dwells…', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: First Perennial Classics, 2001), pp.211-227.
[26] Heidegger, '…Poetically Man Dwells…', p.212, p.213.
[27] Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: First Perennial Classics, 2001), pp.143-159, p.147. Heidegger, '…Poetically Man Dwells…', p.216.
[28] Heidegger, '…Poetically Man Dwells…', p.216.

understood to be defined by ideas of fixity and stability.'[29] Heidegger's paradox of dwelling therefore maintains a level of fixity and permanence.

For Bate, it follows that the connection between poetry and dwelling allows for an understanding of poetry not as mediation, but rather as the signified itself, an 'experience' of environment:

> Ecopoetry is not a description of dwelling with the earth, not a disengaged thinking about it, but an experiencing of it. [...] In Adorno and Horkheimer's phrase, the poem might re-enchant the earth. It can only do so if it is understood as an experiencing of the world, not a description of it.[30]

Bate's notion of the 'song of the earth' is an attempt to bridge the gap between the world and language, as he suggests that poetry is the medium through which the earth can be experienced. Yet this comes up against the way in which poetry is necessarily always mediation, offering not the landscape itself, nor a mimetic response to it, but a representation of it. Indeed, Theodor Adorno makes the point that:

> Since, in Hegel's dictum, there is nothing between heaven and earth that is not mediated, thought remains faithful to the idea of immediacy only in and through what is mediated; conversely, it falls prey to the mediated as soon as it tries to grasp the unmediated directly.[31]

Adorno's elucidation of representation lies anchored in the notion that 'immediacy' can, paradoxically, only occur through mediation: mediation takes place as soon as thought 'tries to grasp the unmediated directly'. Bate's sense that 'dwelling' results in an immediate enchantment of the world through

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[29] David Cooper, 'The Poetics of Place and Space: Wordsworth, Norman Nicholson and the Lake District', *Literature Compass*, 5:4 (2008), 807-821, p.808.
[30] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.42, p.167.
[31] Theodor Adorno, 'The Essay as Form,' in *Notes to Literature*, Volume One, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991 [1958]), pp.3-23, p. 20.

poetry is curtailed by this paradox. Poetry cannot present the earth mimetically, as mimesis cannot be 'thought' or occur without the mediation of language. Without language we cannot begin to 'grasp the unmediated' environment: as Heidegger notes, 'it is language that tells us about the nature of a thing, provided that we respect language's own nature'.[32] Therefore poetry's paradoxical negotiations between environment and language provide a starting point for considering how far poetry can represent either site or place directly, and whether either concept can be depicted in a stable way. If a direct relationship between text and place is transformed by language, then language can reflect as well as unsettle the ambiguities between types of location.

Rather than working within the broader notion of 'place poetry', then, a reconsideration of the relationship between site and place encourages a destabilisation of mimetic poetic processes. In fact, Heidegger develops his metaphor of building and making in 'Building Dwelling Thinking', which states that:

> The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream. […] The bridge is a thing of its *own* kind; for it gathers the fourfold in *such* a way that it allows a *site* for it. But only something *that is itself a location* can make space for site. The location is not already there before the bridge is.[33]

Like his concept of dwelling, Heidegger's bridge suggests that location, site and the earth occur simultaneously, through a 'gathering'. This gathering metaphor helps to readjust the relationship between place, site and poetry: poetry 'gathers' and figuratively makes 'space for site', rather than mimetically

[32] Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p.144.
[33] Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p. 150, p.151.

mirroring it or even producing it.[34] Heidegger's bridge image suggests a similarly fraught relationship between earth and location: '[t]he bridge does not first come to a location to stand in it; rather, a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge'.[35] The bridge thus forms a connective point between the material earth and the space of location, whilst remaining a 'thing of its own kind'. Rather than Bate's understanding of dwelling and poetry as the same essence, the bridge is a two-way process between landscape and site, or place and site: the bridge is a metaphor for mediation. Indeed, J. Hillis Miller points out that the bridge gathers 'in a way that is analogous to the way language gathers', as it simultaneously interlinks and disconnects materiality and metaphor.[36] Like the paradox of dwelling, the bridge offers up a way of connecting and yet separating two things, such as site and place and landscape and language: poetry would not 'come into existence' without site or location, and site or location is represented, or 'gathered', through the mediation of poetry. Unlike dwelling, the bridge emphasises movement to-and-fro, moving between one thing and another.

Walking across the bridge therefore creates a connective movement between two points. Relatedly, walking in and through place has long been associated with nature poetry, whether in William Cowper's *The Task* (1785) or Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1798-1850), as the eighteenth-century 'Grand Tour' and the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1781-88) and *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782) resulted in a close bond between

[34] Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p.147.
[35] Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p.152.
[36] J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.222.

walking, thinking and poetic composition.[37] In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as Alexander and Cooper point out, what has provided 'common ground' for such walking poets is:

> The imaginative importance given to the spatial practices of walking, witnessing and mapping which occur within place […]. Writers from both post-Romantic and neo-Modernist traditions have been attracted to the imaginative possibilities opened up by the embodied rhythms of walking over and across the landscape.[38]

The 'imaginative possibilities of walking' therefore remain wedded to poetic processes and to the 'rhythms' of walking through landscape. On the one hand, walking can be easily linked to traditional prose forms such as the linear narrative and progressive sentence structure, evident in recent 'New Nature Writing', in which texts such as Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* (2007), Robinson's *Connemara* trilogy, Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts's *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (2011), and Simon Armitage's *Walking Home: Travels with a Troubadour on the Pennine Way* (2012) use walking as a way of navigating through particular regions, places, or types of environment in order to creatively reimagine and engage with that landscape.[39]

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[37] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)* ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin Books, 1995), William Cowper, *The Task* (Ilkley: Scolar Press, 1973 [1785]), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. by Angela Scholar, ed. by Patrick Coleman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1781-88]), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, trans. by Peter France (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979 [1782]). Rebecca Solnit credits Rousseau as the person who 'laid the groundwork for the ideological edifice within which walking itself would be enshrined'. Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p.17.

[38] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction', p.11.

[39] 'The New Nature Writing' remains undefined generically, but the label has remained in use since Jason Cowley's edition of *Granta* 101 (2008), <http://www.granta.com/Archive/102> [accessed 19 October 2014]. Robinson's texts in particular reveal a deliberately layered approach to narrative and landscape, creating a metaphorical sense of walking which moves not just across the land but down it, reaching into geological, environmental, social and personal histories.

On the other hand, poetry responds to walking and place not as description but as experience, as Roger Gilbert points out: '[the walk poem] takes as its subject not a landscape, an essentially static entity, but an experience'.[40] Yet the poem itself presents a 'static entity', as the association between walking and writing is formed by an inherent tension between the embodied, physical experience of walking and the inert form of the poem itself. Robin Jarvis's study traces this back to Romantic legacies:

> In Romantic writing, walking, for all its self-evident differences from other modes of travel, is rarely a parochialism of the body; and while we need to take due account of what flows from the material character of pedestrianism, we should recognise too that walking leads a mental and aesthetic life that is both distinct from, and continuous with, its bodily one. There is nothing more concrete than putting one foot in front of the other, but walking is also an idea, or a form of thinking.[41]

Contemporary walking poetry thus appropriates and responds to the balance between walking as 'a mental and aesthetic life' and walking as an embodied experience. The mediation between the human body, the physical landscape and the poem is therefore appropriate for a reframing of the relationship between generic place and specific sites, as the ambulatory movement created in walking mirrors the metaphorical shifts between types of location. Whether literal or metaphorical, walking creates oscillation and movement between one thing and another, both connected and demarcated, like Heidegger's bridge: 'bridges lead in many ways […]. Always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro'.[42] In this way contemporary walking poetry engages and transforms literary convention, the

[40] Roger Gilbert, *Walks in the World: Representation and Experience in Modern American Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.8.
[41] Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), p.4.
[42] Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p.150.

fraught relationship between site and place as well as the tension between literal and metaphorical notions of walking.

This chapter will therefore reframe the conventional association of place and environment poetry with 'dwelling' by paying attention to the 'bridge', to the fraught intersection between material landscape and its poetic representation. Riley's uncertain depiction of location in the preface to *Alstonefield* indicates how walking and place naming encourage a consideration of place and site as obfuscated or even conflicting, and these themes in Finlay and Clark provide useful textual parallels, as each poet uses walking as a base for their texts. In fact, place naming and walking provide a potential juncture between pause and movement. The relationship between the apparently static signification of a place name and the embodied movement of walking affirms the comparison between fixed site and general places, as Michel De Certeau points out in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984): 'the relationships between the direction of a walk […] and the meaning of words […] situate two sorts of apparently contrary movements, one extrovert (to walk is to go outside), the other introvert (a mobility under the stability of the signifier).'[43] Language and place interact in a cityscape that is, for De Certeau, shaped by disorientation and fragments, suggesting that moving through and in place is bound up with literal-metaphorical concerns:

> Linking acts and footsteps, opening meanings and directions, these words operate in the name of an emptying-out and wearing-away of their primary role. They become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geographic on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning.[44]

[43] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, 1984), p.103.
[44] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.105.

The ambiguities of place names and their paradoxically 'rich indetermination' grants a metaphorical level to walking, layering a metaphorical 'poetic geographic on top of the geography of the literal'. For De Certeau, place is enacted or 'unfolded' through the corporeal experience of walking, memory and performative language. In this way walking, place naming and poetics can converge, suggesting ambiguities of location as well as of meaning. As with Riley's simultaneously ambiguous 'vicinity' of *Alstonefield* and the specific grid reference, poetic depictions of site and place consistently wrestle with the relationship between precision and abstraction.

3.2 Place Names

Naming a location or place associates the physical landscape with a linguistic signifier. This process appears to intertwine the human with the non-human, allowing for a relatively straightforward way of identifying specific sites and places. Yet, as Tim Robinson points out in his prose text *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara* (1997), 'there is a difference between a mere location and a real place, between a placename [sic] and a map reference; there may even be conflict between them'.[45] Robinson's identification of the friction or conflict between 'a real place' and a 'mere location' or site is reinforced by processes of naming, creating disconnect between the material landscape and its cultural signification. This suggests that place naming in poetry serves two purposes: both to attempt to locate the poem in a specific site or place and yet,

[45] Tim Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1997), p.162.

at the same time, to point to the gap between the signifier and the physical place. This ambiguity reflects the unstable relationship between site and place, particularly as naming is generally associated with an element of specificity.[46] Place naming in poetry necessarily participates in a longer convention of place name poetry, well-associated with Wordsworth's 'Poems on the Naming of Places' in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798-1800), in which the speaker grants unmarked places their own names, using language to give meaning to site.[47] The preface to the collection states:

> By Persons resident in the country and attached to rural objects, many places will be found unnamed or of unknown names, where little Incidents will have occurred, or feelings been experienced, which will have given to such places a private and peculiar Interest. From a wish to give some sort of record to such Incidents or renew the gratification of such Feelings, Names have been given to Places by the Author and some of his Friends – and the following Poems written in consequence.[48]

For Wordsworth, places are granted meaning through experience and it is naming which reinvigorates this, creating a tension between physical place and metaphorical intent. Indeed, Alexander and Cooper note that:

> Many poems instantaneously foreground their loco-specificity through the titular invocation of a place name. The tradition of the place name poem is inextricably indexed, of course, to a line of pastoralism which runs through English poetry from the Romantics to Thomas Hardy to Edward Thomas to A.E. Housman to Eliot.[49]

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[46] Barry identifies place naming (in the context of 'urban' writing) as the process by which site becomes specific: 'avoiding the use of street names or place names' is '"urban-generic" rather than "urban-specific"'. Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City*, p.16.
[47] William Wordsworth, 'Poems on the Naming of Places', *Lyrical Ballads,* ed. by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005 [1968]), pp.261-270.
[48] Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, p.261.
[49] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction', p.8. Alexander and Cooper are careful not to demarcate between Romantic and Modernist modes here, instead using 'pastoralism' as a connective generic thread.

Place naming therefore connects to literary convention as well as to geographical location, creating an interlinked relationship between place names as literal signifiers and their metaphorical potential. Indeed, Miller goes so far as to ask 'do […] [place names] have a function beyond that of mere setting or metaphorical adornment?', drawing out the apparent dichotomy between metaphorical poetic processes and landscape as 'setting'.[50]

The 'setting' of *Alstonefield* is a night walk through the Peak District and environs of Alstonefield, with a simultaneously singular and doubled voice forming the narrative of the walk. Alexander's essay on *Alstonefield* argues:

> *Alstonefield* is […] a densely "loco-specific" text, mapping its concerns and imagery not only in relation to the villages, hills and dales that most obviously mark the area's topography, but also naming farms, houses, pathways, tumuli and geological features in a manner that suggests both deep local knowledge and scrupulous topographical exactitude.[51]

Alexander's indication of 'loco-specificity' in *Alstonefield* affirms how Riley's representation of the area is formed through naming, geographical knowledge and historical awareness. Yet at the same time Alexander admits that this only 'suggests' such knowledge, recognising that Riley's apparent specificity is both decidedly ambiguous and potentially figurative. In fact, place naming in *Alstonefield* deliberately creates fluctuation between the generic and the specific, as Riley uses place names to locate generic areas of the Peak District as well as specific parts of Alstonefield and other countries. The place naming is therefore decidedly unstable, reflecting the ambulatory nature of the poem.

[50] Miller, *Topographies*, p.7.
[51] Neal Alexander, 'Where Lives Converge: Peter Riley and the Poetics of Place', *Poetry and Geography*, pp.134-147, p.137.

In part II, for instance, the speaker reflects on previous walks from his/her guesthouse:

> Hanging on Thor's lip, the whirlpool cave
> hung over the valley while the miner's hammer
> sounds traces of enriched water to an under-
> ground palace shining with promises. Take
> what's available and depart: a gentlemanly
> mode in the bed of state. I don't blame you
> for running love against profit, O lubric self,
> but I know the victim well. I know the sore
> throat, the scratched palm, the sleeping bag
> in the shop doorway. I hear the passing bell.[52]

Riley compares the experience of mining in the valley underneath Thor's Lip in the Peak District with the walker's stay at the bed and breakfast. 'Take/ what's available and depart: a gentlemanly/ mode in the bed of state' evokes the economic processes of the mining industry, state and class structures and marks the speaker's experience in the inn: 'now the narrow breakfast while the world/ stands outside garmented in fall'.[53] Indeed, Alexander notes how the region acts a meeting point between types of landscape: 'the Peak District itself might be thought of as a kind of "middle ground" located between the English midlands and the industrial north', and certainly *Alstonefield* is preoccupied with the way in which different or opposing landscape modes might come together.[54] Geographically, Alstonefield acts as a kind of contact zone: Tony Baker suggests that the region is 'a hub that receives voices from all sides and has nothing to do with any of them except to let them meet'.[55] Thus 'Thor's lip' and its mythological connotations references a specific site in

[52] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.12.
[53] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.12.
[54] Alexander, 'Where Lives Converge', p.136.
[55] Tony Baker, 'A Démarrage, a Letter and a Postscript, Concerning (Mostly) Peter Riley's *Alstonefield'*, *The Poetry of Peter Riley*, *The Gig* 4/5 (1999/2000), 167-184, p.167.

the area as well as being transformed by the obfuscating circularity of the narrative, which moves between the domestic space of the inn to the profits of mining and, finally, vagrancy and poverty.

The narrative jumps forward, moving from the security of the bed and breakfast to a search for shelter, emphasising the liminal space between walking and resting during a journey:

> Not quite finished, the day pulls
> hard towards Stoke and gets us to the
> George Inn. The food is good and cheap
> the mild is strong and the hope is of
> worthiness, possibly too as I walk back
> finger inter finger with you on the dark road
> each in performance integral, are we. I trust so.
> The dark is deeper when the trust is stronger.[56]

Both the walker's stamina and the day are 'not quite finished', as the driving metaphor propels the journey onwards. The day 'pulls/ hard towards Stoke', emphasising the agency of the time of day instead of the mode of travel or speed of locomotion. Rather than heading specifically towards the George Inn, 'Stoke' is used as a generic marker for the direction of the Inn, transforming the place name. Throughout *Alstonefield* the 'George Inn' acts as marker in the text, a signal for pause and rest: 'so the George again (suddenly it's dark)'.[57] Yet the inn does not clearly denote linear progression and the passing of time, instead acting as a textual point of reference. In fact, the first reference to shelter is in the deliberately ambiguous reference to 'the B&B', where the speaker states 'now I sleep in Alstonefield', suggesting both the location of the

[56] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.13.
[57] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.26.

bed and breakfast but at the same time distorting any clarity of location: the speaker is sleeping somewhere in Alstonefield, whether indoors or outdoors.[58]

The walk is also unstable temporally, as the speaker imagines, remembers and reimagines owning a farmhouse in the area in the longest section of the poem, part V:

> I mention it in passing
> as I pass it and it passed me in 1973 and we all pass
> the world's small and peaceful places with a touch
> of despair.[59]

Although the house is only identified as 'it', Riley's note to the first reference to Harecops in part IV situates this in some context. The speaker in *Alstonefield* can be tentatively linked to Riley himself, and he explains the biographical implications of the farmhouse as follows:

> Harecops: isolated Georgian stone farmhouse on the ridge of land between the Dove and Manifold valleys, with a view towards Wolfscote Hill, inhabited by the author and his family for four years in the 1970s. It is passed again rather more slowly in the middle of Part V.[60]

By part V, the narrator has moved from living in Harecops to a nostalgic desire, to an apocalyptic urge for 'a corner when everything else was sold'.[61] The opportunity passes temporally and physically, 'slowly', as the narrator walks past the lodge. Although the location is not named specifically in part V, this fragment does not 'pass' but instead remains encoded by the repetition and the reference in the notes, forming another textual signal which sits contrastingly with the narrator's aside of 'I mention it in passing'. Despite the

[58] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.11.
[59] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.69.
[60] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.104. In comparison, Alexander notes that the speaker is 'clearly a version of Riley himself'. Alexander, 'Where lives converge', p.137.
[61] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.69.

fact that the house denotes a specific 'site', it is the place's affective properties and echoing memories which remain significant. Indeed, the lodge is not clearly fixed in place and it shifts between individual and collective experience, as 'we all pass/ the world's small and peaceful places.'[62]

Extrapolating from one lodge in situ in Alstonefield to a wider point about the world's 'small and peaceful places' develops the 'passing' moment from a specific consideration of one moment and building in site to place more generally. As Alexander and Cooper point out, 'the poetic naming of a place […] opens up imaginative space for meditating on the interpenetrations of geography, selfhood and collective identity'.[63] Just as the speaker passes the house individually and collectively, 'I pass it and it passed me in 1973 and we all pass', *Alstonefield* draws out the relationship between singular and social experience. Riley's obfuscated location allows for a representation of both 'selfhood and collective identity', as the section in part V moves ambiguously between a singular perspective and wider concerns about place:

> Perhaps I could have been happy there.
> Perhaps I could have gone out of my mind in screaming solitude
> and hypochondriac mania without troubling a soul.[64]

The speaker's 'imaginative space' is ambivalent, simultaneously happy and in 'screaming solitude' in the lodge, as Riley ties together individual desire with the need for social interaction. The metaphoric shift from the current walk to previous walks and collective affectivity allows the poem to elide the precision of place naming and challenge the specificity of the affective influence of

[62] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.69.
[63] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction', p.9.
[64] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.69.

'small and peaceful places', disorientating singular site, place or individual experience.

Riley's individual-social tensions tie into the political and personal implications of social restraints on walking, as evident at the beginning of section V:

> It would be specious to pretend
> that any bit of British countryside is anything
> but an agricultural factory marked Piss Off.[65]

Here Riley calls attention to the tension between the parameters of the 'factory' and the boundaries of the countryside, using 'Piss Off' to reveal the social implications involved in naming and signs. Indeed, Ingold records the conventional association of naming with power, stating that:

> Laying hold of particular portions of the earth's surface and transforming them according to their purpose, human beings are deemed to have made them into places. And every place bears the stamp of its creator in the name that has been bestowed upon it. Thus place names bear witness, in the western imagination, to the history of humanity's colonisation and appropriation of nature.[66]

For Ingold, place naming intertwines the non-human with the human, as the signification grants the location a specific cultural, regional and national connotation, much as how here the countryside is simultaneously rural and a 'factory'. In *Alstonefield*, this connection between the non-human and the power of naming also relates to individual freedom, with the semiotics of 'Piss Off' representing power relations and boundary constraints. Alexander sees this section as demonstrating how:

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[65] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.23.
[66] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p.166.

> Industrialism [in the poem] is not something that threatens to intrude upon the peace of the countryside from without but rather a force that manages, shapes and owns it already, excluding the pastoral pedestrian with an aggressive defence of its property rights. Seen in this light, *Alstonefield*'s emphasis upon walking and wandering takes on a more obviously politicised aspect.[67]

The narrator's walk through site becomes an act of trespass through the British countryside as a whole, as Riley pulls apart the distinction between the apparently untouched 'British countryside' and farming as a 'factory', an industrial process. As 'Piss Off' linguistically signifies a physical restraint on unbounded movement, so Riley's place names operate between literal implications and *Alstonefield*'s metaphorical transformations. Riley's representations of natural-industrial processes, the past and the present and individual and collective experience meet, with the shifting place naming troubling specificity or precision. His place naming therefore becomes an act of transgression, of calling attention to the limits of the walk through the Peak District as well as larger social and political implications. The vacillation between literal and metaphorical naming results in an ambiguous representation of site and place: the reader uses the textual markers and place names to navigate through the narrative of the poem even as Riley's unstable naming refuses to clearly denote specific sites or generic places. As a speaker states in section V, 'names change from time to time', both within the poem itself and in cultural terms, with *Alstonefield* playfully bridging the space between literal and metaphorical naming.[68]

Recalling the opening coordinate that appears to locate *Alstonefield*, Finlay's *White Peak/Dark Peak* is a deliberately situated poetic engagement

[67] Alexander, 'Where lives converge', pp.146-147.
[68] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.93.

with clearly marked locations. Like Riley's text, *White Peak/Dark Peak* is located in the Peak District, defining its scope by using OS coordinates, grid references and location descriptions. Finlay describes the work as an 'audio-visual word-map of The Peak District National Park', including text, audio recordings, physical 'letterbox' markers in the landscape and a website to create a layered representation of multiple walks through the area.[69] *White Peak/Dark Peak* was commissioned as part of *re:place* (2009-2011), which is described as a 'programme of site-specific contemporary visual arts commissions across Derbyshire, 2009-2011', aiming to create public engagement through cultural representation by encouraging readers to enact their own walks by using the text.[70] The fact that *White Peak/Dark Peak* emerged out of a commissioning context grants an additional layer of regional specificity, as the work was deliberately constructed for a particular place and audience. Furthermore, the title 're:place' is also layered, with the 're' prefix acting as shorthand for 'regarding' place, and 'replace' suggesting both the act of re-situating and of replacing something that has been discarded, used or lost. As part of a re-placing public project, then, *White Peak/Dark Peak* can be tied to social and cultural considerations of the Peak District, and the focus on community is enhanced by the fact that Finlay collaborated with numerous writers and poets.[71] Ambitiously, the project aims to create a 'word-map' of the Peak District as a whole, but at the same time it works with specific

[69] *White Peak/Dark Peak* website, <http://www.whitepeak-darkpeak.co.uk/> [accessed 19th October 2014].
[70] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[71] The opening page lists the following poets as working with Alec Finlay: Ann Atkinson, Tony Baker, David Cobb, David Gilbert, Rebecca Hall, Alan Halsey, Hamish Ironside, Judy Kendall, Martin Lucas, India McKellar, Geraldine Monk, Peter Riley, Mark Rutter, John Sewell, Andrew Shimield, Caroline Smith, Ian Storr, David Troupes, Laura Watts, River Wolton.

locations and sites which are determined by individual letterboxes in the landscape and OS markers in the text.[72] Even the title of *White Peak/Dark Peak* reflects this ambiguity between individual locations and generic places. It identifies the conventional way of dividing the region into the 'White Peak' and 'Dark Peak', distinguished by their different geology and location: White Peak is the southern limestone area and Dark Peak is the northern gritstone and moorland peak. In the title the place names are brought together, yet are still divided by the punctuating slash between them, suggesting that the place of the Peak District region can be identified through a simultaneous connection and division between two particular geographical features.

The opening poem, 'Skylines', states: 'this is our poem Tom Tom/ less than the whole dale gets in the poem', creating friction between the expansive Peak District region (which is 540 square miles) and the pinpointing specificity of a 'Tom Tom' navigation system.[73] The poem as 'Tom Tom' metaphor interlinks naming and orientation with poetry, as Finlay insists that it is the poem which dictates the walking journeys through the area. This emphasises the tension between the physical landscape, embodied walking experience and poetic representation. Yet Finlay remains particularly focused on the poem's relations with site and place, querying in the introduction: 'strange, isn't it, that we seldom read poems in their places?'[74] The introduction to *White Peak/Dark Peak* is positioned in the middle of the work, offering explanations and justifications only after the reader has read the opening poems, destabilising narrative linearity. The introduction notes that 'we worked on through to

[72] See appendix 3.
[73] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p. 'A Taste of the Peak District' <http://www.thepeakdistrict.info/general.php> [accessed 9 January 2013].
[74] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.

Autumn, gathering new collaborators along the way, roaming from location to location, slowly making our way from the dark peak into the white', but the way in which the Dark Peak merges into the White Peak and the fact that the walkers 'roamed' destabilises the straightforward movement of the walk.

Simultaneously, the poems are 'in situ haiku', creating movement between the act of reading a poem in place or site and the concept of a poem itself as a site.[75] The poems are tied with other places, as they take the renga form, a Japanese haiku sequence written in collaboration, constructing what Finlay calls 'renga-views' of the Peak District area.[76] This collaborative form undoes the conventional tie between a solitary walk and poetic composition, as the group draw together a communal representation of place. Furthermore, the fact that the renga views require the physical presence of the reader in the landscape heightens the social aspect of the project, as Finlay ties his work to the sculptural art of his father Ian Hamilton Finlay, stating that 'poetry proposes itself as the ideal form of public sculpture'.[77] Wheatley addresses how Ian Hamilton Finlay's work 'overcomes the anxieties of its relationship to nature by, in many cases, becoming a physical part of it, most famously in the garden he created in Little Sparta', which uses sculpture to work with and against the surrounding garden landscape.[78] The idea of 'sculpture', then, suggests not only an allusion to site-specific art but also the idea of fixity, of poetry which remains located in one place, whilst at the same time calling

[75] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[76] In 2010 and 2011 Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn were influenced by Matsuo Bashõ's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1966), using the renga form and travel narrative to trace a 'word-map' of Scotland: see <http://www.theroadnorth.co.uk/> [accessed 1 October 2014]. This resulted in a publication: Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn, *The Road North* (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2014). It is worth noting that the poets appropriate the haiku form fairly loosely.
[77] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[78] Wheatley, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.151.

attention to the tension between material objects and the object of the text. Indeed this is developed by the website, which allows the reader to listen to recordings of the renga-views without being fixed in a particular site or place, both compounding and undermining the physicality of the letterboxes. The multifaceted modes of representation of the Peak District therefore appear to deliberately challenge the relationship between place and site by fluctuating uncertainly between the precision of the 'in situ haiku', the website and the movement of walking in the Peak District.

Initially, *White Peak/Dark Peak'*s use of place names appears to be a fixing and orientating technique. The second half of the catalogue consists of seventy site-situated renga-views, each identifying an opening place name, letterbox location (which contains a rubber stamp circle poem), QR code, grid reference and coordinates:

> Bleaklow
>
> LB: located in Torside Reservoir carpark
> (53°28'54/41"N) (1°53'56.37"W)
> SK 067983[79]

Finlay creates conflict between the poems and the descriptive location markers in the catalogue, blurring the line between poetry and prose through the truncated line lengths, the balanced parentheses and the use of 'Bleaklow' as a title. At the same time the provision of coordinates and directions for the 'Bleaklow' view and letterbox opens up the text to public and social experience, allowing cultural signification to grant the material landscape locational meaning. The link between naming and culture adds a social dimension to place naming: Christopher Tilley notes how 'place names are of

[79] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.

[…] vital significance because they act so as to transform the sheerly physical and geographical into something that is historically and socially experienced,' and so Finlay's descriptive use of place names are rendered cultural.[80] Once the site is identified in the text in this way, the section devolves into specified areas and poems, such as in 'Coombes Clough │ Alec Finlay', which locates a clough in Crowden in the Dark Peak region. The poems in this section are positioned on the opposite facing page, and although they are printed in type too small to read they trace the shape of the landscape on the page, alternating between image and poem.[81] This encourages the reader to either use the QR code, which takes them to an internet page with an audio-visual representation of the renga-view, or to travel to the locations detailed. Place names here are therefore used to situate the views and poems described, fixing the readings and the experience in site.

Yet *White Peak/Dark Peak,* like *Alstonefield,* obfuscates its place names, particularly in the opening section of the text, which includes poems that cannot be found on the website or in situ.[82] These initial poems visually represent the structures and elements of the sites they aim to represent, such as the concrete poems 'Paths' and 'Drystone', which form the shape of the content they contain.[83] The poems challenge the apparent rigidity of the site-specificity evoked in the rest of the catalogue, as they do not require engagement with a specifically located view. However, place names still feature, as in the 'Flora Haiku' sequence, which is footnoted with the statement

[80] Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p.18.
[81] See appendix 4.
[82] These poems and haiku sequences are 'Paths'; 'Drystone'; 'Peakscene Haiku'; 'Flora Haiku'; 'Birds Haiku'; and 'Preramble'. Interestingly, the haiku do not consistently follow the conventional haiku form.
[83] See appendix 5.

'haiku by Alec Finlay | locations by Tony Baker'.[84] The poem and the location are separated both by the dividing line in the footnote and by the demarcation between the two authors, creating disconnection between place name and poem:

> you're pretty, so what!
> what for barren strawberry?
> yes but you are pretty
> *On scree by the Dove near the gate*
> *halfway down/up Wolfscote Dale*[85]

The scree represents a tension between fixity and flux. Scree is an apparently still natural phenomena but within it, as Martin Kirkbride notes, 'whole areas shift and migrate, shuffling and clattering, never moving in the same way but always keeping together'.[86] The positioning here is tentative: the line 'halfway down/up Wolfscote Dale', while apparently precise, recognises that location is not necessarily clearly identified by a place name. For instance, the ambiguous 'down/up' suggests the positioning of not only the scree and the barren strawberry but also the body of the walker, creating a directional marker which is simultaneously going down and going up the hill.

Indeed, Finlay's assertion that *White Peak/Dark Peak* is a 'word-map' is similarly ambiguous, despite his comment that 'a word-map is a descriptive poem of location'.[87] The link between place naming, language and location appears to allow the text to 'map' out the region for the reader and walker, suggesting that the poems are purely descriptive. Yet in 'Peakscene Haiku' mapping is disorientated:

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[84] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[85] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[86] Martin Kirkbride, 'Scree', *Patterned Ground: Entanglements of Nature and Culture*, ed. by Stephan Harrison, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), p.64.
[87] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.

another turning missed
engrossed in the hill
names on the map[88]

Despite the emphasis on mapping, the speakers are simultaneously so 'engrossed' in the hill and the 'names on the map' that they miss their turning. Here, landscape, cartography and place names come together, as the affective implications of the hill halts the progress of the walk. Mapping and literary representation can be considered in parallel, as Tally details in *Spatiality*:

> It is certainly true that iconographic poetry of non-narrative description could appear to be all the more map-like, insofar as they already appear to be straightforward representations of space, whether in the forms of various spatial arrangements of lines on a page or of depictions of the geographical space exterior to literature.[89]

Yet Finlay's correlation of map and poem is not a straightforward connection between cartography and direct representation, as both the poems and the location markers are shifting. This suggests an uncertain relationship between 'straightforward representations of space' or literal descriptions of landscape and metaphorical explorations, as Finlay unsettles the comparison between map and text.

In fact, as seen with the 'Tom Tom' image, Finlay shifts between literal 'description' and metaphor throughout the 'Peakscene Haiku' sequence:

sometimes I fall in love
with a name –
Manifold[90]

[88] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[89] Tally, *Spatiality*, p.49.
[90] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.

'Manifold' refers to the River Manifold in the White Peak area of the district. 'Manifold' appropriately suggests 'varied and diverse', as the affective influence of the walk reaches both to place as well as place naming: the speaker is affected by both the landscape and its signifier. Indeed, Miller suggests that place names and the physical landscape are intricately bound up with one another:

> The power of the conventions of mapping and of the projection of place names on the place are so great that we see the landscape as though it were already a map, complete with place names and the names of geographical features. The place names seem to be intrinsic to the places they name. The names are motivated. […] The place is carried into the name and becomes available to us there. You can get to the place by way of its name. Place names make a site already the product of a virtual writing, a topography.[91]

Rather than a clear-cut link between text, map and material landscape, the association of place naming with site and location creates *White Peak/Dark Peak*'s paradox: it is a text deeply tied to clearly identified orientation markers, yet its use of ambiguous naming and disorientated movement undermines any connection between mapping and poetry. The metaphorical connotations of the haiku create slippage between language and landscape which, unlike Miller's suggestion that 'place names make a site already the product of a virtual writing', critiques how far language can form a literal map.

In comparison with Finlay and Riley's association with the particular region of the Peak District, Clark's poetry is associated with and informed by the landscape of the Scottish highlands, to the extent that his place-identity and place poetry can be seen as intertwined. For instance, Tony Lopez has noted that 'Clark's poetry is best understood as the work of a Scottish poet and […]

[91] Miller, *Topographies*, p.4.

the fact of his origin is an important one […]. [T]he complexity of his more recent work is in part due to an interest in specific geographical and cultural location'.[92] Despite the strong link between Scotland and Clark's poetry and 'specific geographical and cultural location', at first glance his representations of place appear to be non-specific and generic, as in *Alder Brook* (2012):

> continuous present
> body of water
> persistent flow
>
> its task
> an infinite
> alteration
> of itself[93]

Although the poem lacks identifiable landscape features or place names, *Alder Brook* is still engaged with a particular site, one which is (unusually) not located in Scotland. The text is an inter-disciplinary collaborative work with the photographer and artist Susan Derges, responding to a brook found near Derges' studio in Dartmoor.[94] Like *White Peak/Dark Peak*, the *Alder Brook* collaboration shifts between the physical text and its social representation: it featured in an exhibition at the Purdy Hicks gallery in London. In this way the brook is 'continuous present', suggesting both 'gift' and ever-flowing, a form of public engagement and artistic representation as well as an environmental process. Clark's poetry forms 'an infinite/ alternation/ of itself', responding to particular places (especially in the Scottish highlands), yet it does so through ambiguous representations and absent location markers or identifiable features.

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[92] Tony Lopez, *Meaning Performance* (Cambridge: Salt, 2006), p.177.
[93] Thomas A. Clark and Susan Derges, *Alder Brook (*London: Purdy Hicks, 2012), n.p.
[94] See gallery website <http://www.purdyhicks.com/exhibitions.php?opt=p&aid=116> [accessed 19th October 2014].

The title of 'Creag Liath' in *The Path to the Sea* appears to provide some degree of site-specificity.[95] However, 'Creag Liath', which means 'Grey Rock' in Scottish Gaelic, is not a specific island but, as Clark details on the final page of the pamphlet edition, 'a composite of several Hebridean islands', an 'island of many inlets'.[96] The place name shifts between the material and the imaginative, evoking the generic grey rock, the apparent specificity of the title and Clark's amalgamation of other islands. The poem is simultaneously generic and precise:

> island persisting in itself
> drawing the mist about it
> firm ground to stand on
> in a tilting sea and sky
>
> with hills implied behind cloud[97]

Both the island and the mist are, impossibly, 'firm ground', with the sky and sea 'tilting' around the island, which acts like an environmental epicentre. In contrast with the precision of the place name title, and the notion of the island as a centre point, the representation also creates a general environmental atmosphere and a sense of the unknown: the hills are 'implied behind cloud'. Ingold calls this a 'weather-world', stating that 'to inhabit the open is to dwell within a weather-world in which every being is destined to combine wind, rain, sunshine and earth in the continuation of its own existences'.[98] The island in 'Creag Liath' avoids any clear site-specificity by depicting the island as 'persisting in itself', acting like a world rather than a single island. 'Dwelling'

[95] Clark, *The Path to the Sea*, p.35. There are no place names in *The Hundred Thousand Places.*
[96] Thomas A. Clark, *Creag Liath* (Cambridge: Peter Riley, 2003), n.p., Clark, *The Path to the Sea*, p.37.
[97] Clark, *The Path to the Sea*, p. 38.
[98] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p.115.

and its connotations of fixity therefore comes up against the shifting environment in Clark's metaphorical representation of the 'tilting sea and sky'.

This is reinforced by the way in which 'Creag Liath' operates as a poem of simultaneous contrasts and comparisons:

> island exposed and sheltered
> fertile of colours and forms
> contained place in which to be
> both accurate and expansive[99]

The enjambment of 'contained place in which to be/ both accurate and expansive' ambiguously evokes both that the experience of being on the island is 'accurate and expansive' and that the island itself is 'accurate and expansive'. The 'contained place' of the island is defined by its coastal borders, even as it is still 'expansive'. This flowing between large and small scales reflects J. E. Malpas's argument in *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (1999) that 'the very possibility of the appearance of things – of objects, of self, and of others – is possible only within the all-embracing compass of place.'[100] Therefore in 'Creag Liath' the antinomy of accuracy and expansion results in a coming together of site and place, as the poem interlinks precision with the 'all-embracing compass of place'.[101]

Unlike the locational uncertainty of 'Creag Liath', 'At Loch Grinneabhat' in *The Path to the Sea* can be associated with the lake of the same name on the Isle of Lewis, near Stornoway. The preposition in the title grants the poem a deliberate location marker, yet the sequence focuses on a

[99] Clark, *The Path to the Sea*, p.38.
[100] J. E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.15.
[101] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, p.15.

representation of a sandpiper, a bird typically found near water, moving the perspective from the lake to the bird:

> sandpiper piping from a stone
> lifting and lighting
> on the same stone
> piping on alone[102]

The sandpiper's song is tied up with its movement, as 'lifting and lighting' refers both to the physical flight and the rising and falling tones of the bird's song. Again, Clark's representation calls attention to the relationship between the form of the poem and its apparent location. The song permeates the poem through the end rhymes, repetition, internal rhyming and the consonance in 'piping', 'lifting', 'lighting' and 'piping' again. Although the bird is 'a display for no one', the poem itself attempts to mirror the site of Loch Grinneabhat and the circling refrain of the sandpiper. The movement between the representation of the individual bird and the second-person address avoids a singular viewpoint:

> within the visual field
> you do not occur
> lost or taken up with
> what happens to be there[103]

Clark consistently uses the second person form of address, whilst still calling the subjective lyrical 'I' voice into question, an 'unselving' perspective. Here, the 'you' challenges stable perspectives, with it potentially referring to the bird, another figure in the landscape, the reader, or acting as a form of self-address. The notion that 'you do not occur' further removes any sense of self

[102] Clark, *The Path to the Sea,* p.21.
[103] Clark, *The Path to the Sea,* p.24.

or identity despite the specific and consistent use of a personal pronoun, instead placing emphasis on 'what happens to be there', in the site.[104] At the same time, 'you do not occur' could refer to cognitive processes, as the addressee's thinking pauses whilst they are 'lost or taken up with/ what happens to be there', eliding distinctions between self and place.

Despite the vastness created by the spaces between the words on the page, 'the visual field' and the echoes and refrains of the sandpiper's song 'by hill lochs by sea lochs/ sporadically by lowland waters', the poem still highlights the tension between repetition and difference, with the bird 'turning and returning/ to the same theme'.[105] The bird's repetitive flight is apparently mimicked by the poem's form, as 'bobbing head and tail' alters to 'constantly bobbing head and tail' in the next stanza, creating patterns of similarity and difference. In fact, this occurs across *The Path to the Sea* collection as a whole, reverberating in 'Creag Liath':

> sandpiper piping from a stone
> lifting and settling on a stone
> far cry of a curlew
> a corncrake clearing its throat[106]

'Creag Liath', which follows 'At Loch Grinneabhat' in the sequence, poetically echoes the sandpiper's song. Like the sandpiper's 'variations/ on an original air', then, Clark's poetry is continually formed and reformed through patterns of similarity and difference. It is in this way that the place name titles and the absence of place names draws attention to the relationship between precision and ambiguity, as Clark both situates and generically places his

[104] Clark, *The Path to the Sea,* p.24.
[105] Clark, *The Path to the Sea,* p.22.
[106] Clark, *The Path to the Sea,* p.40.

poems. Bush points out that 'difference and repetition are subsumed within one contrary state' in Clark's work, as his interlinking of precision and abstraction emulates his exploration of the 'contrary' relationship between generic place and specific site, creating complex and competing forces.[107] Therefore Clark's present-and-yet-absent place names operate as part of his representation of the paradox between the small form of the poems, the relationship between site and place and difference and repetition. Lopez's assertion that Clark's poetry is bound up with Scotland, then, is both confirmed and undermined by 'Creag Liath' and 'At Loch Grinneabhat', which transform the convention of place naming to destabilise the distinctions not just between site and place, but between places more generally.

3.3 Walking

Representations of walking through place provide a useful starting point for considering the potential oscillation between movement and pause. Although *Alstonefield* constructs a narrative through its textual reference points and convergences, its representations of walking are not straightforward or linear. The walk slips between physical experience and more metaphorical senses of 'walking' or movement. For instance, the narrator uses both feet and mind to navigate: 'I carry my thought-radio/ on my back, aerial aloft. It tells me to walk on/ through such certainty.'[108] The 'thought-radio' provides direction and movement whilst simultaneously challenging 'certainty', as the walker moves through certainty as if it were a physical entity, rather than moving with it. In

[107] Bush, *Out of Dissent,* p.31.
[108] Riley, *Alstonefield,* p.49.

part V *Alstonefield* travels with the metaphorical 'thought-radio', the imagination of the walker and the shape of the landscape itself:

> Like walking a long corridor in a hospital
> the bushes in their white coats and this
> shiny conveyor belt running alongside bearing
> weathering solutions, enzymes, floods of tears
> back to the town. Things that reach across.
> Plodding on the stony track next the stream I
> think of teenage lovers, Alzheimer's patients
> moving to the world's edge and bearing its content.
> The joining of souls is worth all the moonlight
> down which eyes draw their long content.[109]

Here, walking is both literal and metaphorical: it is 'like walking a long corridor in a hospital', as the simile compares the unpredictable lines of the stream to the fixed and sterile parameters of a hospital corridor. The narrator draws parallels between the two as 'things that reach across', using the stream both to direct the walk and to consider how it acts as a natural 'shiny conveyor belt' for industrial effluence.

Despite the rhythmic assertion of 'plodding on the stony track', it is the speaker's thoughts which direct the movement of the passage, fluctuating between literal and metaphorical forms of movement. Solnit describes how 'the rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts', as here the poem's rhythm is formed not through a pointedly consistent metre but instead by mirroring rambling with wide-ranging thoughts.[110] These literal-metaphorical slippages extend to a walking-writing reflexivity, as the narrator states: 'see it through, I tell myself, to the end of the

[109] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.31
[110] Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p.6.

book', which echoes the reader's experience of working through the poem to its conclusion.[111] Riley's walking processes confirm Solnit's notion that walking can be 'a subversive detour, the scenic route through a half-abandoned landscape of ideas and experiences.'[112] His imaginary explorations are a 'subversive detour' from the physical act of walking, yet both walking and thinking are bound up with each other. This begins to suggest that walking, although integral to Riley's explorations of site, is configured through further convergences of body and mind, both here and elsewhere. This could potentially suggest that site and place can be determined by the figure of the body. Indeed, Casey argues that 'site may be bodiless – it entails a disembodied overview, a survey – but there can be no being-in-place except by being in a densely qualified place in concrete embodiment', asking 'how can one be *in* a place except *through* one's own body?'[113] For Casey, 'site' is recognisable insofar as it may be 'bodiless', whereas place is defined through corporeal experience.

However, Riley's representation of thought-walking convergence suggests that site and place are influenced not just by the physical presence of a body, but through the tension between physical experience and metaphorical senses of movement. As with Robin Jarvis's assertion that 'there is nothing more concrete than putting one foot in front of the other, but walking is also an idea, or a form of thinking', Riley's emphasis on unification, such as between the initial split and then convergence of speakers Self One and Self Two, also extends to a convergence of body and thought.[114] As Ingold notes, 'cognition

[111] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.93.
[112] Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, p.12.
[113] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.204.
[114] Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, p.4.

should not be set off from locomotion, along the lines of a division between head and heels, since walking is itself a form of circumambulatory knowing.'[115] Due to this interlinking of thought and movement, the journey and narrative of *Alstonefield* frequently digresses both in the landscape and imaginatively. For instance, the poem opens with a dramatic metaphor: 'again the figured curtain draws across the sky', with 'figured' recalling both the walking figure and the figurative threads that run through the poem. By part V the concept of *Alstonefield* as a theatre space opens up the night walk to the possibility of metaphor and performance:

> A point of contact. How should I know what
> happens in this world? To know is an evasion.
> This walk at its furthest point relinquishes
> the driver's seat and stands nowhere at the dark
> junction not knowing which direction to take
> or what shall ever be the gain. But remembering
> gladly the fires that burned in that stone house
> over there many years ago and sadly the way
> time rolls us onward, trouble in mind. Hell-
> hound at the crossroads, pulling everywhere.[116]

Here, the narrator responds to the 'watershed' crossroads as a 'point of contact', a location marker. Yet whilst the walk pauses at the crossroad, the imaginative movement continues, 'remembering/ gladly' the stone house, which is potentially Harecops. Rather than the walk continuing, the narrator digresses in thought, as 'time rolls us onward/ trouble in mind' and again Riley merges walking with a driving metaphor. Rather than evoking the possibility of continuing the walk in different directions, the junction creates finality, evoking the Stations of the Cross: 'to reach the watershed crossroads/ and be

[115] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p.46.
[116] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.50.

newly old', creating conflict to the extent that the mythological hellhound is 'pulling everywhere'.[117] The digressions in *Alstonefield* unsettle linear movement through a particular site or place, instead heightening the strain between the physical act of walking and imaginative digression.

The element of digression and disorientation is compounded by Riley's mutable lyric voice. Alexander details how 'identity and subjectivity are both affirmed and problematised through their relations to place in *Alstonefield*'.[118] Rather than using a singular 'I' voice, the merged and yet split 'I and I' perspective destabilises individual subjectivity.[119] Baker calls this element of unselving 'a deliberately plupersonal construct', noting that 'the self may be read as a fiction of presence that allows the not-self to walk as freely on the poem's stage'.[120] Although Riley has stated in interview that '"lyric" could be just another way of saying "poetry"', his poetry thus comes up against lyrical conventions by disavowing the singular perspective, challenging any image of a single solitary walker by depicting a fragmented self.[121] By part V the two walker-speakers divide: 'one goes left,/ up the hill and over Ecton on a hard slog to Wetton Mill./ The other carries on with the road as it is'.[122] Indeed, even before the speakers split the poem still emphasises digression, disorientation and unstable narrative perspectives:

> Let me think. Directions available are again four.
> I could slide uphill south where leisure rules. If
> you're tired go to bed and let the world find itself.

[117] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.50.
[118] Alexander, 'Where lives converge', p.137.
[119] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.18.
[120] Baker, 'A Démarrage, a Letter and a Postscript, Concerning (Mostly) Peter Riley's *Alstonefield*', p.171.
[121] Todd Nathan Thorpe, 'Peter Riley in Conversation', *Jacket* 35 (2008) <http://jacketmagazine.com/35/iv-peter-riley-ivb-thorpe.shtml> [accessed 19 October 2014].
[122] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.59.

> I could return to east and live in a document
> of what wasn't except as what survives. I could
> turn to north without hope of anything but
> achievement. I could continue, west, downhill,
> and a lot of trouble in uncertain devolutions
> of the heartland curving back in. Whatever I decide
> there is somebody watching me across a field.[123]

The speaker recognises the Peak District as a meeting point between Sheffield, Derby, Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent, as 'directions available are again four' refers both to the points of a compass and the regional convergences.[124] The narrator attempts to direct their movement by thinking, which is tempered by the possibilities of elsewhere: here, the pause of the walk is simultaneously connected to other places and imaginative potentials. 'If/ you're tired go to bed and let the world find itself' grants the location and the world its own agency, suggesting that it is not the speakers who determine what place or site is but 'the world'. The sense of place is influenced by an additional figure, too, as 'there is somebody watching me across a field', with the direction of the walk affected by elsewhere and other perspectives. Here, then, the uncertain lyric perspective and address mirrors the locational confusion, as Riley connects the regional intersections of the Peak District with the multiple and subjective viewpoints.

Riley's metaphor of meeting and convergence, the 'contact zones', bring site and place into contact. Massey calls this a 'meeting place':

> Instead […] of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations,

[123] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.52.
[124] Riley's notes state that 'the Peak District is encompassed on three sides by (a) gritstone moorlands to the west, north and east, producing landscapes of a darker hue (b) large industrial or ex-industrial conurbations from north-east clockwise to north-west: Sheffield, Nottingham, Derby, Stoke-on-Trent, Manchester'. Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.103.

> experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent.[125]

Massey's concept of the meeting place is, in terms of scale, 'far larger' than site or place, and is formed through social connections, affective experiences of place, and political and constructions as well as the material form of the landscape itself. The notion of a 'meeting place' therefore creates a connecting together of places, moments and perspectives rather than a clear demarcation between here and there. For Riley, this is played out through formal convergences, and he explains that:

> I think of *Alstonefield* as a ramble, a written ramble referring to an actual one. Especially in part five in the night-long walk where the mind is set free, […] you can see it wafting and erring here and there and picking up things as it passes by. There are actually no limits or no programmes for what it might do except the physical conditions of the walk, the valley and the hill. The mind takes a lot of 'leaps', like suddenly to something unprecedented, but that's not an avant-garde programme, that's just the mind behaving as it always does, and the strict confines of the route should make this clear. 'Fantasy' things happen, like waltzing with a rabbit and meeting a ghost, but obviously they happen in the mind. The feet are restricted to a narrow path but the mind isn't.[126]

Like the unbounded nature of Massey's meeting places, *Alstonefield* is tied to movement, both literally and metaphorically: 'the mind takes lots of "leaps"', even though these jumps remain contained by 'the strict confines of the route'. Riley taps into a long tradition of night walking, which Jeffrey C. Robinson suggests 'should, we might think, bring us to the poet's inner life, to dreams and those dimensions of the self that seem to contradict one's self-image'.[127]

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[125] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p.154.
[126] Thorpe, 'Peter Riley in Conversation', n.p.
[127] Jeffrey C. Robinson, *The Walk: Notes on a Romantic Image* (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2006 [1989]), p.78. Robinson's chapter on 'night walks' details literary examples

However, although *Alstonefield* is a 'written ramble', walking and imagination are tempered by the form of the poem as well as the pathways of the walk, creating a physical as well as metaphorical meeting place of simultaneous constraint and freedom.

The poem unites the rigid ten-line stanza form with the shifting lyrical perspectives and ambulatory register, interlinking regularity with unpredictability in part V:

> In dark night there are always lights, little glimmers
> at the edges of vision, sudden streaks by the roadside
> when you look again it's black.
>
> […]
>
> If only for a moment, an elsewhere
> flutters on the verge, and the far stations merge.[128]

Although 'an elsewhere' occurs on the periphery of vision and perception here, the caesura in the final line phonically brings together the internal rhyme of 'verge' and 'merge', creating a meeting point of both place and language. Indeed, Riley notes how the poem presents 'a string of encounters with the world, which come as fragments and connect to other fragments, fragmentary thoughts, glimpses, memories. It helps to have the controlled structure, the fixed stanza to clarify the status of all these fancies and excursions'.[129] Riley's convergences allow the known and the unknown, the self and other, site and place and the literal and the metaphorical to briefly meet and come into contact

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ranging from Charles Dickens to Virginia Woolf, p.77-87. A more recent example can be found in Robert Macfarlane's piece on night walking in *Granta.* Robert Marfarlane, 'Nightwalking', *Granta* 90 (2005), 217-223.

[128] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.62.

[129] Thorpe, 'Peter Riley in Conversation', n.p.

or friction. This is determined and developed through form, as De Certeau describes:

> The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, personal factors).[130]

*Alstonefield'*s long narrative 'walk' both informs and destabilises 'spatial organizations', putting place and site under pressure as Riley's walking poem, like the Peak District itself, creates connections and frictions between one thing and another.

As a social project intended to engage readers with a specific walk, Finlay's *White Peak/Dark Peak* could be interpreted as directional, as providing literal instructions for a particular route. Yet this remains wedded to representation and poetic processes, as Finlay reveals in the introduction:

> Each of the poets walked, looked and wrote in their own way; some composing the poem along the path, step by step; others taking notes to recompose over time; some collaborating, others soloing; some in sensible gear, others hailed on, menaced by lightning; some led by the lamp of literature, others geographising.[131]

Recalling Riley's tension between solo and social walking, Finlay points to the relationship between poetic composition and walking as linking and yet distinguishing between individual perspectives and community aims. Although each poet worked on the same outcome, they 'looked and wrote in their own way'. This mirrors the changing environmental and geographical conditions of

[130] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.101.
[131] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.

the Peak District itself, emphasising variation rather than fixity: 'others hailed on, menaced by lightning'. In this way the literal act of walking and its metaphorical implications come together, as in 'The Great Ridge' by Finlay and Rebecca Hall: 'sideway showers/ stain my trousers/ two shades of khaki'.[132] The sideways formatting of the text attempts to mimic the horizontal rain in this poem, mediating between the representative mode of the poem and the physical rain.[133]

Therefore although the poems act as guides, they are wary of prescription, as Finlay recognises in 'Skylines': 'our views won't replace your views', emphasising the importance of individual experience rather than prescriptive 'views' from the poet.[134] Walking to the specific coordinates outlined in the second half of the collection is, then, not clearly determined by the poems or the text, as Finlay traverses the line between individual and group experience. It is in this way that walking mediates between the specifically located and physical reality of the letterbox renga-views and the larger experience of the district as a whole. Finlay describes 'the renga-view desire to go double: go there, compose your own verses, each poem can expand exponentially', as *White Peak/Dark Peak* presents, like *Alstonefield,* meeting places between the reader-walker, the original poets, the sites of the renga-views and the Peak District itself.[135] Yet unlike Riley's converging moments and locations, Finlay's 'meeting places' in *White Peak/Dark Peak* bring together the Peak District landscape with social experience and poetic

[132] Alec Finlay and Rebecca Hall, 'The Great Ridge', <http://www.whitepeak-darkpeak.co.uk/greatridge/the-great-ridge-by-alec-finlay-with-rebecca-hall#> [accessed 15th November 2012].
[133] See appendix 6.
[134] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[135] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.

representation, as well as bringing differing forms of media into contact. Contrary to Casey's suggestion that 'the somewhere of being-in-place is […] to be contrasted with the nowhere of being-in-site', *White Peak/Dark Peak* utilises reader-walker involvement in site to unpack relations with place.[136] Instead, Casey's notion that 'your locus deeply influences what you perceive and what you expect' seems applicable for both place and site, as the poems metaphorically 'expand exponentially' into the region of the Peak District through the interaction and interpretation of the reader-walkers.[137]

The project presents the poems themselves as guides, as one of the introductory poems, 'Definitions', states, '*map*: poem'.[138] Certainly the text has the potential to operate instructively, what Finlay calls 'a guided walk in the landscape'.[139] For instance, the instructive register in 'Hen Cloud' states: 'From the LB head to the foot of Hen Cloud SK 007619, contouring E to Well Farm SK 009620'.[140] However, as well as the notion that the poem itself could be a map, in 'Preramble' Finlay calls cartographic navigation into question. The portmanteau-like neologism of the title ties the introductory 'preamble' with 'rambling', linking textual modes of orientation with physical ones:

> sure of the way
> the hiker thinks backwards
> to where he left the map
>
> where in the world
> or the wood are we?[141]

[136] Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, p.178.
[137] Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, p.xiii.
[138] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[139] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[140] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[141] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.

Despite the precise and frequent location markers in *White Peak/Dark Peak*, here walking is bound up with ambiguity and disorientation. The hiker is 'sure of the way' yet still requires means of orientation. Walking for the figure is a cognitive as well as bodily experience: s/he ambiguously 'thinks backwards', simultaneously retracing his/her steps in the landscape and mentally retracing the location of the map, recalling Riley's 'thought-radio' method of navigation.[142]

In 'Paths', which forms path-like weaves at the edge of the page, Finlay considers different forms of pathways:

> innumerable branching trails
> bright green ribbons
> sunken hollows
> ancient packways radiating across directionless moorlands
> signposted rights of way[143]

'Rights' of way echoes 'right' as meaning 'correct', as well as suggesting access 'rights' for ramblers, as Finlay, like Riley, calls attention to the friction between unhindered walking and social constraints. The 'innumerable branching trails' metaphorically pulls together tree branches and pathways, destabilising any clear demarcation between natural and cultural pathways. Ingold notes how paths form links through and between place, stating that 'human existence is not fundamentally place-bound […] but place-binding. It unfolds not in places but along paths. Proceeding along a path, every inhabitant lays a trail'.[144] Ingold sees walking as a way of knowing place by tracing its 'paths'. Certainly the hiker in 'Preramble' begins by tracing a specific route: 'don't walk straight/ when the path doesn't', before beginning to ramble,

[142] Riley, *Alstonefield*, p.49.
[143] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[144] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p.148.

following the landscape rather than cartography.[145] This friction between demarcated pathways, maps and representation recalls Miller's suggestion that mapping and literature do not neatly correspond, as Finlay's '*map*: poem' evokes a fraught tension between representation and reality: 'the effort of mapping is interrupted by an encounter with the unmappable. The topography and the toponymy […] hide an unplaceable place'.[146] *White Peak/Dark Peak* as 'earth writing' comes into conflict with the toponymy of the landscape, gesturing towards the ineffable and refusing any clear route through place or site.

Being lost in site therefore becomes a problem for generic place, as the speaker extrapolates being unsure of her/his location in the Peak District to being unsure of whether s/he is lost in the world or a wood. The hiker's query of 'where in the world or the wood are we?' highlights the slippage between being lost in site to being lost in place, and being lost literally, metaphorically and affectively in the world. The form of 'Preramble' itself eschews linearity and uniformity, as it rambles across a double-page spread in the catalogue, reflecting how 'rambling' also suggests talking and writing outside of set parameters:

meshed on the ridge
rambled places
come apart again

don't walk straight
when the path doesn't

[…]

[145] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p
[146] Miller, *Topographies*, p.7.

walking backwards
or taking the path back
which breaks the spell?[147]

Finlay draws out a tension between the large scale 'rambled places' and tightly-meshed ridges here, as the site-place relation is mirrored by the contrast between the alternating two and three line short stanzas and the long length of the poem. Ross Chambers's *Loiterature* (1999) considers how 'stepping out of line' encourages 'the pleasures of errancy: that sometimes delightful and surprisingly refreshing sense of getting lost', and here 'Preramble' evokes 'stepping out of line' whilst walking: despite the instruction to follow the path, Finlay suggests that both 'walking backwards' as well as 'taking the path back' have the potential to 'break the spell' of the linear journey.[148] The poem also steps out of line, as each line and stanza is justified differently, while the shape of the poem on the page forms a neat image of a curve of a hill or a wandering path, constrained by its own form. Therefore although the hiker queries 'where in the world/ or wood are we?', the progression as well as digression is maintained by the fixity of the poem. As Chambers recognises, digression from a set route does not, paradoxically, result in freedom: 'it can never quite be digressive enough: there are constraints and limits'.[149] Walking in *White Peak/Dark Peak* is bound simultaneously by pathways and poetic form, negotiating the balance between directed walking and digression, between physical walking and its representation.

[147] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[148] Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p.31-32.
[149] Chambers, *Loiterature* p.32.

The site-place balance in *White Peak/Dark Peak* is also reinforced by the relationship between the past and the present. *White Peak/Dark Peak* 'goes double' intertextually, as with how the 'Alstonefield' renga-view by Finlay is 'after Peter Riley', interconnecting site with literary heritage and echoing how the poets were 'led by the lamp of literature'.[150] Riley is listed as collaborator in the text despite the fact that he did not contribute directly, as instead *Alstonefield* is used as a literary reference point, with Finlay following in Riley's physical footsteps and his literary traces: the project also cites Riley's *Alstonefield* in the bibliography, as Finlay nods to Riley's Peak District walking poem. Robert Macfarlane calls this interaction between walking texts 'restatements of each other – a print-trail or series of steps of their own', adding a metaphorical level of textual re-walking.[151] In a more literal way, the relationship between walking and time is well recognised, as Tilley notes: 'a walk is always a combination of places and times – seasonal and social times.'[152] Indeed, in 'Peakscene Haiku' Finlay calls attention to other experiences of the Peak District, recognising its cultural and social legacy:

> bolts, rotting slings & rusty pegs
> Body Machine contrives
> cliff into climbing wall
> *Body Machine, route on Shining Tor*
> *pioneered by Ron Fawcett, May 1984*[153]

Finlay re-walks Ron Fawcett's 'Body Machine' 1984 route, which is available on the internet for other Peak District walkers to follow.[154] This addresses the

[150] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[151] Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), p.30.
[152] Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p.28.
[153] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.

friction between previous experiences of the Peak District and the fact that *White Peak/Dark Peak* operates as a specific event in time by encouraging the readers to go to the sites themselves and to listen to the original recordings: 'walk to the various views, stand where the poet stood, with the poem in your ear and the view before your eyes', much as how Finlay himself followed other walkers' paths.[155] *White Peak/Dark Peak* can, then, be considered an event for the reader-walker, a walking event which encompasses both the 'place' of the Peak District and the particular sites of the renga-views, whilst still presenting the poems as fixed and permanent features in the forms of the catalogue, the letterboxes and the website.

This past-present friction recalls Heidegger's exploration of time in his concept of 'Ereignis' in *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936-1938), which Malpas defines as meaning 'Event'.[156] Although a difficult word to translate clearly, Malpas considers it to be integral to understanding Heidegger's interpretations of topology, noting that '"Event" is itself topological in character.'[157] For instance, Heidegger states that 'the event is the temporal-spatial simultaneity for beyng and beings', creating unity between human and non-human time, 'being', place and happening: 'the site of the moment essentially occurs out of the event as the strife of earth and world […] the

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[154] Finlay states in the introduction to *White Peak/Dark Peak* that 'my own poems are compounds: *in situ* haiku, combined with phrases that I tracked down on hiking and climbing blogs, flickr photo-groups, enthusiastic folk-guides such as the *modern antiquarian*, and truffling through guidebooks – trusting the fidelity of those who loved these places.' See, for instance, the details of Fawcett's first ascent at <http://www.rockfax.com/databases/dates.php?crag=88> [accessed 28 March 2015].
[155] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.
[156] Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, trans. by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniel Vallega-Neu (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012 [1936-1938]), p.13. J.E. Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), p.217.
[157] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, p.214.

playing out of the strife is Da-sein'.[158] 'Site', then, is intrinsically linked to the 'moment' of the event. Here, Heidegger links together the 'strife' of the world and the event, which can only be negotiated through human 'being'. This 'playing out of the strife' between time, site and place can be seen in Finlay's project, where the renga-views are dependent upon the audience/reader's moment of viewing. This produces what Finlay calls 'a flickr-like travelogue of images', recalling his notion of poetry as 'public sculpture', both a fixed representation and an event open for interpretation and re-walking.[159]

It is in this way that *White Peak/Dark Peak* reveals multiple experiences of the same location, poem and recording, creating a fluctuating relationship between places and sites, both in the material letterboxes and in the audio recordings. Sound provides key means of negotiating the relationship between place and time: sound in *White Peak/Dark Peak* transforms the experience of listening to poetry and walking through site into a recurring and re-experienced event: 'new thoughts, old paths; old paths, new thoughts.'[160] This circularity is reinforced formally by the circle poems which can be found in the letterboxes as well as on the website:

> direction in a circle poem is not marked in terms of fixed points, yet the poems do often have poles
>
> […]
>
> a circle poem knows that ends can be beginnings and beginnings ends[161]

[158] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p.26.
[159] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p
[160] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p
[161] Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p

'Poles' evoke both the poles of the letterboxes and 'poles' as oppositional points, which Finlay links together to make a circle. For Finlay, the circle presents both ending and beginning, past and present, a continuous movement in place and time. This creates a temporal paradox, which Bate describes as a balance between the moment, event and recording, elucidating 'a central paradox […]: recording is associated with history, with the past, with that which is lost. But the act of recording is an act of renewal'.[162] Finlay's audio recordings, website and QR codes therefore provide a paradox of renewal: as the reader listens to the audio in situ via their mobile phone they can hear the atmospheric sounds of both the original recording and those surrounding them.[163] The layers of 'moments', both past and present, further destabilise any clearly distinguishable relationship between site and event, between beginning and ending.

Malpas describes how the 'Event' can be place-producing: 'in the same way as "presencing" never occurs in some indeterminate "nowhere," but is always an appearing in place, so too the Event is always a happening of place in place.'[164] Thus Finlay's event is both site and place producing, as it 'gathers', like the bridge, the conditions, experiences and perspectives of the project. Not only this, but the participants' own experiences of the renga-views maintain a constant refreshing of the event, meaning that *White Peak/Dark Peak* can be 'always a happening', providing it continues to inspire reader engagement. Finlay's poems are 'compounds' of other hiking literature and he

[162] Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p.92.
[163] The recordings of the poems clearly allows (and encourages) the listener to hear environmental noise such as bird song and running water, although it is worth noting that in practice the absence of mobile phone signal in the Peak District makes using the QR codes difficult.
[164] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, p.214.

states that 'a poet is a radio', a transmitter of multiple experiences and representations of walking in the Peak District, refuting any singular perspective or location. *White Peak/Dark Peak* challenges the association of walking poetry with solitary experience, and Entwistle points out that despite 'the lengthy tradition of the walk poem – a genre self-consciously interested in the spatialised, spatialising effects of its own literary-ambulatory activity', walking and writing necessarily results in a sense that 'the practice of walking is, inevitably, also deeply ambiguous.'[165] The ambiguity of walking, experience and perspective in *White Peak/Dark Peak* emphasises the paradoxical relationship between place and poem, which is reinforced through a form of synecdoche. Finlay suggests that 'the places in-between letterboxes are also poems' and yet, at the same time, 'every letterbox thinks it is the centre of the world', as the letterbox poems create both part and whole of the project and place. Therefore, the project acts as a bridging event between place and site and permanence and transience, with the circularity and emphasis on going 'double' producing a paradoxical representation of both *White Peak/Dark Peak* and the Peak District.

Like both Finlay and Riley, Clark has a keen interest in the relationship between writing and walking, which is well documented by his prose-poem *In Praise of Walking* (2001).[166] The text focuses on how walking, as with Heidegger's bridge, is a means of reaching specific points: 'there are things we will never see unless we walk to them'.[167] Clark's walking processes allow for observational attentiveness to the environment: he notes, paradoxically, how 'walking is a mobile form of waiting', creating a balance between movement

[165] Entwistle, *Poetry, Geography, Gender*, p.152.
[166] Thomas A. Clark, *In Praise of Walking* (Fife: Moschatel Press, 2004 [2001]), n.p.
[167] Clark, *In Praise of Walking*, n.p.

and stasis which is integral to his poetics.[168] Recalling Finlay's interlinked letterboxes and Riley's convergences of places, for Clark walking creates connections between places:

> Climbing uphill, the horizon grows wider; descending,
> the hills gather round.
>
> […]
>
> We can walk between two places and in so doing establish a link
> between them, bring them into a warmth of contact, like introducing
> two friends.
>
> There are walks on which I lose myself, walks which return
> me to myself again.[169]

Mirroring the competing forces found in *The Path to the Sea*, here walking creates both 'distance and proximity'.[170] Like Finlay's ambiguous walking 'up/down' in 'Floral Haiku', the process of climbing and descending a hill results in contrasting scales. This expansion and reduction also occurs in the metaphor of 'introducing two friends', creating comparison between an unknown distance between places and between initial and yet potentially intimate social contact. Walking creates links between places, yet at the same time it can impact on subjectivity and experience, creating a retreat-and-return both of identity and physical movement. These understandings and representations of walking are explored in poetic form in *The Hundred Thousand Places*, a sequence of individual poems which form a longer narrative of an ongoing walking journey. Clark only uses the second person pronoun in the collection: 'put your hand/ on the hollow rock', creating a

[168] Clark, *In Praise of Walking*, n.p.
[169] Clark, *In Praise of Walking*, n.p.
[170] Clark's thematic and formal interest in distance and proximity is evidenced by his pamphlet publication of the same name. Thomas A. Clark, *Distance and Proximity* (Edinburgh: Morning Star Publications, 2000).

guided walk that recalls the directions and instructions in *White Peak/Dark Peak*.[171] However, the representation of movement is still digressive: 'follow your inclination/ a drift of thistledown', as 'inclination' shifts ambiguously between the inclined shape of the landscape and the personal inclinations of the speaker.[172] Like *White Peak/Dark Peak*, *The Hundred Thousand Places* blurs the lines between a walking guide, a record of site experience and an exploration of walking as a poetic process.[173]

In *The Hundred Thousand Places* site itself frequently moves around the walker as well as the walker moving through site:

> if you move
> lightly
> events will start
> up from your feet[174]

The enjambment between 'events will start' and 'up from your feet' draws out the interrelated agency of walking with the 'event' of the landscape. Indeed, the notion of 'events' as precipitated by walking, by feet lightly treading on the earth, suggests that walking is not a passive movement through site but an intertwined event between walker and the earth, as the walker moves not 'on' or 'in' site, but with it. Unlike Finlay's negotiation of literal and poetic events, here Clark's depiction of 'events' is both ambiguous and metaphorical, creating an image of growth and change. This metaphorical ambiguity is further developed through Clark's representations of polysensoriality: *In*

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[171] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, p.76. Ben Smith has noted how this 'gives one the feeling of reading a guide', Ben Smith, 'Singing at the Right Pace: The Songlines of Alice Oswald and Thomas A. Clark', *PN Review*, 38:5 (2012), 47-49, p.48.
[172] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, p.27.
[173] *Oxford English Dictionary*, *'Inclination, n*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 17 January 2013].
[174] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, p.53.

Praise of Walking states that 'for the right understanding of a landscape, information must come to the intelligence from all the senses.'[175] In *The Hundred Thousand Places*, 'all' senses appear to be at work:

> heard but not seen
> the corncrake in the grasses
> steps through fragrance[176]

There are multiple modes of phenomenological experience taking place during this 'step', despite the lack of visual perception: hearing, smell, the step of the walk and the possibility of physical steps in the landscape itself. Clark's site is deliberately multi-sensed, challenging any particular site-specificity by creating a more general bodily experience that is not limited to one specific place or perception. Although Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst argue that 'the movement of walking is itself a way of knowing', Clark's walking creates an all-encompassing ambiguity, an antinomy of walking as a directive mode as well as being physically disorientating.[177] Clark debunks the primacy of vision as a sensorial mode, as he inter-mingles sight, smell, feeling and hearing: a multi-sensual representation of walking, which still calls attention to the visual appearance of the poem on the page.

Clark's sensorial focus therefore offers the walker and reader with alternative methods of navigation:

> the path turns
>
> don't follow it
> wait to feel

[175] Clark, *In Praise of Walking,* n.p.
[176] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places,* p.24.
[177] Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, 'Introduction', *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot,* ed. by Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), pp.1-21, p.6.

the lure of it[178]

The digression here occurs in a moment of pause, a 'wait'. The speaker uses feeling to determine his/her path: it is not the directedness of the path's turn which guides the walker on, but its 'lure', evoking both affective experience and 'lure' as bait. This extends the scope of the moment, and Paul Rodaway considers how polysensorality, a 'sensuous' approach to geography, results in a gathering together: 'the sense(s) is (are) both a reaching out to the world as a source of information and an understanding of that world so gathered.'[179] The poem's multiple senses therefore 'gather', like the bridge, a representation of site and place which destabilises more visually determined ways of walking. Again the 'lure' responds to the ambiguity between bodily touch and affectivity, as *The Hundred Thousand Places* negotiates the relations between material and emotional experience:

the hill that was bright
is now dark
imperceptibly sensation
glows to emotion
then fades again[180]

The 'hill' shifts temporally, moving between night and day, as the poem amalgamates multiple times into one specific moment which also repeats: 'fades again'. The feeling here is not of touch but of emotional sensation. Perception moves from the visual to an affective reflection in the speaker, as 'glow' and 'fade' echo the visual terms of 'bright' and 'dark', a transformation of sensation into an unidentified emotion, which is as transient as the changing

[178] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, p.79.
[179] Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.5.
[180] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, p.93.

brightness of the hill.[181] The pivotal word in the poem, however, is 'imperceptibly': sitting in the centre of the poem, it signals the paradoxical relationship between walking, phenomenology and representation, suggesting that the changes in the site are imperceptible, despite the fact that the poem itself represents them. The depiction of the hill during different times of day is therefore bound by poetic processes, calling attention to the gap between the physical experience of place and its representative modes.

The conflicts in *The Hundred Thousand Places* are formal shifts of scale, both in terms of the length of the poems and their representations of place:

> as you turn a corner
> of the forest path
> the face of the mountain
> looms up before you
>
> it knocks you back
> for a moment
> the force of it
> straddling the path
>
> you must gather
> your wits and go
> forward in a new
> imposition of scale[182]

The speaker turns a corner to see the face of a mountain, simultaneously a geographical feature and personification. This observation causes a moment of pause, of being 'knocked back' by the experience. The mountain shifts the scale within the poem, forcing the walker to reshape his or her progression in light of the observation, even as 'straddling' the path suggests the size of the

[181] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, p.93.
[182] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, p.43.

mountain as well as the stance of the walker. The ambiguous reference of 'you' again eschews subjective identity, placing emphasis instead on the surrounding site and experience, providing 'lovely particulars' of observation, a balance between distance and proximity.[183] These observations of 'lovely particulars' are maintained, paradoxically, through constant movement and progression:

> a steep-sided glen
> you go on and on
> deeper into green
> led by implication
>
> you are not where
> you are but there
> ahead of the given
> in continual revelation[184]

The speaker walks 'on and on', 'ahead of the given', in constant movement. Clark's use of the word 'revelation' here recalls Heidegger's work in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935-6), in which his use of 'revelation' suggests an 'opening up'.[185] Heidegger describes how 'art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual.'[186] Clark's representations of walking and pausing, then, open up the site to new 'continual' perceptions.

The idea of an 'opening up' reflects how the scale within Clark's poem moves from a forest path to the 'imposition' of the mountain. The pauses and moments of observation in Clark's walking allow for a balance between movement and stopping, creating a 'continual revelation' in the site. These revelations are temporal, also, as the first poem in the sequence demonstrates:

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[183] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places,* p.25.
[184] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places,* p.65.
[185] Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Basic Writings,* ed. by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993 [1935-6]), pp.139-212, p.197.
[186] Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', p.197.

once again
for the first time
morning[187]

Like the constantly changing light on the hill, the metaphor of revelation, of opening up the site to an initial experience, is troubled by the paradox of 'once again' and 'first time'.[188] Casey argues that although movement and pause are integral to the experience of walking, place remains static: 'just as we cannot walk without starting and stopping – and pausing – so the places around us […] are also reliably stationary: all places are resting places'.[189] Yet for Clark, walking imagery mirrors his metaphorical depictions of shifting landscapes and times. Here, for instance, at the beginning of the walk, the morning is a specific individual moment and yet still generically re-experienced every day. Heidegger notes that 'if there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth in the work.'[190] The revelations in Clark's pauses are at the same time both a 'happening' and a stopping, both the morning today and the morning yesterday, as his lack of punctuation refutes any depiction of closure or finality. Clark's digressions therefore connect Heidegger's 'gathering' with the idea of revelation, of an opening up of poetry to site which is simultaneously a gathering of repeated perspectives.

[187] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, p.7.
[188] This recalls Yi-Fu Tuan's work on place and pause in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, which states that 'if time is conceived as flow or movement then place is pause. In this view human time is marked by stages as human movement in space is marked by pauses. Just as time may be represented by an arrow, a circular orbit, or the path of swinging pendulum, so may movements in space; and each representation has its characteristic set of pauses or places.' Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002 [1977]), p.198.
[189] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p.228.
[190] Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', p.162.

Clark's metaphors and antinomy elide clear connection between site and place and the poem itself, destabilising not just how far a particular site can be represented, but how far any site can be represented. The short poems create breaks in the reading of the long sequence of *The Hundred Thousand Places*, reflecting movement, pause, digression and progression through the landscape, but also emphasising the act of reading. For instance, a blank page follows a poem in which 'a shape/ lifts from rock and flaps/ out over wastes', as the empty page attempts to mirror the sudden absence of the bird from the landscape.[191] This forces the reader to pause in the physical act of turning the page, a pause in their reading which echoes the pause of observation of the walker. The balance between large and small, particular and generic, is reinforced by the poems' paradoxical negotiation between the opening up of the artwork in the imagination and their small, precise, form on the page. Malpas calls Heidegger's notion of revelation 'revealing-concealing', art which simultaneously reveals and represses what it aims to represent.[192] In fact, Heidegger states that the truth of representation is contradictorily 'based on a bursting forth of human beings into an open realm which opens itself so as to conceal'.[193] In this way, Clark's poetry reveals and conceals, letting his representations of site and place slip between the specific and the generic, and the known and the unknown, to the point of ambiguity and paradox. As each poem in *The Hundred Thousand Places* works individually and as part of a whole, the synecdoche of site and place also works both ways, moving between smaller sites and larger places but ultimately deferring any clear 'revelation' of either. These 'hundred thousand places', create an ongoing

[191] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, pp.30-32.
[192] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, p.189.
[193] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p.290.

representation of concealment and revelation, as walking forms a basis for Clark's depictions of the tensions between site and place, movement and pause and literal and metaphorical mediations.

3.4 Complex articulations

Riley's, Finlay's and Clark's representations of site and place are based on the formulation that neither 'site' nor 'place' form distinct categories. Although each of the poets engage with themes of walking and place naming, they put site and place under pressure in particular ways: Clark's formal similarities and differences, Finlay's social interaction and temporal instabilities and Riley's phenomenological disorientations and convergences. Yet what the poets share is an attention to how far poetry determines or destabilises the relationship between fixed, literal location and metaphorical ambiguities. *The Hundred Thousand Places* in particular presents this productive interaction between poetic representation, place and site-specificity:

> a common idiom
> carries through
> complex articulations
> call it a place[194]

The balance between a 'common' language and specific idiomatic phrasing points to the fraught relationship between the particular and the general, whilst the repeated consonants create precision. 'Call it a place' slips between the act of naming a physical place and making a metaphorical place for the 'complex articulations' of language. It is in this way that the poets have woven 'a

[194] Clark, *The Hundred Thousand Places*, p.69.

common idiom' of site and place representation, a language both specific and general and yet still 'complex', challenging any binary between site and place. Their representations of walking call attention to the physical processes of walking through landscape as well as the metaphorical implications of intertextuality. The paradox of place poetry which is both specifically located and uncertainly placed therefore produces a way of reframing 'place poetry' as a genre. Like Heidegger's bridge, Finlay, Clark and Riley's poetry vacillates between two things. As Owain Jones points out, the bridge 'does more than simply connect two banks of a river. Rather it creates a place, and rearticulates the spaces and places, and the lives therein, around it. This quite literal example should not obscure the idea that all things are connectors and assemblers', a convergence which helps unpick fixed notions of time, location and perspective.[195] Contemporary poetry's interrogations of the conventions of place naming and walking allows for a fresh conception of how poetry can mediate between particular material landscapes and environments and metaphorical exploration.

[195] Owain Jones, 'Dwelling', in *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography Volume 3*, ed. by Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009), pp.266-272, p.267.

4 Borders and Boundaries

4.1 'The sea was the river, the river the sea'

Heidegger's bridge showed how a boundary metaphor can reveal interaction and conflict between apparently contrasting concepts, creating an image of simultaneous connection and disconnection. Certainly, contemporary poetry appears to be particularly preoccupied with the possibilities of such images, demonstrating multiple engagements with the concept of borders and boundaries, and imaginatively exploring the notion of the 'border' itself. For example, Heaney's paradigmatic essay 'Something to Write Home About' interlinks a specific political hinterland with the environment, tying his geopolitical concerns to depictions of nature. Heaney depicts a small child pulled between conflicting currents, before finally remaining 'rooted to the spot midstream' in the Moyola river.[1] Significantly, the Moyola runs from the Sperrin Mountains to Lough Neagh, acting as an environmental division between the Protestant Castledawson and Catholic Bellaghy.[2] It is this simultaneous geographical and cultural demarcation which concerns Heaney's essay:

> Nowadays when I think of that child rooted to the spot in midstream, I see a little version of the god the Romans called Terminus, the god of boundaries. The Romans kept an image of Terminus in the Temple of Jupiter on Capitol Hill and the interesting thing is that the roof above the place where the image sat was open to the sky, as if to say that a god of the boundaries and borders of the earth needed to have access to

[1] Seamus Heaney, 'Something to Write Home About', in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London: Faber, 2002), pp.48-58.
[2] Heaney, 'Something to Write Home About', p.49, p.48.

> the boundless. […] And it is that double capacity that we possess as human beings – the capacity to be attracted at one and the same time to the security of what is intimately known and the challenges and entrancements of what is beyond us – it is this double capacity that poetry springs from and addresses. A good poem allows you to have your feet on the ground and your head in the air simultaneously.[3]

The physical borderland of the river Moyola forms a starting point for Heaney's imaginative interpretation of Terminus, as he interlinks the 'midstream' stopping point in the river with classical allusion in order to address the simultaneous significance and elusive nature of boundaries: the limits of 'what is intimately known' and the 'challenges' beyond borders.

Borderland poetry is, of course, not limited to Heaney's output: a parallel yet contrasting example can be found in Ciaran Carson's collection *Belfast Confetti* (1989), which responds to socio-political border zones in the context of The Troubles (1969-1998).[4] Indeed, contemporary borderland poetry frequently negotiates national and regional perspectives, including the Anglo-Welsh tensions in R.S. Thomas's Welsh writing in English. This creates scope for identification of borderland poetry as a genre or subgenre. According to M. Wynn Thomas, Thomas's 'pro-nationalist' poetry has resulted in both agreement and contention in Welsh and English contemporary border poets such as Christine Evans, Jo Shapcott, Gillian Clarke and Robert Minhinnick, revealing frontiers within the genre of borderland poetry itself.[5] This notion of a 'genre' of borderland poetry is reinforced by ongoing intertextual relations between border texts, creating links and frictions, for example, between the

[3] Heaney, 'Something to Write Home About', pp.48-49.
[4] Mike Morrissey, Marie-Therese Fay, and Marie Smyth, *Northern Ireland's Troubles: The Human Cost* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), pp.25-48.
[5] M. Wynn Thomas, 'Prints of Wales: Contemporary Welsh poetry in English,' in *Poetry in the British Isles: Non-Metropolitan Perspectives,* ed. by Hans-Werner Ludwig and Lothar Fietz (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp.97-115, p.100.

Irish and Northern Irish borderland work of Carson and Heaney and other regional and/or national perspectives.

Clarke's sonnet 'Sabrina' from her Severn sequence in *A Recipe for Water* (2009) reactivates previous legacies of border poetry, focusing specifically on an English-Welsh borderland, the Severn estuary:

> Before history there was mythology.
> Fingerprinted between the strata of story
> Is the human sign. We make a guess
> At who they were, and where and why it was.
> How the daughter to faithless Locrinus drowned
> Between and Ice Age and the Age of Stone
> To become the river-goddess, a curb in the river.[6]

'Sabrina' identifies the myth of the Goddess Sabrina, the water nymph from whom the Severn takes its name.[7] Clarke links back not just to the history of the borderland but its mythological and literary interpretations, the relationship between the 'strata' of geographical memory and 'the human sign' of adaptation. The poem therefore begins to reveal how a geographical and environment border can also indicate historical and cultural resonances. At the same time, 'Sabrina' demonstrates an awareness of the ambiguities of legacies: '[w]e make a guess/ At who they were, and where and why it was', interlinking the uncertain borders of the estuary with vague legacies. Similar ambiguity can be found in Ivor Gurney's 'By Severn' (1921-22), despite the contrasting historical and national context of the poem:

> If England, her spirit lives anywhere
> It is by Severn, by hawthorns and grand willows

[6] Gillian Clarke, *A Recipe for Water* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2009). Clarke, *A Recipe for Water,* p.25.
[7] Philip Schwyzer, 'Purity and Danger on the West Bank of the Severn: The Cultural Geography of *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*', *Representations* 60 (1997), 22-48, p.23.

> Earth heaves up twice a hundred feet in air
> And ruddy clay-falls scooped out to the weedy shallows.[8]

Gurney paradoxically finds 'England' in the surrounding natural environment, not in the borderland of the waterway but in the muddy 'earth', which is echoed in Gross's depiction of mud in *The Water Table* (2009).[9] Yet like Clarke, the 'spirit' is deliberately lacking in specificity, found 'by' the estuary in the uncertain earth rather than clearly situated.

Although geographically difficult to locate clearly, the estuary ostensibly runs from the end of the River Severn at the second Severn crossing between Sudbrook and Redwick, and merges with the Bristol Channel before it enters the Celtic Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. Whereas the Moyola indicates a type of border that apparently designates socio-political and regional differences, the Severn and the Channel form a geographical border between England and Wales which also indicates a national boundary. In fact, the geopolitical border between England and Wales lies in the very centre of the channel, an ambiguous social construct which cannot be physically marked. The islands Flat Holm and Steep Holm, which are in the middle of the waterway, demonstrate this ambiguity: Flat Holm falls under Welsh administration and Steep Holm under English jurisdiction, despite their close proximity and lack of territorial marker. This political and national boundary therefore interweaves with the material landscape of the channel, making any distinction between the territorial marker and the physical waterway difficult. Indeed, Philip Schwyzer's article on Milton's *Comus: A Masque Presented at*

[8] Ivor Gurney, *Collected Poems*, ed. by P. J. Kavanagh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.145.
[9] Philip Gross, *The Water Table* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2009).

Ludlow Castle, 'Purity and Danger on the West Bank of the Severn', illuminates how:

> From the Middle Ages and well into the seventeenth century, the river Severn was widely known and referred to as the border between England and Wales. In this period, the river's status as a border had little if anything to do with the business of demarcating actual boundaries. The Severn passes from Wales into England without at any point marking the divisions between the nations. […] Yet such mundane facts had little effect on the general understanding that the Severn – now, as ever – separated England and Wales.[10]

Schwyzer details the cultural and literary implications of the Severn's representation, pointing out how 'the Severn […] was not only an ancient border but also a key site in the original fracturing of a unitary British identity.'[11] The historical and ongoing interpretation of the Severn therefore creates certain distinctive tensions between the physical borderland and its symbolic, political, regional and cultural connotations, and it is for these reasons that it offers an appropriate starting point for thinking about borderland poetry.

As Schwyzer describes, the Severn has had a lengthy history of literary appropriation, stemming from Geoffrey of Monmouth's tale of the drowning of Habren and Sabrina in *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136), from which the river took its names (Hafren in Welsh, Sabrina in Latin, reflected in the modern-day names of Môr Hafren and the Severn).[12] The seventeenth century in particular saw a rise in literary interpretations of the Severn, including Milton's *Comus: A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle 1634* (1799) and

[10] Schwyzer, 'Purity and Danger on the West Bank of the Severn', p.24.
[11] Schwyzer, 'Purity and Danger on the West Bank of the Severn', pp.25-26.
[12] Schwyzer, 'Purity and Danger on the West Bank of the Severn', p.23.

Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612, 1622).[13] Longer traditions of Severn poetry and border poetry include Ivor Gurney's Severn poems and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's focus on Somerset in 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison' (1834), yet recently there have been increased engagements with the Severn Estuary and the Bristol Channel.[14] Twentieth and twenty-first century approaches to the river therefore must strike a balance between previous legacies and more contemporary cultural and social responses, such as the Severn Estuary festival in 2009, for which Oswald's *Sleepwalk on the Severn* (2009) was commissioned.[15] Other twenty-first century English depictions of the estuary include Gross's *The Water Table* and Frances Presley's *Myne* (2006).[16] Representations by Welsh poets include Robert Minhinnick's *After the Hurricane* (2002), Peter Finch's *Poems for Ghosts* (1991), Catherine Fisher's 'Estuary Poems' in *Altered States* (1999), Clarke's *A Recipe for Water* and Emily Hinshelwood's *On Becoming a Fish* (2012).[17] Given these multifarious engagements with the waterway and the changing geopolitical interpretations of the borderland, this chapter employs a dual geocentred and ecocritical

[13] John Milton, *Comus: A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle 1634* (London: E. Harding and W. West, 1799). Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (London: Humphrey Lownes, 1612).

[14] Gurney, *Collected Poems*, p.118, p.145, p.167. Clarke's 'Sabrina' opens with an epigraph from *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*, as she uses her depiction of 'a girl caught in a shoal of silvers' to undermine Milton's 'gentle nymph'. Clarke, *A Recipe for Water*, p.25. The Bristol Channel acts as a focal point for Samuel Taylor Coleridge's thinking on imperialism and the slave trade, as Bristol played a central role. He moved to Nether Stowey in Somerset at the end of 1796, and David Higgins reads 'This Lime Tree Bower' (1834) as geographically significant, describing how the figures in the poem 'have emerged from Holford Dell […] and are looking north across the Bristol Channel', potentially at Flat Holm and Steep Holm. David Higgins, *Romantic Englishness: Local, National and Global Selves 1780-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), p.53-54. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison', in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. by H.J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985 [1834]), p.38.

[15] Like Alec Finlay's *White Peak/Dark Peak*, the fact that Oswald's text was commissioned makes the cultural and social context particularly poignant.

[16] Alice Oswald, *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* (London: Faber, 2009), Frances Presley, *Myne: New and Selected Poems and Prose 1976-2005* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2006).

[17] Robert Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2002), Peter Finch, *Poems for Ghosts* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), Catherine Fisher, *Altered States* (Bridgend: Seren, 1999), Gillian Clarke, *A Recipe for Water* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2009), Emily Hinshelwood, *On Becoming a Fish* (Bridgend: Seren, 2012).

approach to Severn poetry. It maintains a deliberate focus on both the complex ecology of the Severn and its geopolitical implications, specifying a particular area or genre of borderland poetry.

The growing field of border studies is testament to how evocative the notion of the border is for literary studies as well as for cultural and political studies. The developments in border scholarship reveal the interplay between symbolic and physical borders, and yet attention still needs to be paid to borders as physical and material types of landscape as well as to their metaphorical potential. Certainly geographical borderlands such as rivers, estuaries, seas and coastlines can form physical as well as more metaphorical boundaries. For instance, Gabriel Popescu recognises how 'boundaries are both symbolic and physical at the same time, since symbolic borders can have territorial dimensions, and territorial borders can be symbolic as well', although he also notes that it remains important to remember that 'landscape features are not necessarily barriers to human activity'.[18] For border and boundary writing, then, it is necessary to appreciate this potentially fraught yet interlinked relationship between symbolic borders and physical borders, and the simultaneous socio-political, geographical and literary interpretations of the Severn make the waterway an ideal focus point. Attending to the borderland environment of the Severn Estuary and the Bristol Channel, which itself creates a border between England and Wales, allows for a consideration of how contemporary poetry responds to a specific physical boundary, negotiating the relations between the geographical border and its symbolic implications.

[18] Gabriel Popescu, *Bordering and Ordering the Twenty-First Century: Understanding Borders* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2011), p.8, p.17.

Maintaining a focus on a specific borderland thus avoids a general approach to the concept of borders. Indeed, Étienne Balibar calls attention to the fact that the definition and understanding of a 'border' is dependent on its individual and specific circumstances, as well as of those representing or perceiving the border: 'we cannot attribute to the border an essence which would be valid in all places and at all times, for all physical scales and time periods'.[19] The Severn Estuary and the Bristol Channel are themselves shifting environments: the estuary merges with the channel at Sand Point in Somerset and Lavernock Point in South Wales. The fluctuations in the geography of the borderland is also reflected in the multiple names for the area: the English Bristol Channel and the Welsh Môr Hafren (the Severn Sea), intertwining human understanding of the border with its environmental complexity. This interaction between material and physical landscape therefore emphasises how non-human agents such as estuaries can, as Jane Bennett suggests, 'articulate a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans to see how analyses of political events might change if we gave the force of things more due.'[20] Paying attention to the ways in which the physical borderland relates to human structures, politics and experiences, and vice versa, rebalances the relationship between the human and the non-human. Bennett re-appropriates Bruno Latour's concept of the 'actant' as 'a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events.'[21]

[19] Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. by Christine Jones, James Swenson, and Chris Turner, (London: Verso, 2002 [1997]), p.75.
[20] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p.viii.
[21] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.viii, Bruno Latour, *The Politics of Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.237.

This non-dualist approach is therefore particularly important for the 'border' of the Severn Estuary/Môr Hafren, as by considering material landscapes as agents in their own right the relationship between borders as cultural constructs and borders as physical features can be readdressed.

The concept of the 'border' itself has been subject to considerable exploration, with Balibar observing its inherent complexity: 'if we are to understand the unstable world in which we live, we need complex notions - in other words, dialectical notions. We might even say that we need to complicate things.'[22] It is not surprising, then, that defining what is meant by 'border' or 'boundary' has been evocative for both geography and literature. Massey points out that 'geographers have long been exercised by the problem of defining regions, and this question of "definition" has almost always been reduced to the issue of drawing lines around a place.'[23] Massey's play on 'definition' draws out the relationship between physical boundaries and human constructions, as she sees 'drawing lines' and borders around places as questionable, creating interplay between physical geographical features and human interpretations of what constitutes the limits of a region. From a linguistic perspective, the *Oxford English Dictionary* states that a boundary 'serves to indicate the bounds or limits of anything whether material or immaterial; also the limit itself'.[24] This 'definition' recognises that boundaries can be used to mark 'material or immaterial' edges, again reinforcing the relationship between physical and metaphorical boundaries, whilst at the same time emphasising their ambiguity by not distinguishing clearly between them.

[22] Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, p.75.
[23] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p.152.
[24] *Oxford English Dictionary*, *'Boundary, n*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 27 February 2013].

In both of these definitions a boundary is a 'limit', a marker of place which enforces separation rather than connectivity. Despite this, Casey suggests that edges are 'porous', and that they 'take in as well as give out'.[25] Likewise, 'border' and 'boundary' are generally used interchangeably, although Casey makes the distinction between a border as 'a humanly constructed entity' and a boundary as 'intrinsically permeable'.[26] The concepts of 'border' and 'boundary' are therefore in themselves a liminal negotiation between meanings, refuting any stable definitions or demarcations.

This paradoxical potential of liminality is explored by Derrida in *The Truth in Painting* (1987). Derrida's consideration of the frames of artworks begins to provide a way of thinking about the paradoxical nature of borders, particularly in the example of what he calls a 'passé-partout'.[27] The passé-partout is the mounting section of a picture frame, which is both a part of the artwork and yet outside of it: 'what appears, then, and generally under glass, only appears to do without the passé-partout on which it banks.'[28] The passé-partout creates an image of a border which is both inside and outside the artwork, creating overlap between the 'art' and the 'frame'. Derrida's understanding of the passé-partout, although not concerned with territorial or geographical borders, can be usefully re-contextualised. For example, Derrida develops this inside-outside frame in the notion of the 'parergon', the actual frame of an artwork, which constitutes, like the mounting frame, both the

[25] Edward S. Casey, 'Edges and the In-Between', *PhaenEx: Journal of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture* 3:2 (2008), 1-13, p.6.
[26] Edward S. Casey, 'The Edges of Landscape: A Study in Liminology', in *Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies*, ed. by Jeff Malpas (MA: MIT Press, 2011) pp. 91-109, p.94, p.95.
[27] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.12.
[28] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p.12.

outside and the inside of the work. The bordering frame is therefore not only a limit or an edge to artwork:

> A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the ergon, the work done *[fait]*, the fact *[le fait]*, the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the boarder, on board *[au bord, à bord]*. It is first of all the on (the) bo(a)rd(er) *[Il est d'abord l' à-bord]*.[29]

Derrida's notion of the parergon can be metaphorically used to continually frame and reframe place, defining the edges of places whilst at the same time forming both the inside and the outside of it. Nicholas Royle suggests that the parergon 'is not simply a question of the border lines of a box or frame of a painting, say, but of the borders of texts, institutions, and indeed nations and continents'.[30] Royle here recognises that Derrida's parergon can be deployed metaphorically to explore the construct of borders, whether textually or geographically.

Furthermore, the parergon links to Derrida's later concept of the 'aporia'. Derrida explores the notion of the aporia in response to Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), as he considers the troubling moment of impasse between 'Being' and death.[31] The aporia is a paradoxical 'unpassage', as Derrida details:

> The experience of the nonpassage, the experience of what happens and is fascinating […], paralyzing us in this separation in a way that is not necessarily negative: before a door, a threshold, a border, a line, or simply the edge or the approach of the other as such. […] What, in sum, appears to block our way or to separate us in the very place where

[29] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p.54.
[30] Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.15.
[31] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. by Thomas Dutoit (California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p.23.

> it would no longer be possible to constitute a problem, […] at the point where the very project or the problematic task becomes impossible and where we are exposed, absolutely without protection, without problem, and without prosthesis, without possible substitution, singularly exposed in our absolute and absolutely naked uniqueness, that is to say, disarmed, delivered to the other, incapable even of sheltering ourselves behind what could still protect the interiority of a secret.[32]

Derrida's point that the experience of the aporia is 'not necessarily negative' links to the sense that it is not a 'problem': it is not the crossing or lack of crossing of a border that is important, but the experience of the 'impasse', the moment in-between and therefore the experience of the elusive border itself. Derrida points out that the actual crossing-over is not and cannot be experienced directly (in his example, death): 'who has ever done it and who can testify to it?'[33] The aporetic threshold is therefore not stable and fixed but elusive and transient. Aporias, Derrida notes, 'test a passage, both an impossible and a necessary passage, and two apparent heterogeneous borders.'[34] The Greek origin of 'aporia' as 'impasse', or, as Derrida puts it, 'not knowing where to go', reflects the paradox of borders and boundaries as both porous and as limits: 'not knowing where to go' suggests the possibility of crossing and indecision as well as the limitation of the impasse.[35] Derrida's multiple 'aporias' allow for a way of thinking which is not limited to a binary opposition, but instead provides a metaphorical consideration of the multiple and paradoxical experiences of thresholds themselves, as they evoke crossing and not crossing, ending and beginning. This chapter therefore utilises the paradoxical potential of the aporia to destabilise the depiction of borders and boundaries in Severn Estuary/Bristol Channel poetry. By focusing on Presley's

[32] Derrida, *Aporias,* p.12.
[33] Derrida, *Aporias,* p.8.
[34] Derrida, *Aporias,* pp.17-18.
[35] *Oxford English Dictionary*, *'Aporia, n*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 3 July 2013].

representation of hills, Minhinnick's coastal environments and considerations of mud in Gross's text, the chapter crosses the 'borders' between representation, environment and geography.

4.2 Hills: Frances Presley

Presley's *Myne* (2003-2004) and *Somerset Letters* (2002) focus on the landscape of Minehead in Somerset, which is located on the south bank of the Bristol Channel.[36] Minehead is, as Entwistle describes, 'a historical tourist destination and regional cultural and economic centre' for Somerset, granting Presley's poems a specific locus.[37] By paying attention to the history, geography, politics and archaeology of the area, Presley's texts deliberately respond to the material and cultural landscapes of Minehead and the Bristol Channel. This regional focus has led Bush to suggest that 'there is something supremely English and local about Frances Presley's voice and poetic world', and certainly the local politics of Minehead is important for *Myne* and *Somerset Letters*.[38] Letter '7' in the prose-poetry *Somerset Letters*, for instance, reveals social and corporate tensions over the apparent ownership of the Somerset landscape: 'Butlins, I mean Rank, own the foreshore.'[39] Presley puns on 'Rank', evoking not just the ownership change in Butlins in Minehead but also the derogatory meaning of 'rank' as 'festering', and 'rank' as a position in a social or military hierarchy, critiquing corporate tourism. Thus

[36] Frances Presley, *Myne: New and Selected Poems and Prose 1976-2005* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2006).
[37] Alice Entwistle, 'Taking Place; Deixis, Collaboration and the Gender Politics of the Aesthetic', in *Placing Poetry*, ed.by Ian Davidson and Zoë Skoulding (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp.69-91, p.74.
[38] Clive Bush, 'Leading off the Path: Clive Bush reviews *Myne*', *Jacket* 31 (2006) <http://jacketmagazine.com/31/bush-presley.html> [accessed 16 December 2014].
[39] Presley, *Myne*, p.83.

Presley's representation of the Minehead landscape is not necessarily always straightforward, particularly given that Rank's ownership of Butlins ended in 1995, before *Somerset Letters* was completed in 2000, fluctuating between past and present conceptions of the area.

Despite Bush's assertions, Presley's engagement with Minehead appears to be more than a purely local and political one. In fact, Presley's own place-identity is far from 'supremely English', as she was born in Derbyshire to English and Dutch-Indonesian parents. She states in the online journal *How2* that the 'connotation […] "minehead" led back to my birthplace of Derbyshire: my father's family were miners and it seemed strange to us that we should travel to a place named mine head [sic] in a very different landscape and society, with no mines in the sense we understood'.[40] For Presley, Minehead operates as a biographical link to Derbyshire as well as a landscape in its own right. Minehead takes its name from 'myned', Old English for 'hill', as the town lies beneath North Hill, which has a lingering presence in both *Myne* and *Somerset Letters*. 'Mynadd' is also linguistically similar to the Welsh word for mountain, 'mynydd'. This linguistic echo creates a link between Anglo Saxon, Celtic and contemporary Welsh language, further challenging Bush's sense of the local in Presley's work. Presley's 'mining' of the etymology of 'Minehead' demonstrates the uncertain linguistic thresholds of the place name: from the possessive pronoun of 'mine', to the Old English, to 'the Celt' (suggesting also the Welsh) for 'top of the hill'. The place name of Minehead therefore evokes both Welsh and English legacies, metaphorically crossing boundaries between

[40] Frances Presley, 'Common Pink Metaphor: from The Landscape Room to Somerset Letters', *How2* 3:2, <http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_2/ecopoetics/essays/presley.html> [accessed 23 July 2013].

places. In this way Presley's work begins to unveil unsettled distinctions between linguistic, literary and material signification.

Minehead lies to the east of Exmoor National Park, with North Hill in close proximity, acting as a geographical border between the park and the town of Minehead. Indeed, Presley has noted she was 'impressed by the hills after journeying down from the flat lands of Lincolnshire,' giving her focus on hilly and proximate landscapes a personal pertinence, to the extent that with the exception of 'April: from Greenaleigh to Porlock Bay', all of the poems in *Myne* are situated on hills.[41] In 'June: On North Hill', for example, Presley represents a speaker 'blind drawing' the view from North Hill:

> not detachment
> but embrace
> and the interchangeability
> of frames
>
> real drawing is like this
> and now I have made
> the bridge too wide[42]

The 'interchangeability of frames' evokes multiple frames of representation: the drawing, the poem and the landscape. Presley crosses the boundaries between the channel, North Hill and the text, 'bridging' the water in the blind drawing whilst simultaneously attempting to bridge the poem and the landscape. There is 'not detachment/ but embrace' of the multiple and inter-changeable frames and thresholds of place and its representational modes. The poem slips between the literal and the metaphorical, as the drawing is 'real' yet unable to represent the 'bridge' realistically. The pen marks turn 'into

[41] Presley, 'Common Pink Metaphor', n.p., Presley, *Myne*, p.44.
[42] Presley, *Myne*, p.47.

shadowline', a line which is represented by the mark of the pen on the page as well as in shadow, by the shadow created by the pen's blockage of light on the speaker's work.[43] The speaker's assertion 'I have made' additionally suggests the territorial connotations of map-making, which, like Presley's play on 'Rank', alludes to how representation can serve to destabilise landscape authority and conceptions of power and ownership.

Presley has described the compositional process of 'blind drawing' as follows:

> I […] sometimes sketch as well as write, and I include that process (though not the drawings) in 'June on North Hill', which is subtitled 'blind drawing'. The artist's technique of 'blind drawing' is one where you draw without looking at the page in order not to distract the eye.[44]

In the act of writing Presley emphasises the tension between the 'outside' and the inside of the text, as the speaker draws a bridge that is 'too wide': as a representation it fails to mimic the outside environment. Other poems in *Myne* take this tension between literal lines and geographical representation further by including drawn lines within the poems themselves. In 'March: on North Hill', for instance, the poem opens with a drawn line which could represent the shape of the hill through the perspective of the speaker, but which is still limited to poetic representation.[45] In *Lines* (2007) Ingold similarly considers different forms of representation, asking 'where does drawing end and writing begin?'[46] He notes how 'so long as writing is understood in its original sense as a practice of inscription, there cannot then be any hard-and-fast distinction

[43] Presley, *Myne*, p.47.
[44] Edmund Hardy, 'An Interview with Frances Presley', *Intercapillary Space*, 18th October 2006, <http://www.intercapillaryspace.org/2006/10/interview-with-frances-presley.html?q=frances+presley> [accessed 8 April 2013].
[45] Presley, *Myne*, p.55.
[46] Tim Ingold, *Lines* (London: Routledge, 2007), p.120.

between drawing and writing.'[47] This ambiguity between writing and inscription is paralleled in *Myne.* Yet *Myne* still calls attention to the object of the text in its published form, as the drawn lines juxtapose with the regularity of the letters, contrasting the permanence of the text with the momentary nature of composition. For Presley, drawing and writing lines, whether visual or poetic and literal or metaphorical, allows for an inter-connected framing and reframing between the 'backdrop' of the text and the 'backdrop' of the landscape, a constant movement between forms of representation and the material landscape that recalls the torsions between physical and metaphorical borders.

These reframed and mutable hilltop perspectives mean that the foci in *Myne* can be open and shifting, as in 'October: on North Hill':

> sun slats
> through dry leaves
>
> like the turning
> segments of glass
> at Foreland Point
> occulting the optic
>
> white outriders
>
> *over ride the line*[48]

Again, 'line' points to both the poetic line, the line of the waterway and line as limit or separation, recalling Ingold's interest in 'the sheer profusion of different kinds of line' in his anthropological study of lines and line-making.[49] Here, the speaker compares the image of sun 'slats' through trees on North Hill with the patterns made by the beam of a lighthouse at Foreland Point, which is

[47] Ingold, *Lines,* p.3.
[48] Presley, *Myne,* p.49.
[49] Ingold, *Lines,* p.2.

further west from Minehead, in Exmoor. This moving away from Minehead also occurs in 'June: On North Hill', where another voice, 'Kelvin', states 'West, is where you're tending', as the coastal views and perspectives of the speaker begin to 'over ride' the coastal line and move out towards the open sea of the Bristol Channel.[50] 'Tending' has multiple meanings, suggesting the changing inclination of the speaker's view, the 'tending' of husbandry and agriculture and the nautical term for a ship using the tide to turn. In 'October: on North Hill', Presley interconnects poetic movement with tidal flow, as the word 'outriders' suggests 'the action or an act of riding out or venturing forth', connecting with the view from the hill and the crafts in the sea.[51] These 'outriders' could also be boats, overriding the visual 'line' made by wave patterns. Furthermore, the Bristol Channel is overlooked by the lighthouse at Foreland Point, a gaze which is fragmented and 'occulting', flicking between light and dark, between safety and danger, and challenging the 'optic' vision. The 'line', then, represents the lines of the text or of a drawing, an environmental line such as the white crests of the waves, the cultural and technological line of the light from the lighthouse, or the metaphorical line between life and death. For Presley, the 'line' of the lighthouse light in 'October: on North Hill' creates a line between the sea and land as well as representing a 'white' line of security and danger that can have potential repercussions for ships. This echoes Entwistle's point that Presley's poetry 'refuses to take place, to position itself or any of its potential co-producers, in

[50] Presley, *Myne,* p.46.
[51] *Oxford English Dictionary, 'Outriding, adj'*, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 12 April 2013].

any culturally, politically, or aesthetically straightforward or delimiting way,' as Presley destabilises the concept of a stable or knowable 'line'.[52]

The oscillation between different modes of representation can be identified within Presley's poetic processes. Her consideration of landscape is necessarily interconnected with her experimentation with language: letter '10' in *Somerset Letters* states 'these units of language keep us constantly guessing, like the first steps of desire', creating a link between sexuality and linguistic representation which continues throughout the text.[53] Furthermore, *Somerset Letters* interweaves poetry with prose-poems, alternating between different forms of representation, echoing the fluctuation between drawn lines and poetic lines. *Somerset Letters* uses found text and epistolary forms to create correspondence between the speaker(s) in the text and 'Elaine', the poet Elaine Randell, a figure whom Entwistle describes as 'ever-present/absent', a constant mediator between writer, text and reader.[54] Again, Presley draws attention to the relationship between materiality and representation, continuing the artistic theme by including drawings which show layers of strata of what could be either land or sea, whilst creating additional frames within the boxed frame of the image itself.[55] This emphasis on the construction of the text and its status as a material object in comparison to the landscape itself is compounded by form in both *Myne* and *Somerset Letters.* 'December in St Peter's', for instance, crosses the boundary between the inside and outside of St. Peter's church, which is located on the quay of Minehead:

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[52] Entwistle, 'Taking Place; Deixis, Collaboration and the Gender Politics of the Aesthetic', p.81.
[53] Presley, *Myne,* p.90.
[54] Entwistle, 'Taking Place; Deixis, Collaboration and the Gender Politics of the Aesthetic', p.74.
[55] See appendix 7.

holding this away from wet cuffs
capsize me

s/he stands on the water
not even the hem is wet
in the midst is not
on the water

to be in the midst

coal ship
the last
no glowing embers[56]

The lines ‘to be in the midst’ and the earlier ‘barrels scrape/ the quay’ are separated out from the rest of the poem, attempting to spatially represent the distance between the inside of St. Peter’s and the outside water of the Bristol Channel.

Yet Presley unsettles the relationship between distance and proximity: ‘midst’ suggests immersion, whereas ‘not even the hem is wet/ in the midst is not/ on the water’ implies that the speaker is not necessarily in the water of the channel. ‘Midst’ also aurally slips into ‘mist’, suggesting an additional environmental ambiguity. ‘S/he stands on the water’, evokes how the speaker is standing on the quay itself, penetrating into and over the banks of the channel but not standing in the water itself, as well as challenging gendered boundaries. The boundaries between the inside of the church and the channel outside are further crossed as the speaker experiences ‘knee damp’ and observes ‘rot behind the altar/ blue wall gone brown’, the water of the environment seeping into the structure of the church. Presley has noted that ‘the non-linguistic dimension has to be given space to appear on the page’,

[56] Presley, *Myne,* p.51.

suggesting that her aim is, paradoxically, to bring the physical landscape of Minehead, the 'non-linguistic dimension', into the work itself.[57] In this poem she juxtaposes the deliberately disjointed form with the speaker's inability to distinguish between the blurry wet environments of the church, the quay, the Bristol Channel, and his/her own gender identity. The 'blue wall' of the church goes brown due to the damp, yet this simultaneously suggests an image of blue water shifting to the 'brown' caused by the silt and dirt of coal industry. This signals the difficulty of allowing the 'non-linguistic dimension […] to appear on the page', creating a repeated reframing of inside and outside, metaphorically, materially and within the form itself. The continual negotiation between different modes of representation such as lines, drawing and poetic fragmentation suggests that Presley's attempt at mimesis, to bring 'the non-linguistic dimension' of materiality into the text, is not just thwarted but embraced, as she uses representational ambiguity to, paradoxically, mirror the ambiguity of the borderland landscape.

Indeed, Presley uses the notion of the 'interchangeability of frames' seen in 'June on North Hill' to present multiple and unstable representations of landscape, allowing for her representations of the Bristol Channel to be compared with other types of places and other forms of landscape representation. For example, letter '7' contains found text about Joseph Mallord William Turner's paintings of the Minehead coastline:

> Turner shows a sweeping view over Blue Anchor Bay to Dunster Castle with North Hill and the Blue Anchor Inn in the foreground. Sweeping my view around a blue lagoon, somewhere in Italy. Dad asks if we have any brown wrapping paper, forgetting her excess of

[57] Presley, 'Common Pink Metaphor', n.p.

> wrapping paper. A golden beach and cliffs not yet affected by caravans, where blue shadows cross delicate dry land trees.[58]

Presley points out in the notes to *Somerset Letters* that 'the words on Turner […] are taken from *An Endless View: the artist and Exmoor* by John Yeates', providing the source material for her found text, which is simultaneously art.[59] The narrative voice shifts from the description of Turner's paintings of Blue Anchor Bay in Minehead to the 'sweeping view' of another speaker, 'sweeping my view around a blue lagoon, somewhere in Italy.' Presley uses the artist's representation to guide the gaze of the speaker, who mirrors Turner's coastal perspective, whilst focusing instead on an unnamed 'lagoon' in Italy, contrasting with the everyday detail of wrapping gifts. The next sentence shifts back to the Minehead coast: 'a golden beach and cliffs not yet affected by caravans, where blue shadows cross delicate dry land trees', yet the representation is decidedly artistic, focusing on colours, and with a speaker asking 'what kind of tree is it in the foreground? He says he thinks it's an artistic tree.'[60] Recalling Derrida's parergon, the notion of an 'artistic tree' reveals a distinction between the tree itself and its 'artistic' representation, as Presley alternates ambiguously between forms of representation, as well as figuratively crossing the border between a coast in Italy and the Bristol Channel. In this way Presley inter-changeably 'frames' the Bristol Channel

[58] Presley, *Myne,* p.83.
[59] Presley, *Myne,* p.92. Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove in *The Iconography of Landscape* argue that 'a landscape is a cultural image' insofar as 'to understand a built landscape […] it is usually necessary to understand written and verbal representations of it, not as "illustrations", images standing outside it, but as constituent images of its meaning or meanings', which mirrors Presley's negotiation of the productive tension between the physical landscape of Somerset and its numerous cultural representations. Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, 'Introduction: Iconography and Landscape', in *The Iconography of Landscape,* ed. by Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 [1988]), pp.1-10, p.1.
[60] Presley, *Myne,* p.83.

through artistic metaphor, comparing different forms of representation with personal narrative whilst still maintaining a focus on the physicality of the landscape itself. The metaphorical reframing doubles the representation of place, moving between Italy and Minehead, similar to how the image of a beach 'not yet affected by caravans' evokes both the present tourist seaside landscape and Turner's historical depiction.

'June: on North Hill' continues to explore the friction between different representational modes:

> Kelvin said
> Just the sea, Frances
>
> sur sur sur sur
> sur surring
>
> su su su rus[61]

The lines here poetically mimic the effect of 'susurrus', 'a low soft sound as of whispering or muttering'.[62] Yet rather than creating a gap between the physical sea and its representations (both in the poem and in the 'drawing' in the poem), the aural elements of the letters, sibilance and repetition attempt to recreate and mimic the 'susurrus' sound of the coastal waters. This pre-empts the way in which letter '8' in *Somerset Letters* notes 'Harriet [Tarlo] relies on the words – the way they sound, the way we hear them or don't hear them. The gaps and the breaks'.[63] Presley evocation of Tarlo's work demonstrates how Presley calls attention to not just 'the gaps and the breaks' of the words on the page but the gaps and breaks in understanding, pointing to the difficulty of her experimental form yet at the same time emphasising its potential. Here, for the

[61] Presley, *Myne,* p.47.
[62] *Oxford English Dictionary, 'Susurrus, n*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 3 June 2013].
[63] Presley, *Myne,* p.84.

reader, the sea is poetically and visually absent and yet aurally present, spatially separate on the page and yet surrounding in the landscape, as Presley explores different frames of representation. In fact, the first letter in *Somerset Letters* opens with a framed image: 'from this window you can usually see the sea, and sometimes the Welsh coast on the other side of the estuary. Today it's concealed in grey white mist, which also lies across the Minehead holiday camp, with all its funfairs. The colours are all in the foreground.'[64] The speaker looks through the framing shape of a window, noting that 'you can usually see the sea, and sometimes the Welsh coast', but on this occasion it is hidden by mist, recalling how 'December in St. Peter's' depicts the blurring between the 'midst' of the known and unknown environment. The apparently view-limiting mist transforms the view of Minehead's funfairs, as the lights of the fair penetrate through the mist even as the camp itself remains hidden: 'the colours are all in the foreground.' This line shifts the image into that of a landscape painting, as if the speaker were describing a work of art rather than the view from a window, again moving between the material landscape, the uncertain realities of tourism, visual representation and poetic representation.

Somerset Letters is an 'elegy' for Presley's mother.[65] Yet Presley has also noted that 'I still retain a strong interest in the politics of the landscape, and how it is shaped by the various key players – including the national park authorities, the private landowners and the local politicians.'[66] Again, Presley's interest in the Minehead landscape is multifaceted and her 'strong interest in the politics of the landscape' can be seen in letter '4' in *Somerset Letters*:

[64] Presley, *Myne*, p.63.
[65] Presley, 'Common Pink Metaphor', n.p.
[66] Presley, 'Common Pink Metaphor', n.p.

> I need a grammar that will link the channel tunnel to the need for an extra groin in the sea wall. I mean groin, depression between belly and thigh. The minimum number and size of groynes necessary to economically contain the beach material is reassessed by the design architects who realise they will have to see things in the light of October's storm, for which they were not prepared. The park warden is urging the sea to break through the shingle ridge and create new openings and lagoons, which look lovely from above. You cannot economically contain the beach.[67]

Presley's prose-poem demonstrates how multiple voices, perspectives and textual sources attempt to mimic the multiplicity of the landscape itself, as she deliberately presents the beach as an embodied landscape, destabilising distinctions between modes of landscape representation. The language slips between Presley's sexual puns and the discourse of architects considering 'the minimum number and size of groynes necessary to economically contain the beach material'. The initial 'I' voice could be an architect, requiring a 'grammar' for the reasoning behind creating an extra groyne in the sea wall. Yet Presley puns on 'groin', destabilising the discourse of the speaker. Furthermore, 'see things in the light of October's storm' evokes both the colloquial phrase meaning new perspective and the brightness created by a lightning storm. In 1990 a storm caused the beach of Minehead to be washed away. *Somerset Letters* was finished in 2000, as the sea defences were under construction, and the beach was restored fully in 2001, granting the letter a contextual basis. Here, the coast of the Bristol Channel is subject to the constraints of what Presley calls 'the various key players' in Minehead. A speaker comments: 'you cannot economically contain the beach,' repeating the language of the design architects, yet the voice is ambiguous, moving from the

[67] Presley, *Myne,* p.73.

free indirect discourse of the park warden's speculative 'which look lovely from above' to a comment on the futility of attempting to 'contain' a beach.[68]

'Economically' suggests the influence of tourism on the beach, as the park warden is concerned with aesthetically shaping the coastline and restraining the water in order to increase Minehead's tourist trade. 'Economically', also means 'thrifty or sparing', suggesting that Presley is punning on a drive to contain the sea and manage the coastline with as little effort or cost as possible, despite the forceful impact of the original storm.[69] Presley's depiction of the apparent need for containment of the Bristol Channel hints at the realities of climate change and its influence on tourist landscapes in particular, drawing a tension between safety and aesthetics whilst still pointing to the changes in the environment. The shift from first person pronoun to an ambiguous second person by the end of the paragraph elides either personal or communal responsibility for managing the coast, granting further agency to the channel: 'you' suggests that the park warden, the design architects and humanity in general are unable to 'contain the beach'. This problematic agency recalls the opening of letter '7': 'Butlins, I mean Rank, own the foreshore. She knows that because she once complained of [the lack of] wheelchair access to the beach and was told to write to them, and the following year they had installed a wooden ramp.'[70] Rather than presenting the understanding of a beach as a place of global relations and connective economics, what Amy Cutler calls 'a zone of transition, commerce, and communication', Presley instead points to local ownership of the beach and internal bureaucratic

[68] Presley, *Myne*, p.73.
[69] *Oxford English Dictionary*, *'Economically, adv.'*, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 10 July 2013].
[70] Presley, *Myne*, p.83.

processes.[71] Indeed, 'she knows that' suggests that Rank's ownership only becomes apparent in relation to access rights. As Yvonne Rydin points out, 'the fundamentally untameable character of the beach is always there. The land can be developed but water is a more resistant medium'.[72] In Presley's prose-poem, then, an apparent friction emerges between the cultural and social development of the coast and the 'untameable' element of water. In this way she strikes a balance between the agency of tidal forces and the agency of human economics and planning, ironically calling attention to the fact that a wooden ramp took a year to install, suggesting that 'access' to the beach is not easily granted by Rank. The socio-political awareness inherent in the representations of coastal changes and corporate ownership grants Presley's negotiations between the material and the political a contextual basis. In letter '4' the tidal impact of the channel is a material influence on the landscape of Minehead, providing Presley with the metaphorical opportunity to explore the relationship between economics, human agency, the aesthetics of tourism and the force of the sea.

In the notes to *Myne: New and Selected Poems* Presley reveals her urge to find 'new ways of writing about the social realities of life in the country. Another poet who influenced its writing and who shares my passion for the "outside" is Harriet Tarlo.'[73] Presley's use of quotation marks around the word '"outside"' here suggests a view of environment as something other, something outside the text. But at the same time, the marks are ironic and self-

[71] Amy Cutler, '"Whitby is a statement": Littoral Geographies in British Poetry', in *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post War Poetry,* ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.120-133, p.129.
[72] Yvonne Rydin, 'Beaches', in *Patterned Ground: Entanglements of Nature and Culture,* ed. by Stephan Harrison, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), p.153.
[73] Presley, *Myne,* p.92.

conscious, poetically framing the word '"outside"', bringing the external 'life in the country' and Minehead simultaneously inside and outside the text. Indeed, Tarlo herself states in her introduction to *The Ground Aslant* that 'language is a form in which landscape can come alive.'[74] However, this link between poetic form and representation is potentially fraught, as Angela Leighton discusses: 'as a word it [form] holds off from objects, being nothing but form, pure and singular; at the same time, its whole bent is towards materialization, towards being the shape or body of something. Form, which seems self-sufficient and self-defining, is restless, tendentious, a noun lying in wait for its object.'[75] While Presley poetically interrogates the etymological and linguistic boundaries of 'Minehead' she simultaneously interrogates the material and socio-political landscape itself, confirming what Cutler identifies as 'an ambivalent attitude towards littoral geographies, equivocating between residual Romantic understandings of "sublime" coastal prospects and conceptions of the coast as a space crisscrossed with economic and political interests'.[76] Rather than bringing the landscape to 'life' in Tarlo's sense, then, Presley's use of form teases out the relationship between object, materialisation and the poem itself. Her preoccupation with 'drawing' and artistic representation emphasises both the materiality of language and the poem's own status as a spatial object, as her form and language call attention to the visual representation of the poem whilst still encouraging an awareness of socio-political realities and concerns in Somerset.

[74] Tarlo, 'Introduction', p.10.
[75] Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.1.
[76] Cutler, '"Whitby is a statement": Littoral Geographies in British Poetry', p.120.

The multiplicity of the types of geographical, archaeological and sexual landscapes found in *Somerset Letters* and *Myne* is further reinforced by the multiple frames of formal representation. This representational ambiguity occurs within the form and genre of the prose-poems themselves, which are not clearly either epistolary, poetry, or prose: they contain no addressee or sender and the sentences are maintained within specific boundaries on the page. '5' in *Somerset Letters* also negates any clear demarcation between perspective and voice:

> That series of abstract paintings is just exactly the clouds above the estuary until a seagull gets in the way on the sea wall, which must be a relief for the readers, as they have got it entirely. Someone asks which are the clouds and which is the sea, and obviously the sea is up there and the clouds are down there. They are so neatly folded that there is nothing to fold up, nothing at all, only things to take out of her handbags.[77]

This 'letter' opens with a speaker folding up their mother's clothes to take to a charity shop, yet here the narrative voice shifts between a description of landscape paintings, personal history and the estuary landscape. The close of the passage states 'the paintings are called "Broken horizons: shattered dreams", but I think that she liked the yellow in it', conflating together the colours of the art with the colours of the clothing. Presley's found texts create deliberate ambiguity, consistently slipping between contexts. The notion that the 'series of abstract paintings is just exactly the clouds', for instance, reveals friction between the abstraction of the art and the apparently precise reality of the environment, enhancing the disorientation within representational forms and pointing to the difficulties with accurate description. At the same time, the

[77] Presley, *Myne*, p.80.

passage contains multiple perspectives, with the query 'someone asks which are the clouds and which is the sea', evoking the ambiguous estuary environment, the uncertain precision of the artistic representation and questioning how far the perspective itself can be identified. In this way, Presley interweaves her representational modes, using found text and differing perspectives and voices in order to reinforce the blurry lines between environment and representation as well as between types of representation.

For Presley, the Bristol Channel and the hilltops of Minehead provide a way of exploring the relationship between the borderland material landscape and the metaphorical borders of representation. Through an exploration of one specific town on the Somerset coast Presley's poetry is able to evoke multiple representations of place, challenging the notion that her work is 'supremely local'. Instead, it is the straining between delimiting borders and the act of boundary-crossing in Presley's work that is particularly significant. Presley herself has noted that 'there is a constant writing and rewriting of the park and its history in which I am also implicated', demonstrating an awareness of the line between cultural representations and environmental realities as well as the implication of the poet in this mediation.[78] Paradoxically, Presley's mediations between representational modes critique the accuracy of mimetic representation whilst still mirroring the ambiguous borderland of the channel itself.

4.3 Beaches: Robert Minhinnick

[78] Presley, 'Common Pink Metaphor', n.p.

Minhinnick's coastal poetry focuses on the south-facing Glamorgan coast, which stretches along Môr Hafren from the Gower Peninsula and Swansea Bay in the west to Cardiff Bay in the east. Like Presley's local reframing of Minehead, Minhinnick's *After the Hurricane* links specifically to the town of Porthcawl in Glamorgan, which also overlooks the channel. Porthcawl's landscape is distinctively contradictory: its commercial arcades emphasise the cultural element of tourism, contrasting with Porthcawl's conservation areas of natural beauty. Minhinnick himself points out that Porthcawl is 'a tourist resort – but it's also an interesting place'.[79] John Urry and Jonas Larsen argue that the tourist 'gaze' is constructed 'through difference […]. There are many ways of gazing within tourism, and tourists look at "difference" differently,' emphasising the role that perspective plays in representing and understanding landscape from different points of view.[80] This shifting gaze occurs in 'Questions of The Woman Who Fell': '[H]ad you considered the fair/ And its timetabled mania?', as the poem compares the timetabled tides with the timetables of Porthcawl funfair, even while a woman mysteriously stands on a cliff-edge above the channel.[81] Minhinnick therefore renders the friction between the natural and artificial landscape productive, using tidal imagery to unpack relations between the human and the non-human and earth and water. At the same time, the landscape remains externalised, a tourist location which tempers the element of locality.

John Mack's *The Sea: A Cultural History* (2011) describes how 'tides create a shifting boundary between sea and land. Their effect is to emphasize

[79] David T. Lloyd, 'Interview with Robert Minhinnick', in *Writing on the Edge: Interviews with Writers and Editors of Wales*, ed. by David T. Lloyd (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp.57-65, p.61.
[80] John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: Sage, 2011 [1990]), pp.2-3.
[81] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane*, p.27.

the liminality of the beach as parts of it are successively revealed and then swamped by tidal action'.[82] The tidal action of water revealing and also 'swamping' the earth is particularly the case for rock pools, as Minhinnick's sequence 'From the Rock Pool' explores.[83] 'From' suggests ambiguously that the poem is 'from' the voice of the rock pool, or reveals the spatial deixis of the speaker, yet it also signals how the poems are fragmented and truncated, as if taken from a larger sequence. Rock pools (also known as 'tide pools') can only exist when the sea is at low tide, before they merge back into the sea. The rock pool therefore alternates between being separate from the sea and part of the sea as a whole, much like the individual poems in the sequence. The tidal relationship between the rock pool and the sea creates an element of liminality that is also a form of interconnection, as the rock pool is dependent on the sea, recording its 'tides': 'I held the microphone/ to the water. And now I can play the sea's voices/ at night.'[84] Like Presley's explorations of the relations between the material environment and forms of representation, Minhinnick's 'From the Rock Pool' begins to suggest that the watery environment of the Bristol Channel cannot be represented in a fully mimetic manner.

In fact, 'From the Rock Pool' calls attention to the fraught border between the human and the non-human through consideration of different types of landscapes and communication:

> In the Funland arcade I stood next to the sea.
> I lost every coin in my pocket
> but the sea kept winning money all afternoon.
>
> Lend me a dollar, a dinar, a shekel, a groat, I asked.
> An escudo, a euro, a forint, a florin.

[82] John Mack, *The Sea: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p.165.
[83] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane,* pp.111-119.
[84] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane,* p.112.

A pound, a peso, a crown, a cruzerio,

Lend me a Skanderbeg beggar's quindarka,
that I can play this game until the end.
But the sea said nothing. Instead she knelt down
and the money-child ran laughing into her arms.[85]

Porthcawl funfair is located on Coney Beach, behind the beach of Sandy Bay, sitting in-between the beach and the town. The spatial deixis indicates the speaker's simultaneous location 'in' the 'Funland arcade' at Coney Beach as well as 'next to the sea', occupying two places at once. Minhinnick again compares the natural environment of the beach with the tourist resort, as he interlinks the image of throwing money into the sea with playing on 'Funland' arcade machines, likening the push-and-pull of the penny arcade machine with the rhythms of the tides. The association of seaside entertainment with the beach evokes the notion of the sea as an economic space, creating monetary connections between places, and again calling attention to Porthcawl as a tourist landscape. Although the poem is specifically located at the Porthcawl 'Funland arcade', the speaker's call for 'a dollar, a dinar, a shekel, a groat' extrapolates the image of a person playing on local penny arcades out to a reference to international currency markets, shifting from the tourist 'gaze' to wider economic concerns. Indeed, Gregson notes in *The New Poetry of Wales* (2007) how Minhinnick's 'travel writing and, more urgently, his sensitivity to ecological questions […] have influenced his knowledge of how places which are geographically distant from each other can still interact and intermingle'.[86] The metaphorical crossing of international currencies, commercial enterprise and the natural space of the coast allows Minhinnick to demonstrate how the

[85] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane,* p.118.
[86] Gregson, *The New Poetry in Wales,* p.14.

Bristol Channel forms an edge to place as well as creating connections with other places. Yet he also challenges the flow of cultural and economic agency: 'the sea kept winning money all afternoon', shifting the focus from the sea as creating economic mobility to the sea itself as a metaphorical consumer, swallowing money.[87]

This simultaneous comparison and contrast can also be found in Minhinnick's representation of coastal detritus: Jarvis points out that 'Minhinnick's south Wales coastline is quite often littered. […] It constitutes another form of gap-closing between [the] human and non-human.'[88] In 'From the Rock Pool' the unidentified lyrical perspective compounds the blurred human and non-human entanglement:

> There is only what the tide leaves:
> a Sanskrit of coal,
> a McDonald's plastic lid,
> an empty hourglass.
> Until the next of times
> and only the next of times
> these too have their appointed place.
> But I who was born in the rock pool
> know nothing has lasted.[89]

Here, the flow of the tides leaves traces of other places and matter on the beach. The coal, as well as signifying the long history of Welsh coal mining, is also 'Sanskrit', creating connections between Porthcawl and India, as the material traces of the coal on the sand suggest the patterns of the Sanskrit language. The traces of the coal inscribe the language on to the beach, the image interconnecting the material properties of the coal with written script. The beach rubbish also emphasises temporal fluctuations, calling attention to

[87] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane,* p.118.
[88] Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*, pp.82-83.
[89] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane,* p.113.

plastic detritus which is technically waste yet at the same time is lasting, non-biodegradable, and potentially permanent. As well as signalling the ecological impact of coastal waste, Minhinnick's reference to the McDonald's lid recalls the relationship between capitalism and the coast. The representations of waste remind us, as Gillian Whiteley points out, that 'waste is […] an adjunct of luxury. Junk, trash, garbage, rubbish, refuse – whatever we call it – is dependent on economic wealth and excess production.'[90] Minhinnick's litter therefore does more than attempt to close the gap between the human and the non-human, as his environmental concern is also an implicit critique of capitalism, intersecting social, political and ecological preoccupations.

Although the apocalyptic 'until the next of times/ and only the next of times' suggests that the litter will remain a permanent and potentially damaging feature on the coast, the rock pool's voice interjects 'but I who was born in the rock pool/ know nothing has lasted'.[91] The rock pool's environmental transience reverberates into the representation of the beach as a whole, creating a tension between the matter of the detritus and the constantly moving flow of tides: 'the next of times' could also refer to the next tidal wave, sweeping the litter back out to sea, erasing the patterns made by the coal. This circularity is key: Bennett notes how 'a vital materiality can never really be thrown "away" for it continues its activities even as a discarded or unwanted commodity.'[92] Thus Minhinnick's tidal litter creates on-going retreat and return, repeatedly destabilising the border between waste and valued matter. David Trotter also emphasises the symbolic potential in the circularity of 'waste', stating in *Cooking with Mud* (2000) that 'waste remains for ever

[90] Gillian Whiteley, *Junk: Art and the Politics of Trash* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p.4.
[91] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane*, p.113.
[92] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.6.

potentially in circulation because circulation is its defining quality'.[93] It is through this circular process that the 'empty hourglass' symbolically represents timelessness, stopped time, and the more literal and material sense that the hourglass has been emptied of sand. The 'waste' merges with the beach, as the sand from the hourglass leaks into the landscape.

The speaker states in 'Questions of the Woman Who Fell' that: 'I choose the wave's verdict/ That everything will be returned/ Though it comes unrecognised,' as Minhinnick negotiates the impact of coastal processes on detritus and, more ominously, human mortality.[94] In 'Questions of the Woman Who Fell' the water of the channel operates as a metaphorical boundary line between life and death. Minhinnick leaves 'the woman' unnamed, suggesting the troubled anonymity of the figure and querying the tradition of associating the Severn/Môr Hafren with the names of Habren and Sabrina.[95] Minhinnick also interlinks the boundary of life and death with the potential border between linguistic representation and the materiality of the channel:

> We live in language,
> That limestone fault
> Between sweetwater
> And mortifying salt.[96]

'Language' is a 'fault', a fault 'line' in Ingold's sense. It is simultaneously an error – written or otherwise – and a geological separation between tectonic limestone plates, as language forms a boundary between the human and the non-human, a gap which humans are forced to 'live in'. The neat rhyme here

[93] David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [2000]), p.20.
[94] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane,* p.29.
[95] Schwyzer, 'Purity and Danger on the West Bank of the Severn', p.23.
[96] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane,* p.27.

conflicts with the notion of the imperfect fault-line of language, as this paradoxical association and separation between things, between material reality and poetic mimicry, recalls the concept of the aporia. This aporetic tension occurs between the freshwater of the river Severn and the 'mortifying salt' of the channel and the sea. As with the apocalyptic 'From the Rock Pool', in which 'civilisations slip/ through pavement cracks' like water, the channel is a threatening space. The woman's ambiguous fall is associated with detritus in the water: 'curious what's found floating in these seas,' tying human mortality to material decay.[97] Minhinnick's depiction of the simultaneous materiality and ambiguity of mortality also recalls Derrida's concept of the aporia, which finds its clearest example in death. Thus in 'Questions of the Woman Who Fell' Minhinnick adroitly associates the aporetic border of mortality with linguistic representation, the 'fault' of language. For Minhinnick, the tension between language and matter is repeatedly explored, like the image of the 'Sanskrit coal' leaving traces of writing on the sand, concurrently representing physical matter and pointing to the artifice of language.

The 'Songs for the Lugmen' sequence details the physical processes of digging for lugworm fishing bait within a coastal environment. At the same time Minhinnick continues to explore the historical connotations of the intertidal zone:

> The future lies beneath their feet,
> Laid out in this savannah
> Where the coming and the going meet
> And transform one another.
>
> The lugmen on their knees
> Are listening at the pools.

[97] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane,* p.28.

> In their bucket I see vitriols;
> Lenses that look through geologies.[98]

The coastline is a 'savannah', paradoxically suggesting a dry landscape whilst at the same time pointing to an association between beaches and savannahs as transitional landscapes, where earth meets water and where forest meets grassland. The 'coming and the going meet/ and transform each other' mirrors tidal processes, landscape ambiguity, the transience of the sand lugs and Minhinnick's own representation of how borders between forms of landscape cannot necessarily be clearly demarcated. Furthermore, 'vitriols' plays on 'vitriol' as anger as well as a sulphate of metal.[99] The glossy sheen of the metallic substance is, for the speaker, evidence of longer earthy geologies both of the lug worms and the landscape itself. In this way 'Songs for the Lugmen' switches between the past and the present, crossing borders between forms of landscape and temporal signification. Yet again, the way in which Minhinnick depicts the ambiguities of environmental and geographical borders at the coast's edge also extends into the paradoxes of representation and language:

> There they crouch into the breeze, mouths pursed like anemones.
> Salt and samphire on the tongue
> But how briefly lasts the lozenge
> Of language.[100]

As well as contrasting the personification of the sand lugs' 'mouths pursed like anemones' with the lugmen's silence, Minhinnick draws a comparison between the transient phenomenology of the taste of salt and samphire in the coastal environment. The materials are able to momentarily cross the boundary

[98] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane*, p.34.
[99] *Oxford English Dictionary*, '*Vitriol*, *n*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 20 June 2014].
[100] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane*, p.34.

between the human and the non-human, much as how 'the lozenge/ of language' metaphorically evokes the uncertain immediacy of spoken word, whilst the alliteration calls ironic attention to the artifice of the poem. The torsion created by the oxymoronic 'briefly lasts' acts as a microcosm for Minhinnick's exploration of the tension between the language and matter, between spoken language and the written text.

There is then an irony and self-consciousness in Minhinnick's repeated concessions to the fragility of language, an acknowledgement of the fact that poetry itself is an act of cultural mediation. Minhinnick ventriloquizes and personifies aspects of the Glamorgan coast, particularly in 'Porthcawl Preludes', giving voices to environmental materials such as salt and oysters as well cultural structures like a lighthouse.[101] Bennett points out that the presence of anthropomorphism need not necessarily create a dualistic distinction between the human and the non-human: 'a touch of anthropomorphism […] can catalyse a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations.'[102] In 'From the Rock Pool', for instance, Minhinnick's anthropomorphism uncovers the uncertain distinctions between the human and the non-human:

> Yes, if words are coral,
> then languages are islands,
> I tell the sea. You have yours
> and I have mine.
> But the sea only smiles
> and holds my hand tighter
> as we walk together into the sunset.[103]

[101] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane,* pp.98-105.
[102] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* p.99.
[103] Minhinnick, *After the Hurricane*, p.119.

The sea and the rock pool have their own 'languages', as Minhinnick's representations of the non-human are mediated through the human function of language. He undermines, like Bennett, any clear separation between 'distinct categories of beings'. The ending walk into the sunset implies literary cliché, tidal retreat and mortality, emphasising the difficulty in straightforward landscape mimicry.

Speaking 'for' the landscape and its non-human inhabitants presents a challenge which Minhinnick manages by repeatedly calling attention to the artifice of the poem: this is not an ecopoetic 'song of the earth' in Bate's sense but a complex recognition and negotiation of the 'border' between poetry and the environment.[104] Minhinnick's distinctions and comparisons are made by the 'fault' of language, through a formal approach which Gregson calls 'tellingly dialogic', as Minhinnick negotiates the border between the construction of poetry and engagement with the diverse and fluctuating ecology of the coast.[105] In this way Minhinnick is not straightforwardly 'ecopoetic' but is more concerned about the flow of relations between matter and language. Through the use of juxtaposition and parallels he repeatedly interlinks the human and the non-human whilst also distinguishing between them, as his poetry creates liminality between the material landscape and its more metaphorical representations. In comparison with Presley's ambiguous and multiple forms of representation, Minhinnick's poetry attempts to create non-dualist entanglements and yet still comes up against the limits of borders and boundaries. Whether through the material reality of Môr Hafren's intertidal zone, the metaphorical borders between the human and the non-

[104] Bate, *The Song of the Earth,* p.42.
[105] Gregson, *The New Poetry of Wales,* p.52.

human and the local and the global, or by striking a balance between the artifice of poetry and the physical environment, Minhinnick's work 'flows' between material and metaphorical boundaries.

4.4 Mud: Philip Gross

Similarly to Minhinnick, depictions of coastal detritus in Gross's *The Water Table* are both environmental and cultural, as in 'Almost Alabaster':

> White, buff, pink chunks on the beach:
> each morning leaves gifts in the casual way
>
> a cat presents small slaughter at your feet
> expecting thanks. Mute lumps: the waves'
>
> sucked sweeties, coarse peppermint, coconut
> ice – crude figurines, tongue-sculptures
>
> licked half into shape like words not
> quite articulate.[106]

Gross presents the stones and pebbles of the coastline as sweets which have been 'licked half into shape' by the tides of the water. Like Minhinnick's tension between language and landscape, of 'language as islands', Gross points to the intricate relationship between 'words' and the material shape of the stones: they are 'mute', 'not/ quite articulate', even as the poem itself mediates their representation through language. Yet unlike Minhinnick, Gross's similes remain wedded to a kind of litter or waste which is still environmental matter. For Gross, it is not rubbish which uncovers the potential aporia between environment and its representation but the blurred intersection between water and earth: mud. *The Water Table* is preoccupied with geographical and

[106] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.18.

environmental ambiguities, as the title of the work itself signals the murky point in the land at which earth and water reach equal saturation points.[107] Like Presley's awareness of the impact of climate change on the coast of Somerset and Minehead, *The Water Table'*s title evokes concern around flooding and tidal changes. Although his tidal images reveal frictions between past and present and the in-between state of the estuary, it is Gross's depiction of mud which best illustrates the intertwined ecology and geography of the borderland, establishing metaphors of linked and yet separate environmental matter. Indeed, by definition mud is dependent on specific landscape circumstances, yet it can still be broken down into its constituent parts and reformed again.[108] Through this on-going contrast of mixture and separation, *The Water Table* is granted a material focus, a grounding in the geography and environment of the estuary. At the same time, mud has significant metaphorical potential, as Trotter points out, describing mud and mess as 'transitional objects' which allow 'writers and artists [to] think with mess as well as about it'.[109] Mud acts as a source of creativity, a way of thinking 'with' the fertility of the earth as well as through its ambiguity.

The tidal changes in the Severn Estuary frequently reveal the expanses of mud in the landscape, as Jones notes: 'the tide turns and slowly recedes to leave a draining estuary. […] No water at all might be visible, just a deep, indistinct perspective of sand, mud banks and draining channels'.[110] When the

[107] 'Water table', *Dictionary of Environment and Ecology,* ed. by Peter Collin (Huntingdon: A and C Black, 2010), p.223.
[108] 'Mud', *Dictionary of Environment and Ecology,* ed. by Peter Collin (Huntingdon: A and C Black, 2010), p.140.
[109] Trotter, *Cooking with Mud*, pp.8-9.
[110] Owain Jones, '"The Breath of the Moon": The Rhythmic and Affective Time-spaces of UK Tides', in *Geographies of Rhythm: Nature, Place, Mobilities and Bodies,* ed. by Tim Edensor (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2010), pp.189-203, p.192.

tide is out, the water drains into the ground, forming and revealing mud. This 'indistinct perspective' on muddy landscapes in the Severn Estuary is important for Gross's collection. For example, in 'Coming To', the speaker details the six-hourly tidal pattern in relation to a steamer:

> And here I am, and now… and then
> and then again: twelve metres
> and six hours below
>
> at the mud's edge by the dry-shod
> and barnacle-booted last legs of the pier,
> the dizzying idea
>
> of depth above me where the anyway-
> unlikely craft has moored
> suspended in mid-air[111]

'Coming To' describes a 'hundred-year-old steamer' mooring at the edge of the Severn Estuary. The speaker imagines the 'century late' steamer docking at high tide whilst s/he stands at low tide, signalling the swift fluctuations in the landscape: '[a]nd here I am, and now… and then/ and then again: twelve metres/ and six hours below'.[112] Although Gross does not name the 'last legs of the pier', Clevedon Pier in Somerset is well-known for its role as a port for paddler steamers during the nineteenth century. Gross's signalling of time, of the 'Truce' made 'between Now and Then', therefore creates an admittedly ambiguous historical context for the poem.[113] The poem is also connected to the physical processes of the landscape. The speaker imagines observing the craft 'suspended in mid-air' due to the change in the tide level 'twelve metres/ and six hours below', tying the representation of the steamer to the tides of the estuary. The speaker is located 'at the mud's edge' by the pier, suggesting that

[111] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.24.
[112] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.24.
[113] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.23.

the tide has gone out, leaving the 'unlikely craft […] moored/ suspended in mid-air.' The landscape changes in the course of a few hours, as the six hourly tidal patterns interweave with the balance between the past and the present.

It is in this way that *The Water Table*'s mud motifs metaphorically represent the 'in-between', as the substance of mud provides an image which shifts between earth and water, the past and the present.[114] This connects to Gross's own place-identity, as he grew up in Cornwall and now works at the University of South Wales, Glamorgan.[115] Gross has said of the Severn Estuary that 'from the west [Welsh] side it looks like a great lake, an inland sea […] It's a very muscular body, that carries these tremendous tides, with a tremendous body of filth in it. You can't take that lightly. It's a body of water that penetrates everything around it.'[116] Alternating between bodily and sexual metaphor and the reality of the 'tremendous tides', his description of the 'tremendous body of filth' interlinks the body metaphor with the presence of filth, dirt, mud and waste in the water. Filth signifies the ecology of the estuary and its potentially entangled human and non-human processes. In 'The Grounds', for instance, Gross uses the Severn's changing tidal processes to undermine earthy stability:

> Untenable grounds:
>
> betweenlands dis-
> appearing when the tide's attention
>
> is elsewhere, recurrent dreams
>
> devoid of incident or

[114] Casey, 'Edges and the In-Between', p.6.
[115] Stephen Adams, 'Philip Gross speaks about "The Water Table"', *The Telegraph*, 20 January 2010 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/7029350/Philip-Gross-speaks-about-The-Water-Table.html> [accessed 12 April 2013].
[116] Adams, 'Philip Gross speaks about "The Water Table"', n.p.

anyone.

[…]

Indefinite grounds:

constant inconstancy.
Birds appear, condensing

from the sky where they had been

and not been, incipient, un-
formed, latent, like silt,

say, in this ever-flexing water.[117]

Recalling the figure ambiguously caught in the midstream of the River Moyola in Heaney's 'Something to Write Home About', Gross's hyphenated enjambment forms two meanings at once: the betweenlands are both 'dis-/ appearing' and 'appearing' and the 'birds' are both 'un-/ formed' and 'formed', a simultaneous absence and presence, like the tides. The grounds and tides of the estuary are 'untenable', 'indefinite', 'indefinable' and yet, later, 'irrefutable', like the regular but shifting stanzas on the page.[118] The poem's form thus points to the 'constant inconstancy' of tidal patterns, recognising their predictability and management through tide tables but also their inherent 'ever-flexing' nature. *The Water Table* is deliberately non-situated, as 'The Grounds' reveals, with the speaker making up names for the 'grounds': 'irrefutable grounds/ we can't possess, but maps/ and I can name them', using colloquial rather than cartographic references such as 'The English Stones'.[119] This disorientation allows Gross to continually undermine the sense that *The Water Table* is a stable collection about the Severn, despite the title of 'Severn

[117] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.47.
[118] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.47, p.48.
[119] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.48.

Song', where the anaphoric 'the sea was the river, the river the sea' reminds us of how the Severn itself elides constancy or precision.[120]

This element of disorientation features in 'Coming To', where the title ambiguously suggests the physiological state of 'coming to' after losing consciousness and the steamer 'coming to' dock at the pier. Although the steamer has imaginatively moored by the end of the poem, the physical and temporal location of the estuary is unstable:

> Up on the gangplank, one day-trip-dazed
> returner hesitates
>
> (Look down, he'll feel my gaze
> parting the grainy miasma of silt)
> before trusting his weight
>
> to things, deciding to believe
> in time and destinations.
> (Else, where would we be?)[121]

The mud and silt in 'Coming To' represent the mixed ecology of the Severn Estuary rather than signifying clearly defined 'edges' between the land and the water. The silt is parted, separating out the mixture of sand and clay, suggesting that the 'gaze' could be the tidal processes of the estuary, filling in the riverbed and clearing away the silt. The silt is, however, also 'miasma', a noxious vapour, and therefore is tangibly 'grainy' as well as vaporous, an image which mixes together air, earth and water.[122] Therefore 'Coming To' represents both the liminal geography of the estuary borderland as well as mutable psychological processes. Gross's images of mud and silt and 'the dizzying idea' created by the low tide intertwines with the temporal and

[120] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.64.
[121] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.24.
[122] *Oxford English Dictionary*, '*Miasma, n*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 22 July 2013].

locational ambiguity of the poem, metaphorically fluctuating between places and times, rather than creating a sense that the Severn Estuary is a clearly demarcated borderland.

Gross's repeated use of hyphenated words deliberately calls attention to both links and gaps. This creates connections between the words on the page as well as between types of environments, recalling Presley's movement between different forms of representation. In fact, Casey suggests that 'a clue toward a […] constructive notion of the "in" of the in-between is found in the hyphenation of this very phrase itself'.[123] Casey's concept of the physical and metaphorical in-between here links with a focus on written representation: for example in *The Water Table* 'Stilt City' states 'earth-mist, silt-marsh, reed-mulch and salt pastures/ where three rivers used to graze.'[124] 'Earth-mist', 'silt-marsh' and 'reed-mulch' combine environmental and geographical features which signal the ambiguity of the borderland landscape. 'Earth-mist', for instance, is a geographical impossibility yet metaphorically evokes the multiplicity of the ecology of the region. Furthermore, 'where three rivers used to graze' apocalyptically suggests that the riverine landscape has changed or declined and simultaneously marks the points where the Severn, Wye and Avon become subsumed into the Severn Estuary. The hyphens reveal both semantic connect and disconnect, poetically signifying a gap whilst also crossing it. In 'Betweenland VIII', this hyphenation extends to father-son relations:

> What my father can't hear, I hear for him - the flow,
> the under-hush of water, tide-drag, friction with itself -

[123] Casey, 'Edges and the In-Between', p.4.
[124] Gross, *The Water Table,* p.25.

> though it's only one thread of the chord (too broad, too low
> for human ears) the whole estuary is.[125]

The speaker attempts to mediate between the estuary and his/her father by listening to the 'chord' of the estuary. By hyphenating sub-clauses, using parentheses and creating hyphenated portmanteaus the poem creates 'friction with itself' in the lines of the stanza, forming poetic threads which attempt to mirror the 'thread of the chord' of the estuary.

Yet at the same time the parenthetical interjection '(too broad, too low/ for human ears)' signals the impossibility of truly hearing the 'under-hush of water', which becomes other-worldly: 'or maybe that,/ not the chatter of things, *is* what he's left with now'.[126] Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* also creates a tension between sound and silence, as Schwyzer points out:

> While the poem as a whole (or rather, as a fragment of a whole) is devoted to Great Britain, it is on the banks of the Severn that Drayton […] seeks to work out the vexed question of British identity. In the person of the nymph Sabrine, Britain is given its most persuasive voice, a voice that collapses, in the space of a few thousand lines, into incoherence and finally silence.[127]

Like Drayton, Gross inter-links the unknowable 'vertigo' of his father's limited hearing with the underwater experience of the estuary, a sound which is paradoxically 'such/ all-sound that it's silence', creating a link between the two which is same time impossible: an aporia.[128] Indeed, Gross has stated that 'if you look at the Severn estuary, which looks both blue and brown, it is because it is reflecting both earth and sky', suggesting that the estuary acts as a

[125] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.44.
[126] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.44.
[127] Schwyzer, 'Purity and Danger on the West Bank of the Severn', p.28.
[128] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.44.

mirror.[129] Yet 'no mixture' creates a tension between the two colours, suggesting that the borderland of the Severn is a simultaneous doubling up of two things, as well as a geographical entity in its own right: 'two things can be true', as his poetic hyphenations interlink with the materiality of the Severn.[130] Gross creates a paradoxical tension which reflects how the Severn Estuary is 'a body of water that penetrates everything around it', simultaneously separate and yet part of the wider landscape.[131]

Echoing 'Coming To', mud and its metaphorical connotations reveal shifts between the past and the present in 'Betweenland IX':

> There's a river underneath the river:
> the lowest of tides make that clear –
>
> with broad meanders, floodplain
> pastures like our own upstream
>
> but monochrome, an early silver-
> nitrate plate that flicks to negative
>
> and back, depending how you tilt it,
>
> a memento of itself, or what
> we had forgotten we'd forgotten[132]

When the tide of the estuary retreats, mud flats and silvery patterns are left, as Jones describes: 'the tide turns and slowly recedes to leave a draining estuary. […] No water at all might be visible, just a deep, indistinct perspective of sand, mud banks and draining channels.'[133] Low tide reveals the paradoxically 'clear' mud flats and floodplain underlying the estuary's edges. The poem

[129] Adams, 'Philip Gross speaks about "The Water Table"', n.p.
[130] Gross, *The Water Table,* p.64.
[131] Adams, 'Philip Gross speaks about "The Water Table"', n.p.
[132] Gross, *The Water Table,* p.50.
[133] Jones, '"The Breath of the Moon": The Rhythmic and Affective Time-spaces of UK Tides', p.192.

returns back to an ancient time, when 'we had forgotten we'd forgotten', a time before animals, humans, grass, or even history itself, associating the murk of the mud with the unknown. 'Betweenland IX' oscillates between the past and the present, like the flickering 'early silver/ -nitrate plate' of a monochrome photograph. The mudflats are a 'memento' of the waterway, an environmental trace as well as a metaphor for the passage of time.

In this way Gross's representation of the Severn Estuary provides a way of metaphorically and frequently ambiguously negotiating the relationship between 'two things'. The anaphoric line 'the sea was the river, the river the sea' in 'Severn Song', for instance, represents not just the fluid relationship between the channel and the estuary, but the way in which this can be mirrored or reflected by poetic processes.[134] Similarly, in 'Mist' from the sequence 'Bridge Passages', Gross represents a bridge which 'sidles/ into white midstream':

> Heavy goods pour on
>
> over into the blank
> others seem to return from
>
> so of course we trust it
> like an elegant equation.[135]

The mist obscures passage across an unspecified bridge over the Severn Estuary, even though 'others seem to return', as the bridge crossing is only partly perceived and represented. It appears to interrupt movement across the estuary, even as 'midstream' ambiguously suggests both the 'midstream' of the water of the river and the positioning of the bridge in the middle of the mist.

[134] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.64.
[135] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.37.

The scale of the Severn is shrunk from an estuary to a stream due to the view-limiting influence of the mist. Here, then, the environmental influence of mist acts as an additional boundary in itself, but one which can still be passed through. The scale shift evokes how mist is a microcosm for water: mist is formed from water droplets but is also able to conceal and obscure, creating a temporary yet crossable environmental threshold. Gross makes sure to avoid erasing the boundaries between types of environment by continuing to 'hyphenate', whilst still pointing to the ambiguity of comparing specific environmental features. According to Ingold, a consideration of weather allows for a reframing of the relationship between the material and the immaterial:

> In the canons of modern thought […] the surfaces of the landscape are identified with the limits of materiality. This, in turn, renders immaterial the medium through which persons and organisms move in perception and action. Thus whilst the landscape appears to be real, the weather can only be imagined. Overturning this ontology, […] in the perception of the weather-world, earth and sky are not opposed as real to immaterial, but inextricably linked within one indivisible field.[136]

Gross's preoccupation with both the waterscape and the weather of the estuary destabilises the boundary between earth and 'sky', between landscape and atmosphere. Indeed, the next poem in the sequence, 'Murk', states: 'Brown sky over the channel, not/ pollution but reflection. Correspondences:/ *as below, so above.*'[137] This 'reflection' rather than 'pollution' indicates the relations between the weather and the water of the channel, connected but not intermingled. Furthermore, Gross's awareness of pollution and smog here anticipates recent developments regarding harnessing the tidal range of the Severn as a means of producing clean energy, hinting at the delicate balance

[136] Ingold, *Being Alive*, pp.96-97.
[137] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.378.

between the natural environment of the Severn and its potential involvement in pressing environmental concern.[138]

Recalling Minhinnick's 'From the Rock Pool', the 'Betweenland' sequence negotiates between individual parts and the whole sequence. Rather than following on from another, each 'Betweenland' poem is dispersed across the collection, linking to how Gross's appropriation of mud traverses between the particulars of specific environmental material and the larger ecology and 'weather-world' of the estuary. Indeed, in 'Meander' a speaker asserts that '[t]he river desires/ with a fixed and single-/ minded purpose/ to be everywhere,/ every drop of it free'.[139] Again, Gross shifts between scales. Despite its tidal patterns, the river impossibly 'desires' to be everywhere, not bounded by the edges of land but with every droplet of water 'free' from the borders of the riverbank and the ground of the earth. At the same time the river is 'fixed and single-/ minded', pointing to the physical reality of its fixed yet meandering path and, like 'The Grounds', the fixed borders and regularity of the form of the poem. Although Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen's introductory exposition of borders in *Borders: A Very Short Introduction* (2012) suggests that 'nature […] pays little heed to political borders and thus functions as the most pervasive of border crossers,' the environment in *The Water Table* is represented as not free and unbounded but instead as subject to

[138] In 2012 the shadow Welsh secretary Peter Hain called for a tidal barrage of the Severn to be put in place: Leo Hickman, 'Should a Tidal Barrage Be Built Across the Severn Estuary?', *The Guardian*, 15th May 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2012/may/15/severn-barrage-peter-hain-energy> [accessed 19 March 2015]. On 2 March 2015 plans were confirmed for a first tidal lagoon to be built on Swansea Bay: Karl Mathiesen, 'Should the UK Be Subsidising the World's First Tidal Lagoons?', *The Guardian*, 2nd March 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/mar/02/should-the-uk-be-subsidising-the-worlds-first-tidal-lagoons> [accessed 19 March 2015].

[139] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.53.

its own constraints and patterns.[140] This is reflected in how *The Water Table* as a collection maintains a focus on the Severn whilst still questioning loco-specificity through its dearth of place names, with the exception of 'Severn Song'. Like 'Betweenland VIII', 'Severn Song' creates an intertextual link with Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, which is structured into songs.[141] In this way Gross's text points to both the necessity and the impossibility of defining the material borders of the estuary, even as his intertextuality creates connections to longer literary interpretations of the Severn.

Gross therefore develops the possibility of mud as, in Trotter's phrase, a 'transitional object' between earth and water into a consideration of the estuary landscape as a whole. Representations of environmental thresholds in *The Water Table* metaphorically hyphenate the relationship between the estuary and the channel, the human and the non-human and the past and the present. Like Derrida's description of how 'the parergonal frame stands out against two grounds *[fonds]* but with respect to each of these two grounds, it merges *[se fond]* into the other', mud's transitional and yet distinctive composition provides Gross with ongoing metaphorical possibilities.[142] The 'river underneath the river' in 'Betweenland IX', for instance, reframes environmental borders, as Gross creates parallels between mud and water, river and floodplain. His representation of the ambiguous muddy geographical borderland recollects the way in which Minhinnick uses litter imagery to highlight the relationship between materiality, ecology and language.

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[140] Alexander C. Diener, and Joshua Hagen, *Borders: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.111.
[141] Schwyzer, 'Purity and Danger on the West Bank of the Severn', p.29.
[142] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p.61.

4.5 Double capacity

Heaney's understanding of the 'Terminus' of boundaries seen in 'Something To Write Home About' is Janus-faced: it reveals the 'double capacity' of borders and boundaries as points of both limit and crossing, emphasising the double capacity of poetry itself. Despite the common meaning of terminus as a final station, Heaney's metaphor correlates interestingly with the aporia. His poem 'Terminus' in *The Haw Lantern* (1987), for instance, traverses border lines: 'I was the march drain and the march drain's banks/ Suffering the limit of each claim', intertwining the speaker's body with the borderland environment of marches as well as with the political marches of The Troubles.[143] This chapter, then, has shown how the Severn poetry of Gross, Presley and Minhinnick takes the 'double capacity' of poetry further, using the interplay between linguistic representation and material reality to draw out the paradoxical tension inherent in the concept of borders and boundaries. Borderland poetry is always an attempt at mediation, a paradoxical and evocative threshold in itself, operating between the system of language and the physical landscape. Simultaneously, Gross, Minhinnick and Presley's evocation of the materiality of the Bristol Channel region allows the poetry to refocus on applied landscape issues, ranging from Gross's awareness of flooding and pollution to Minhinnick's concern over the environmental impact of waste. Thus their poetry strikes an important chord for poetry of environment and place, remaining attentive to socio-political issues such as tourism and coastal erosion as well as literary representation.

[143] Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* (London: Faber, 1998), p.295.

The poets' interest in Môr Hafren and the Severn Estuary is not coincidental: the borderland landscape of the waterway allows for in-depth and versatile explorations of what it means to write 'border' poetry. In the 'Thinks Bubble' sequence, for instance, Gross creates a parallel between human consciousness and water which recalls Minhinnick's aporetic boundary between the human and the non-human. The 'Thinks Bubble' is, as the speaker states, 'meaning gathering', a metaphor for both rain clouds and a 'thought bubble' from a comic strip.[144] Like Minhinnick's circular litter imagery, Gross uses the ongoing water cycle to evoke creative processes:

> Soon I learned how it fell
>
> into text – slant, side blown,
> as italics.
>
> Rain now
> falls on water, in the small hours,
>
> as a tree in the forest, as *thinks*
> not quite *thought*
>
> returns itself seamlessly
> into itself,
>
> the mind, the weary mind,
> not there to see.[145]

Rain, acting as a metaphor for writing, creates the text: 'slant, side blown', before being returned 'seamlessly' into itself. Gross's weather-world here echoes Presley's friction between the inside and outside of the text. This is continual and ongoing: it '*thinks*' in the present tense. Gross, Presley and Minhinnick therefore utilise the Severn Estuary and Bristol Channel region to

[144] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.55.
[145] Gross, *The Water Table*, p.56.

uncover how far the ‘double capacity’ of poetry can stretch, how far it can mediate between the physical ecology of landscape and its representation. In Heaney’s metaphor, it is like ‘that child rooted to the spot in midstream’.[146] This is an aporetic poetry which pushes against the limits of representation even as it comes up against it.

[146] Heaney, ‘Something to Write Home About’, pp.48-49.

5 Body, Place and Environment

5.1 'Of bodies changed to other forms I tell'

The concept of aporetic borders can be developed from geographical and environmental borders into human and non-human ones, particularly through a consideration of the ultimate boundary between the world and the self: the confines of the body. Certainly, bodily motifs in contemporary nature poetry interrogate the relations, conflicts and interactions between the corporeal human body and the non-human environment. What is striking is that these representations can be material and metaphorical, evident in such phrases as a 'body' of water, land, or the 'body' of a text. On the one hand, focusing on the physical body suggests an element of landscape phenomenology, which Wylie notes 'often lays stress upon some measure of direct, bodily contact with, and experience of, landscape'.[1] This non-representational approach is to an extent material, focusing on the 'processual and performative' functions of the embodied world, instead of being 'stabilised or structured via messages in texts and images'.[2] A phenomenological negotiation of body-world relations therefore simultaneously attends to the on-going processes of place, environment and human interaction. The performance of place contrasts with the processes of representation which 'stabilise' and formalise geographical and phenomenological experience in a text, creating tension between physicality and representation. On the other hand, 'body' can particularly

[1] Wylie, *Landscape*, p.138.
[2] Wylie, *Landscape*, p.164.

evoke metaphorical potential, suggesting the implications of 'body' as physical form as well as 'body' as metaphor.[3] Tally's definition of literary geography, for instance, is itself tied to metaphor, as he states that '"projecting a world" seems an entirely appropriate phrase for describing the role of literature, and a great many literary works have undoubtedly functioned as imaginary maps, diagrams, constellations, and the like'.[4] For Tally, representation echoes and constructs place and environment rather than reducing it to fixed description. The concept of the 'body' similarly shifts between physicality and poetics, providing a way of navigating the relationship between material corporeality, the environment, and the 'body' of textual representation. Considering the treatment of the body in the poetry of Oswald, Shapcott and Burnside will therefore reveal the fluctuating and paradoxical relations between corporeality and metaphor.

Phenomenological approaches to body and landscape suggest that the material corporeality of the body can act as a porous boundary between the human and the non-human. Yet the 'song of the earth', the notion that 'the experience evoked by the poem is that of feeling at home, being gathered into oneness with the surrounding environment' seems problematic for linguistic mediation.[5] Bate's metaphor of the 'song of the earth' suggests that the environment's materiality extends so far as to be mirrored by the text itself, as he argues that poetry is materially linked with the earth. Ironically, Bate's metaphor implies that landscape poetry can be reduced to its material and physical presence. In contrast, Ingold's notion of 'the meshwork' unpicks the material-metaphorical tensions between landscape and cultural representation,

[3] *Oxford English Dictionary*, '*Body, n*', <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 20 September 2013].
[4] Tally, *Spatiality*, p.42.
[5] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.281.

suggesting that environment is an entanglement of nature and culture: 'organisms and persons, […] are not so much nodes in a network as knots in a tissue of knots, whose constituent strands, as they become tied up with other strands, in other knots, comprise the meshwork.'[6] The 'tissue of knots' implies not just a network of natural-artificial relations but also bodily tissue, as Ingold's metaphor interlinks bodily imagery with landscape. The meshwork of environment therefore encourages a phenomenological approach that does not preclude human production and does not suggest that poetry is the song of the earth itself.[7] Similarly, Julie Sanders's response to Wylie's work notes that 'the application of phenomenological geography alone is not enough', as she argues that physical and historical experience 'should not be abstracted from the imaginative, the physical, or the experiential', thereby interlinking a literary critical approach with landscape phenomenology.[8] This ensures that an affective or material experience of landscape and place is still connected to representation. Reframing the idea that the body only operates as a literal material link or division between the human and the non-human encourages a consideration of how the 'body' of a poem can itself simultaneously represent, challenge and negotiate bodily relations with the environment. Phenomenology's blurring of body and landscape can lead to a complete elision of human and non-human categories rather than an exploration or a destabilisation. Therefore, by examining how the physical body, its metaphorical connotations and textual explorations interact, this chapter will

[6] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p.70.
[7] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p.339.
[8] Julie Sanders, 'Beyond the Power of Art to Represent? Narratives and Performances of the Arctic in the 1630s', in *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities*, ed. by Stephen Daniels et al. (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.293-298, p.297.

explore the frictional intersections and interactions between body, text and environment.

The theme of labour is one way of associating the physicality of the body with the material environment. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, situating the body 'here', in place, involves the work of the body itself, 'the anchoring of the active body in an object, and the situation of the body confronted with its tasks'.[9] The tasks of the body in labour and work, as Merleau-Ponty details, are not just a way of locating the body's 'determinate position', but add another layer of phenomenology, 'a manner of expressing that my body is in and toward the world.'[10] This can also be extended to the environment more generally. For instance, Ingold suggests that the meshwork of environment involves making and growth of both 'artefact and organism', both nature and culture, an interpretation of the interrelation between human and non-human materiality as constantly in process.[11] Ingold uses the image of work to convey this, defining what he calls a 'taskscape', the landscape of labour. This taskscape is 'understood as the totality of tasks making up the pattern of activity of a community'.[12] The taskscape, then, is work of and within the landscape, work which is not limited only to human beings.[13] The body signals not just spatial location but influence and involvement in the landscape through the processes of the taskscape. Ingold adds that 'landscape and taskscape […] are not to be opposed as nature to culture'.[14] This recalls Williams's point that 'there is […] not much point in counterposing or

[9] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. by Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2013 [1945]), pp.102-103.
[10] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* p.103.
[11] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*¸p.339.
[12] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment,* p.325.
[13] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment,* p.199.
[14] Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment,* p.197.

restating the great abstractions of Man and Nature. We have mixed our labour with the earth, our forces with its forces too deeply to be able to draw back and separate either out'.[15] Williams's 'labour' emphasises a physical, social, cultural, and political interaction between the human and the non-human, as he suggests that the processes of labour challenge distinctions between the natural and the artificial. The concept of bodily labour and work in the landscape therefore destabilises any sense of landscape as idealised, allowing the realities of labour to interact with the non-human environment. Instead of Bate's suggestion that ecopoetry shares the perspective 'not of the hand-worker but that of the imagination-worker', this chapter will reveal how Oswald's consideration of the interactive communities on the river Dart, Shapcott's exploration of the labour of illness and the process of writing poetry, and Burnside's fraught relations between human work and the mystery of the natural world all transform traditional notions of body and labour.[16]

Poets and writers have long been intrigued by the relationship between the body and landscape. Like the lengthy tradition of Severn Estuary poetry, imagery of body and land can be found in riverine poetry such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8AD), Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), all of which create a literary legacy for contemporary poetry concerned with the shape-shifting potential of landscape, water and bodies.[17] Like Clarke's understanding of the vagaries of literary legacies in 'Sabrina', and the way in which poetic heritages '[…] make a guess/ At who they were,

[15] Raymond Williams, 'Ideas of Nature', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1989 [1980]), pp.67-85, p.83.
[16] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.280.
[17] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. E.J. Kennedy and trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008 [8AD]), Drayton, *Poly-Olbion*, T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005 [1922]), pp.50-70.

and where and why it was', the intertextual traces found within writing on body and landscape requires an awareness of the nuances and ambiguities involved in tracking such connections.[18] Taking this friction between the material and the metaphorical further, though, the metaphorical body-world transformations this chapter explores can be traced back more specifically to Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* whose mythological depiction of shape-shifting bodily forms has resulted in sustained and ongoing literary transformations.[19] The twentieth-century legacy of *The Waste Land* is also significant: as part of its allusive project *The Waste Land* responds to and adapts Ovid, including the tale of Tereus and Philomela.[20] James Longenbach points out that Eliot's allusions form the basis of *The Waste Land* itself: 'the allusions do not seem to reinforce an otherwise approachable meaning but instead seem essential to the structure, not immediately perceivable, of the poem'.[21] It is this conjunction between intertextuality and form which is significant for a consideration of metaphorical and interlinking bodies of texts. Indeed, *Metamorphoses* opens 'of bodies changed to other forms I tell', as Ovid signals the main theme of bodily transformation and alteration. This is particularly pertinent for this chapter, as 'forms' simultaneously suggests the forms of literary works. Indeed, Sarah Annes Brown notes 'its [*Metamorphoses*] permeation into so

[18] Clarke, *A Recipe for Water,* p.25.
[19] Sarah Annes Brown additionally locates Ovid's legacy in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* as well as Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando.* Sarah Annes Brown, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid: From Chaucer to Ted Hughes* (London: Duckworth, 1999), p.39, p.57, p.155, p.201.
[20] Eliot, 'The Waste Land', p.60, l.99-104.
[21] James Longenbach, '"Mature poets steal": Eliot's allusive practice', in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot,* ed. by A. David Moody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.176-188, p.176.

many revered literary texts', which as a result create literary metamorphoses of their own.[22]

Therefore, as well as creating literary transformation, Ovid's themes of metamorphosis and transformation also act, as Annes Brown points out, as 'conceits of a kind – metamorphoses could be described as metaphors made flesh'.[23] This suggests that Ovid's bodily translations are circular, paradoxically moving between the material to the metaphorical and vice versa through the literary legacy of his myths. *Metamorphoses'* famous opening lines, for instance, are translated in Ted Hughes's *Tales from Ovid* (1997) as 'now I am ready to tell of how bodies are changed/ into different bodies'.[24] Hughes's response to *Metamorphoses* simultaneously rewrites Ovid's lines and marks his own self-referentiality, demonstrating how the act of translation is a poetic transformation as the body motif oscillates between material bodies and the metaphorical 'body' of the text. This chapter, then, intertwines the seemingly material theme of physical labour with the apparently more metaphorical concept of metamorphosis, deliberately moving between the two in order to challenge any clear demarcation between bodily physicality and imaginative representation. As with the opening of *Metamorphoses*, the poets' 'versions' and 'other forms' will be seen to mirror their shifting perspectives and representations of unstable and changing bodies. Burnside, Oswald, and Shapcott respond to Ovid's tradition of metamorphosis and the body whilst at the same time forging their own versions, as they mediate between materiality and poetic representation.

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[22] Annes Brown, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid,* p.2.
[23] Annes Brown, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid,* p.2.
[24] Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems,* ed. by Paul Keegan (London: Faber, 2003), pp.865-1042, p.865.

5.2 Labour

Oswald considers the fraught relationship between physical work and its representation by suggesting that 'a nature poet is someone concerned with things being outside each other,' asking 'how should extrinsic forms, man and earth for example, come into contact?'[25] Her answer lies in a complex negotiation of the labour of gardening, the construction of poetry, and mediation. Oswald once worked as Ian Hamilton Finlay's gardener at Little Sparta, and her experience and emphasis on physical outdoor work is necessarily intertwined with her poetic processes.[26] She notes how poetry, gardening, and the body involve productive tensions:

> I've always loved poems which express the continuity of man with Nature. But when I started gardening, what enthralled me was the contrariness of Nature – the earth fighting back, refusing to loosen, roots clinging in, cold disabling my fingers.[27]

Oswald draws a contrast between poems which unite the human and the non-human and the physical experience of gardening, which suggests 'the contrariness' rather than submission of nature to 'man'. In both creating and coming up against distinctions between the body, the material environment, and poetry, Oswald recognises the paradox of using representation to consider physical bodily experience. Oswald's interpretation of labour considers how

[25] Alice Oswald, 'The Universe in time of rain makes the world alive with noise', in *A Green Thought in a Green Shade: Poetry in the Garden,* ed. by Sarah Maguire (Milton Keynes: Poetry Society, 2000), pp.35-45, p.40.
[26] Peter Howarth, '"Water's Soliloquy": Soundscape and Environment in Alice Oswald's *Dart*', in *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post War Poetry,* ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.190-203, pp.199-200.
[27] Oswald, 'The Universe in time of rain makes the world alive with noise', p.38.

the relationship between the body and nature can challenge human and non-human divisions, even while pointing to the fraught connection between physicality and poetics.

It is in this vein that Oswald opens the introduction to her anthology *The Thunder Mutters*, considering how the physical action of a garden rake acts as a connective tool:

> Raking, like any outdoor work, is a more mobile, more many-sided way of knowing a place than looking. When you rake leaves for a couple of hours, you can hear right into the non-human world, it's as if you and the trees had found a meeting point in the sound of the rake.[28]

For Oswald, the work of raking produces sound, which contrasts the sounds of the outside world with the sounds created by poetry, what she calls 'putting our inner worlds in contact with the outer world – a deep, slow process that used to be the remit of the rake'.[29] This is developed on a larger scale in *Dart* (2002), as her representation of the river is filtered through a consideration of the sounds of the social and working communities that surround it.[30] The depiction of an apparently encompassing world of sound in *Dart* recalls R. Murray Schafer's study on 'soundscapes', which asks 'is the soundscape of the world an indeterminate composition over which we have no control, or are *we* its composers and performers, responsible for giving it form and beauty?'[31] Oswald's use of sound in *Dart* poses a similar question, negotiating the friction between the literal sounds of the environment of the river and the sounds created by the form of the poem. The 'rake' symbolises this tension, acting as a

[28] Oswald, 'Introduction: A Dew's Harp', p.ix.
[29] Oswald, 'Introduction: A Dew's Harp', p.x.
[30] Oswald, *Dart (*London: Faber, 2002).
[31] R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Vermont: Destiny Books, 1994), p.5.

metaphor for poetic composition as well as the literal act of raking and the noise it produces. At the same time, the physical labour of raking is phenomenological, providing a tool which extends the body's connection with the world, and echoing Merleau-Ponty's sense that labour allows the body to gesture 'in and toward the world'.[32] Oswald's earlier essay in *A Green Thought in a Green Shade* (2000) elucidates this, as she discusses how 'meaning is something "working" and provisional, it needs to be picked up and put down and then picked up again over a period of time, according to what needs doing, like any hoe or hand tool.'[33] Ironically, the physical labour of raking provides Oswald with a way of thinking about how the human body is simultaneously a limit and a connection with the surrounding environment, a body which labours in the landscape yet also mediates this engagement through language and sound.

The rake mirrors Oswald's emphasis on the intrinsic link between language, poetry and sound, and Peter Howarth suggests that in *Dart* the body itself figures 'as an instrument of sound'.[34] In *Dart*, what Rodaway calls the 'sensuous dimension' occurs partially through Oswald's emphasis on sound, with the preface to the poem stating:

> This poem is made from the language of people who live and work on the Dart. Over the past two years I've been recording conversations with people who know the river. I've used these records as life-models from which to sketch out a series of characters – linking their voices into a sound-map of the river, a songline from the source to the sea. There are indications in the margin where one voice changes into another. These do not refer to real people or even fixed fictions.[35]

[32] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.103.
[33] Oswald, 'The Universe in time of rain makes the world alive with noise', p.40.
[34] Howarth, '"Water's Soliloquy": Soundscape and Environment in Alice Oswald's *Dart*', p.193.
[35] Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies*, p.7, Oswald, *Dart*, n.p.

Like Presley's 'made' territories and artistic representations in *Myne*, here the poem is 'made' insofar as it is constructed from an intricate meshing of human and non-human communities on the river Dart. Oswald uses sound recordings to create a 'sound-map', resulting in an inter-linking of the form of the poem with the geography of the river Dart, as Howarth remarks: 'the geography of *Dart* […] cannot be thought except through its form.'[36] This focus on form initially suggests Tally's understanding of 'literary cartography' as a narrative which 'makes possible an image of the world, much like that of a map, and the literary cartography present in one narrative can become a part of future surveys', evoking a sense that Oswald's 'map' acts as an 'image' of the Dart.[37] 'Making' thus ties to the political implications of map-making, as Oswald points to the inherent power relations involved in cartography by deliberately shifting between genres. Indeed, songlines, as Ingold explains, are 'the so-called songlines […] that, in Aboriginal cosmology, criss-cross the entire continent of Australia […], [and which] are for Western observers but part of an imaginary construction that is "pinned" on to it' rather than 'traced out by ancestral creator beings'.[38] *Dart* as simultaneous 'songline' and 'map' points to this 'imaginary construction' even as it maintains a keen awareness of the material landscape: it is 'made' both poetically and physically.

As well as attentiveness to sound, each section of the poem has particular formal distinction: from listing boat names to juxtapositions between prose sections and poetry, Oswald uses the structure of the poem to attempt to evoke the structure of the community. The poem signals variations in voice,

[36] Howarth, '"Water's Soliloquy": Soundscape and Environment in Alice Oswald's *Dart*', p.191.
[37] Tally, *Spatiality*, p.49.
[38] Ingold, *Lines*, p.50.

register, and location, but with frequent ambiguity, as seen in the interchange between an eel-watcher and eel:

> (two places I've seen eels, bright whips of flow
> […]
> I let time go as slow as moss, I stand
> and try to get the dragonflies to land
> their gypsy-coloured engines on my hand)
>
> whose voice is this who's talking in my larynx
> who's in my privacy under my stone tent
> where I live slippershod in my indoor colours[39]

The distinction between the eel watcher's voice and the eel itself is signalled by the parenthesis. Yet the human's voice and the eel's eventually become merged: 'whose voice is this', as Oswald uses the form of the poem to both define and undermine contrasts between individual voices and the human and the non-human.

Paying attention to working communities on the Dart also allows Oswald to interlink bodily engagement with the landscape and individual experience. Charles I. Armstrong details: 'as Oswald interprets it, work involves a physical engagement with matter. It reconfigures subjectivity, rooting it more firmly in the body.'[40] For instance, the wool workers use the water of the Dart to wash wool and make dye, a working 'taskscape':

> wool in the back of the throat, wool on ledges,
> in fields and spinning at 5,000 rotations per minute –
> and look how quickly a worker can mend an end
> what tentacular fingers moving like a spider,
> splicing it invisibly neat look what fingers could be –
>
> cotton warp, jute weft, wool pile, they work
> lip-reading in a knocking throbbing bobbining hubbub

[39] Oswald, *Dart,* p.6.
[40] Charles I. Armstrong, *Figures of Memory: Poetry, Space, and the Past* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.194.

> transporting the web on slatted belts with a twist to get it
> transverse,
> then out for lunchbreak, hearing the small sounds of the
> day
>
> That smell of old wet sheep.[41]

The wool workers' perspective is pluralised, as Oswald's focus is on the multiple bodily experiences of the workers. The taste of wool, the tactile and spider-like movement of the worker's fingers, the sounds of the day and the smell of 'old wet sheep' all inform the physical sensations of industry. Yet it is sound which stands out, as the present participles bring the clamour of the taskscape to the fore: 'knocking throbbing bobbining hubbub'. Howarth notes how *Dart* 'makes us hear sounds more than words, sounds which then key into the sound of the river', and for the Woollen Mill passage this poetic 'hearing', what Howarth calls 'the endlessly combinable babble of sounds', is decidedly industrial.[42] The workers are surrounded by noise, forced to 'work/ lip-reading'. Besides its onomatopoeic potential, the present tense encompassing 'knocking throbbing bobbining hubbub' shifts individual bodily sensorial experience to a general 'hubbub' of sound, pain, and labour. The 'geography' of *Dart*, then, is not a referential one, and nor is it a purely natural environment. Instead it is a complex representation of the variety of industry, labour, and interdependent human and non-human relations surrounding the river, as Armstrong states: '[the poem] does not constitute a delimited, idyllic place, but is the point of intersection for a variety of spatial relations of trade and traffic'.[43] The dragonflies in the eel-watcher section metaphorically create

[41] Oswald, *Dart*, p.19.
[42] Howarth, '"Water's Soliloquy": Soundscape and Environment in Alice Oswald's *Dart*', p.197, p.198.
[43] Armstrong, *Figures of Memory: Poetry, Space, and the Past*, p.194.

the sound of industrial 'engines', whilst the recurrent assonance and sibilance creates sound within the poem. Ingold's critique of the notion of 'soundscape' asserts that 'listening to our surroundings, we do not hear a soundscape. For sound […] is not the object but the medium of our perception. It is what we hear in'.[44] Understanding the soundscape not as a flat terrain but a place of movement and flux challenges *Dart's* trajectory as an unbroken linear narrative or a 'sound-map', instead suggesting that it is a fragmentary poem of movement and flow. Ingold adds how: 'sound flows […] along irregular, winding paths, and the places it describes are like eddies', appropriately tying his description of sound to water metaphor.[45] Sound can therefore be linked to the labours surrounding and within the river Dart, as the poem traverses the relationship between the apparent reality and objectivity of the recorded voices, phenomenology and the varied landscape of the river.

This emphasis on the bodily experience of work links back to the original meaning of the word 'labour'. Williams observes: 'as a verb labour had a common sense of ploughing or working the land, but it was also extended to other kinds of manual work and to any kind of difficult effort'.[46] Even the 'lunchbreak' in the wool worker section is wedded to the speakers' working lives and sensorial experience, as they are unable to escape the all-pervasive smell of 'old wet sheep', with a singular speaker identifying the different types of breeds.[47] Oswald's representation of the clamouring sounds of the mill and the multiple bodily experiences of labour avoids a singular corporeal perspective. Yet at the same time Oswald reinvigorates the link

[44] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p.138.
[45] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p.139.
[46] Williams, *Keywords*, p.146.
[47] Oswald, *Dart*, p.19.

between the lyric poem and sound. Indeed, Brewster's work on the lyric form details how the term 'lyric' originates from 'the Greek lurikos', and emphasises 'lyric as a performance', particularly in the 'voices and structures of address that are heard or invoked in lyric texts'.[48] Although a long poem rather than a short lyric, *Dart*'s fragmented narrative fits with Brewster's sense that the lyric is 'curiously "outside" of time rather than tied to a specific occasion'.[49] In this section, for instance, the simple present tense captures the experience of the wool workers which could be attributed to any generic working day instead of a specific moment. Oswald's use of the lyric, then, deliberately enters into a poetic tradition which privileges sound and voice over linear narrative, as the relationship between the physical sound of the rake, the sounds of human voices, and formal lyricism entangle in *Dart*. Brewster notes how 'lyric practice has by now become almost entirely separated from song and music, but nonetheless lyric has continued to be defined in terms of voice and dramatised presentation from antiquity to the present'.[50] Despite the separation of lyric poetry from music, Oswald still taps into the musicality of the lyric form, as *Dart*'s construction of a 'songline' forms a polyphonic lyric of both human and non-human bodily experience.

For Oswald, the lyric form reinforces the ambiguous relationship between the natural and the artificial. Indeed, Bate's discussion of Adorno's 'The Beauty of Nature' argues that '[n]ature is not just an image of beauty, it is also an object that is worked over and commodified, but the beauty of nature nevertheless offers us a promise of freedom, peace and belonging. By withdrawing into its own realm and thus obliterating the scars of

[48] Brewster, *Lyric*, p.2.
[49] Brewster, *Lyric*, p.18.
[50] Brewster, *Lyric*, p.34. Oswald, *Dart*, n.p.

commodification, art has the capacity to redeem that promise.'[51] Oswald's lyric form is not a 'song of the earth', however; in *Dart* the distinction between the working landscape, the 'object' of nature and its 'beauty' is difficult to draw, as demonstrated by Oswald's representation of Totnes Weir, where the river meets the sea:

> Exhausted almost to a sitstill,
> letting the watergnats gather, for I am no longer
> able to walk except on a slope,
>
> I inch into the weir's workplace,
> pace volume light dayshift nightshift
> water being spooled over, now
>
> my head is about to slide – furl up my eyes,
> give in to the crash of
> surrendering riverflesh falling, I
>
> come to in the sea[52]

The river is both anthropomorphic and what Westphal calls 'geomorphic' here: the portmanteau 'riverflesh' suggests both the flesh of human corporeality and the body of the river itself.[53] Oswald moves between representing the landscape as a body and the body as landscape, since the use of 'I' suggests a human persona merging with the river: 'I am no longer/ able to walk except on a slope', a figure who does not 'come to' until he/she reaches the sea, recalling Gross's play on 'coming to' in *The Water Table.* Yet the river is also a ventriloquized non-human entity, using the register of labour to call attention to the balance between the river as a commodity and as a natural waterway. The river moves into the 'weir's workplace', and the labouring imagery of 'pace volume light dayshift nightshift' combines with the physical and

[51] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, pp.122-123.
[52] Oswald, *Dart*, p.26.
[53] Westphal, *Geocriticism*, p.68.

economic exhaustion of the river, which, like a resting human body, is at a 'sitstill'. Oswald's representation of the human and the non-human is interlinked, further challenging the sense that phenomenology need be purely natural, as Wylie points out:

> Phenomenology continues to posit and depend upon a "natural" perceiving subject, a pre-linguistic, pre-cultural lived body possessed of inherent perceptual arrangements and facilities. […] It tends to replace a detached meaning-bestowing "cultural" mind with an active, sturdy and involved dwelling body.[54]

Oswald's language destabilises any demarcation between the landscape as labour-producing, as aesthetic beauty, or as either human or non-human. She grapples with what she calls 'my worked-in world alive in all its freshness' and poetic representation by allowing for an exploration of the relationship between the material body and its 'meaning-bestowing' cultural representation in lyric poetry.[55] Rather than Bate's suggestion that 'art' reflects the 'promise' of the aesthetics of nature, Oswald's 'art' is a complex negotiation between the work of human community, the work of the river, and representation. Her metaphorical shifts between forms of bodies, the body of poetry, the body of the river, and sound and lyric results in the construction of a labouring community which delicately blurs human and non-human distinctions.

Like Oswald, Shapcott's representation of the relationship between the body and labour is frequently concerned with industry and landscape, particularly in the 'Gladestry Quatrains' sequence in *Tender Taxes* (2001).[56] The quatrains engage with the borderland of Gladestry in east Wales in order

[54] Wylie, *Landscape*, pp.184-185.
[55] Alice Oswald, 'Wild Things', *The Guardian* 3 December 2005 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/dec/03/poetry.tedhughes> [accessed 22 April 2015].
[56] Jo Shapcott, *Tender Taxes: Versions of Rilke's French Poems* (London: Faber, 2001).

to refigure considerations of identity, belonging, and landscape history. Shapcott's essay 'Confounding Geography', whose title suggests the evocative properties of 'geography' as well as its potential obfuscation, notes how her 'quest has been to discover how to be a different kind of writer, for whom place and language are less certain, and for whom shifting territories are the norm', and certainly 'Gladestry Quatrains' demonstrates this shifting territory, place and language.[57] For Shapcott, 'shifting territory' evokes a metaphor of transformation as well as the concept of having an uncertain sense of place. 'Llan', for instance, opens:

> If there's a goddess of this place
> does she speak Welsh?
> There's not much English
> in her bright face.[58]

Gladestry is in Powys in mid Wales, lying on the border with England. 'Llan' in Welsh means an enclosed piece of land, as Shapcott uses its etymology to emphasise the persistence of national borders. Furthermore, 'English' implies both nationality and language, and thus Shapcott signals the fraught language and border tensions between England and Wales. Her depiction of the landscape as a Welsh female is no accident: Deryn Rees-Jones points out that:

> Although the female body, and how to name and place it in relation to a poetic "I", is a pervasive source of anxiety in twentieth-century women's poetry, […] Shapcott is rare among her contemporaries in playing out a relationship between self and world so that the fixed matter of the body also becomes unfixed in a merger with the landscape around it.[59]

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[57] Jo Shapcott, 'Confounding Geography', in *Contemporary Women's Poetry: Reading/Writing/Practice*, ed. by Alison Mark and Deryn Rees-Jones (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp.40-46, p.42.
[58] Shapcott, *Tender Taxes*, p.51.
[59] Deryn Rees-Jones, '"Wanderer, incomer, borderer/ liar, mother of everything I see': Jo Shapcott's Engagement with Landscape, Art and Poetry', in *Poetry and Geography: Space*

Shapcott's representation of the border landscape in 'Llan' is as 'unfixed' as her anthropomorphism: here the female body is not a 'poetic "I"' but a transformation of the mother earth trope, granting Shapcott's consideration of Gladestry a geographical, feminine and deliberately impersonal dimension.

Although the anthropomorphism of the landscape as a female body is linked to the speaker's heritage, this ancestry is simultaneously undermined:

> Old border tongues trash
> this cwm, words and sounds
> I can make when my parents,
> rarely, let me eat their ashes.
>
> The valley loves, it sleeps.
> Why should I enter its body,
> travel its capillaries,
> listen to its skin?[60]

The barrier created by the 'skin' of the valley prevents the speaker from entering the landscape: but at the same time, listening to the skin and moving through blood vessels suggests a longing for sensorial experience. The speaker's estrangement is compounded by the word 'cwm', meaning valley, as its suggestive onomatopoeia juxtaposes with the English words. This single Welsh reference self-consciously makes the Welsh 'words and sounds' 'rarely', as the speaker recognises the tension between his/her Welsh heritage and the border county itself. *Tender Taxes* adapts Rainer Maria Rilke's French poems, and Shapcott notes that 'in my poems the place names change from Swiss to Welsh and English', creating an additional level of oscillating

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and Place in Post War Poetry, ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.163-178, p.164.

[60] Shapcott, *Tender Taxes*, p.51.

location.[61] These relocations recall the fluctuating relations between site and place, and Shapcott calls attention to how place names can both confirm and undermine notions of secure location. In entering into an engagement with Rilke, Shapcott intertextually reflects changing national and regional identities, noting that 'I moved Rilke's poems, set them in a place which has, literally, an edgier feel: the borders of Wales, where my family has its roots.'[62] Although 'Llan' suggests a link between Shapcott herself and the speaker's Welsh heritage, Shapcott has said of her later work that 'The "I" [in my poetry] is no more and no less me than it ever was', deliberately obfuscating the perspectives in her work.[63] By eliding any element of autobiography she furthers the estrangement and disconnection, as the 'Gladestry Quatrains' sequence confirms Shapcott's 'shifting territories' of location, identity, and bodily metaphors.

Another poem in the sequence, 'Wye Marches', details the bodily work involved in the labour of mining, simultaneously evoking the lingering consequences of coal dust. Shapcott evokes the borderland landscape of the marches to consider tensions between history, personal identity and work:

> It keeps evading me, this border country,
> though my own grandfathers
> mined coal, coughed, spat
> and died not far away.
>
> You round a corner and the hill
> has moved, the sky's gone AWOL
> and the ancestors, muttering in another tongue

[61] Shapcott, *Tender Taxes*, p.ix.
[62] Shapcott, *Tender Taxes*, p.x.
[63] Sarah Crown, 'Jo Shapcott: I'm not someone chasing her own ambulance', *The Guardian*, 24 July 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/24/jo-shapcott-poet-interview> [accessed 14 November 2013].

have dug themselves even further in.[64]

The labouring 'grandfathers' provide an ancestral link for the speaker in the poem, a link that is paradoxically connective and alienating. Like 'Llan', 'Wye Marches' negotiates the tension between the body, identity, and the border landscape. It points to the difference between English and Welsh, 'another tongue', and the alienation of the miners digging themselves in to the earth and, more metaphorically, the nation. The visceral 'spat' simultaneously suggests the miners spitting due to the coal dust and acts as a metaphor for speaking Welsh. Yet the poem ends with 'muttering', a quietening of the previously vociferous sounds of language, and the addition of the preposition 'in' ambiguously suggests a 'muttering in' another language. Although Casey suggests that 'things are not oriented in and by themselves; they require our intervention to become oriented […] the *a priori* of orientation belongs to the body, not to the mind', here the sense of place is formed by the corporeal experience of coal mining, the language of the Welsh Marches and the history of the landscape.[65] In fact, the body refuses to provide secure orientation, as 'the hill/ has moved, the sky's gone AWOL', with Shapcott's shift to second-person address further destabilising the perspective of singular national identity.

This mutable depiction of subjectivity and identity is a thread that runs through Shapcott's work. *Of Mutability* (2010), for instance, is interested in how illness shapes relations between and representations of the body and the

[64] Shapcott, *Tender Taxes*, p.49.
[65] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (California: University of California Press, 1998), p.205.

world.[66] The text, which begins by acknowledging Shapcott's own doctors at Hereford County Hospital, engages with how serious illness affects both writing and the body.[67] Shapcott has stated that her experience of breast cancer was:

> [L]ike being reborn as someone slightly different. And in my case, that meant not only finding out who I was now – this new, wobbly person – but how that person wrote. The distinctive thing about breast cancer is that you're not cured, you're only ever in remission. You become aware that the body is going in one direction: towards disintegration.[68]

Shapcott suggests that her illness influenced not just her own body, her 'new, wobbly person', but also her poetry, as she links together the process of writing with the bodily 'disintegration' caused by the cancer, which brings an enforced attentiveness to mortality. Although *Tender Taxes* focuses on the interconnection between industry, the body and national perspective, labour in *Of Mutability* attends to internal bodily and biological processes. This again recalls Williams's observation that 'labour' extends from manual industry to 'other kinds of manual work' and 'any kind of difficult effort'.[69] In *Of Mutability*, this 'difficult effort' can be related to the workings of the body itself, to the effort in putting one foot in front of another, as in the eponymous sonnet:

> Look down these days to see your feet
> mistrust the pavement and your blood tests
> turn the doctor's expression grave.[70]

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[66] Jo Shapcott, *Of Mutability* (London: Faber, 2010).
[67] Shapcott, *Of Mutability*, n.p.
[68] Sarah Crown, 'Jo Shapcott: I'm not someone chasing her own ambulance', *The Guardian*, 24 July 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/24/jo-shapcott-poet-interview> [accessed 14 November 2013].
[69] Williams, *Keywords*, p.146.
[70] Shapcott, *Of Mutability*, p.3.

The speaker's feet 'mistrust' both the ground of the pavement and his/her blood test results, suggesting that the impact of illness influences the perception of the environment itself. In contrast with *Dart,* the speaker's bodily experience of the environment is primarily visual: the metaphysical world is sensed on the periphery of vision, 'out of the corner of your eye' and the instability of the pavement is observed rather than felt. Like Shapcott's suggestion that remission from cancer is 'going in one direction: towards disintegration', here the instability and difficulty of the act of walking is tied to the threat of death inherent in 'grave'. Shapcott's depictions of labour therefore move between the personal and the impersonal, maintaining an attention to domestic and private labour over the community or industrial forms of work.

Rees-Jones notes how the fact that *Of Mutability* was written during Shapcott's battle with breast cancer gives the collection a 'new engagement with the body that illness can bring'.[71] In 'Of Mutability' this refigured relationship is revealed through the perspective and instructional tone of the speaker, which again is both personal and impersonal. The poem opens with the speaker stating that '[t]oo many of the best cells in my body/ are itching, feeling jagged, turning raw/ in this spring chill'.[72] However, the sense that Shapcott is, as she states, 'not an autobiographical poet', allows her exploration of 'mutability' to be reflected in the unstable depiction of voice and address. The poem continues:

> It's two thousand and four
> and I don't know a soul who doesn't feel small

[71] Rees-Jones, '"Wanderer, incomer, borderer/ liar, mother of everything I see': Jo Shapcott's Engagement with Landscape, Art and Poetry', p.170.
[72] Shapcott, *Of Mutability,* p.3.

among the numbers. Razor small.
[73]

A shift from concern over a singular speaker's internal processes to a second-person address occurs here. Shapcott merges the physicality of the body with the soul, as the soul is impossibly quantified by its physical size, and the speaker's concern alters from an interior consideration of their 'best cells' to a collective experience of time. Drawing upon the tension between anonymous medicalisation and self-identity, by using the sonnet form Shapcott enters into a tradition in which, as Brewster details, 'the lyric persona is not to be confused with the poet her- or himself'.[74] Shapcott's fluid perspective challenges the dissolution of the self into a sick body by fluctuating between the individual and wider society. Shapcott's representation of illness as both personal and collective is therefore reflected in the lyric itself, which is, as Brewster notes, 'fundamentally concerned with the conditions and nature of address.'[75] As with the exploration of the tension between border landscapes, self-identity and labour in 'Gladestry Quatrains', *Of Mutability* begins to reveal how Shapcott's representation of the body is both internal and external, creating an unstable depiction of the inner workings of the human form.

In contrast, Burnside's representations of the body are intricately tied to relations between the human and the non-human, rather than focusing on tensions between intrinsic and extrinsic human corporeality. Burnside's essay, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology' suggests, in fact, that writers should maintain 'a philosophy of dwelling that includes all things, living and

[73] Shapcott, *Of Mutability*, p.3, Crown, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/24/jo-shapcott-poet-interview> [accessed 14 November 2013].
[74] Brewster, *Lyric*, p.2.
[75] Brewster, *Lyric*, p.2.

non-living, and informed by the principle of ahimsa, of doing, if not no harm, then the absolute minimum of harm'.[76] Burnside's poetic representations are therefore motivated by attentiveness to the politics of environmental degradation. Burnside's espousal of a 'minimum of harm' in poetry is evocative of 'ecopoetics', which, as Tarlo summarises, tends to be 'motivated by environmentalism'.[77] Yet Burnside simultaneously recognises both the benefits and the limits of linking together poetry and ecology, suggesting that 'the great thing about being an ecological poet is that one is utterly inconsequential and so entirely free to propose anything. Even the impossible'.[78] The 'impossible' is displayed through Burnside's exploration of the other-worldly, of myth and the unknown, with the environment represented as 'the real world' as well as 'enduring mystery'.[79] Burnside's approach to ecology forms a tension between the material and the metaphorical and this paradox is played out through his consideration of phenomenological experience of landscape. He notes, echoing Bate's *The Song of the Earth*, that:

> A walking human – or, for that matter, any human being standing in the open, exposed, aware, at risk, untrammelled – is able to attune him or herself to the rhythm of the earth, the feel of a place, the presence of other animals, the elements, sidereal time, the divine.[80]

Like Oswald's rake, for Burnside the human body allows for 'untrammelled' access to 'the rhythm of the earth', allowing it to act as mediator between the human and the non-human. His ongoing engagement with Heidegger

[76] John Burnside, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology', in *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science,* ed. by Robert Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.91-106, p.93.
[77] Tarlo, 'Introduction', *The Ground Aslant,* p.11.
[78] Burnside, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology', p.94.
[79] Burnside, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology', p.92.
[80] Burnside, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology', p.101.

emphasises this, as Burnside's bodily metaphors are frequently addressed through the lens of dwelling. Here, the human body allows for a connection with 'the elements', recalling Heidegger's 'fourfold' of earth, sky, divinity and mortals in 'Building Dwelling Thinking'.[81] Burnside's fraught relations between the known and the unknown, what David James calls '[an] apparently contradictory coexistence of pragmatism and mystery', creates balance between corporeal phenomenology, the material and ineffable aspects of environment and lyric poetry.[82]

As seen in Shapcott's exploration of the relationship between lyrical subjectivity and objective perception, Burnside's lyrical form enters into an internal, self-conscious tradition which appears to juxtapose with holistic environmental attentiveness. For instance, in contrast with Oswald's presentation of an intertwined river community in *Dart*, Burnside displays a specific focus on individual experience. In 'Nightshift at the Plug Mill', from *The Hunt in the Forest* (2009), a speaker details their steel-work: 'four hours into the dark I'd fall asleep/ for seconds, then wake to the scream/ of gears', recalling Oswald's emphasis on the sounds of industry.[83] By the end of the poem the threat of 'the misalignment that might kill me' changes to a pause in the work:

> sometimes the wheels turned smoothly all night
> long
> while I sat in the cabin and gazed off into the lights
> of the freight yard, where trains slid by
>
> like trains in a film about wartime or mass

[81] Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p.147.
[82] David James, 'John Burnside's Ecologies of Solace: Regional Environmentalism and the Consolations of Description', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 58:3 (2012), 600-615, p.601.
[83] John Burnside, *The Hunt in the Forest* (London: Cape Poetry, 2009), p.13.

transportation,
fresh snow drifting in waves between brickwork and
gables
or standing an hour at the door, till it came to
nothing.[84]

Brewster points out how Burnside 'attempts to think the natural world ethically and "relationally" through the singularity of a lyric mode whose nature has characteristically been conceived as one of detachment and self-absorption,' creating disjunction between the personal lyric form and the wider world.[85] Here, the individual experience of the plug-mill worker still results in a wider sensorial attentiveness: the potential of a lull in work allows the speaker to gaze outwards, both physically and imaginatively. The ending 'till it came to/ nothing' ambiguously suggests the apparent futility of the labour and looking at the freight yard, a fruitless coming to consciousness, and the gaze itself. Burnside's lyric mode, then, ironically traverses the porous boundary between individual experience and the outer world.

In 'Ports' from *The Asylum Dance* (2000), however, Burnside uses the collective 'we' to consider the relationship between the labour of the harbour, 'dwelling' and representation. 'Ports' is located at Edinburgh harbour, which the speaker calls 'our dwelling place', noting how the harbour is both home and a destination point: 'whenever we think of home/ we come to this.'[86] Unlike Heidegger's more fixed concept of dwelling, 'home' in 'Ports' is shifting, dependent on perspective. The poem focuses on shipping work, depicting the ship 'Research' as simultaneously wrecked and recovered, 'its

[84] Burnside, *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.13.
[85] Scott Brewster, 'John Burnside: Poetry as the Space of Withdrawal', in *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post War Poetry*, ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.178-189, p.178.
[86] John Burnside, *The Asylum Dance* (London: Cape Poetry, 2009 [2000]), p.1.

smashed keel half-restored', suggesting the concept of 'research' as an ongoing process.[87] In 'Ports', the human body is also associated with the physicality of the ships:

> This time of year
> it's night by five o'clock
> and as we walk
> we harbour something new:
> the old pain
> neutral and stilled in our blood
> like a shipwreck observed from a distance
> or one of those
> underwater shapes we sometimes glimpse
> through hairweed and clouded sand
> a shifting form
> that catches the eye for a moment
> then disappears.[88]

'The old pain' in the blood of the speakers' bodies is contrasted with the simile of 'like a shipwreck observed from a distance', as if the pain is, 'the beauty of wreckage/ the beauty/ of things submerged', both within the sea and within the body.[89] The puns on 'harbour' and the self-conscious 'shifting form' of the poem points to the construction of the poem itself, despite its inherent transience: 'catches the eye for a moment/ then disappears'.

Indeed, internal bodily awareness shifts to the periphery of vision, glimpses of 'underwater shapes', whether human or non-human, and the possibility of the unknown. Ian Galbraith considers how Burnside's poetry draws attention to the representational and the non-representational:

> If the world "in itself" withdraws from our descriptive gaze, the poem, Burnside suggests, need not return from such a voyage empty-handed. […] Things as they are may indeed elude the directness of our gaze, and yet our attempts to draw closer to them tell us that they are there,

[87] Burnside, *The Asylum Dance*, p.1.
[88] Burnside, *The Asylum Dance*, p.7.
[89] Burnside, *The Asylum Dance*, p.2.

> helping us to understand and assess the relations between ourselves and others.[90]

In Galbraith's understanding, Burnside's poetry, despite being a form of 'descriptive gaze' itself, gestures towards the intangible, immaterial and mysterious aspects of the world. 'Ports' concludes by considering both the limits of human perception and the limits of human representation, contemplating the name 'Serenity' on the hull of a boat:

> In daylight it would seem
> almost absurd:
> too sentimental
> gauche
> inaccurate
> a weekend sailor's image of the sea
>
> but now
> as snow descends into the rings
> of torchlight
> and the sky above the harbour
> darkens
> it is only what it seems:
>
> a name for something wanted
> and believed
>
> no more or less correct than anything
> we use to make a dwelling in the world.[91]

The speaker notes how the inscription of 'Serenity' seems inaccurate, insufficient for the seascape and labour of the harbour: 'a weekend sailor's image of the sea'. Yet as snow falls the speaker adjusts their perception and the name becomes 'no more or less correct than anything' which humanity uses 'to

[90] Ian Galbraith, 'Scottish Poetry in the Wider World', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.558-575, p.566.
[91] Burnside, *The Asylum Dance*, p.8.

make a dwelling in the world'. This suggests that language is simultaneously sufficient and not, a 'more or less correct' process of dwelling. The idea of making 'a dwelling in the world' picks up on Heidegger's theory of dwelling; the 'harbour' acts as both dwelling place and taskscape, a space for movement and pause that calls attention to the construction of representation: as 'the sky above the harbour/ darkens', the perception of 'Serenity' becomes 'only what it seems'.[92] In fact, like Burnside's line here, Heidegger's '…Poetically Man Dwells…' deliberately intertwines poiesis, of poetry and language as making, and dwelling: 'poetry and dwelling not only do not exclude each other; on the contrary, poetry and dwelling belong together, each calling for the other.'[93] Like Galbraith's sense that Burnside's work reaches for and yet refutes the mystery of the non-human world, in 'Ports' Burnside reveals a balance between poiesis and the material landscape through his negotiations of the relationship between 'dwelling', work, the human body and the body of a ship.

The Asylum Dance opens with an epigraph taken from Heidegger's 'Building Dwelling Thinking':

> The proper dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *proper* plight of dwelling as *the* plight? Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that *calls* mortals into their dwelling.[94]

This appropriation of Heidegger suggests that Burnside's adaptation of the notion of dwelling is one that is simultaneously bound up with estrangement from the world: 'homelessness', when given 'thought', allows mortals to

[92] Heidegger, '…Poetically Man Dwells…', pp.211-227.
[93] Heidegger, '…Poetically Man Dwells…', p.225.
[94] Burnside, *The Asylum Dance*, n.p., Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p.159.

consider dwelling as the 'proper plight', allowing the known world to be linked to the unknown. Burnside's interest in the bodily labour of gardening ties in with this balance between the 'home' of dwelling and the mysterious 'homeless' aspects of the environment. Yet gardening remains a decidedly human activity. Indeed, Tilley notes that dwelling itself is human-centred:

> If "dwelling", in Heideggerian terms, forms a primordial part of that which it is to be human, this necessarily requires a consideration of the body as the privileged vantage point from which the world is apprehended. The kinetic activities of human beings orientate apprehension of the landscape and create it as human.[95]

According to Tilley, the notion of 'dwelling' reveals a consideration of bodily 'kinetic activities' which grants a particularly anthropocentric perspective, a 'privileged vantage point', on the surrounding environment. Burnside's appropriation of dwelling therefore appears to accentuate the paradoxical relationship between his ecological perspective and the anthropocentrism of his poetic representations.

'Being and Time' in *The Light Trap* (2002) engages with Heidegger's notion of 'being' in relation to corporeality:

> something was always present in the snow
> that fell between our parish and the next,
>
> a perfect thing, not what was always there,
> but something we knew without knowing, as we knew
>
> that everything was finite and alive,
> cradled in warmth against the ache of space,
>
> marsh-grass and shale, and the bloodroot we dug in the woods
> that turned our fingers red, and left a stain
>
> we kept for weeks, through snow and miles of sleep,

[95] Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p.13.

> as if it was meant to happen, a sliver of fate
> unstitching its place in the marrow, and digging in.[96]

Like Heaney's image of a child stuck in the midstream, the snow in this poem falls 'between our parish and the next', creating an environmental border space between one location and another, whilst mirroring the gaps between snowflakes. Furthermore, gardening does not occur within the confines of a private yard but in 'the woods' in an ambiguous act of digging. The speaker is preoccupied with 'something', with the edges of perception and experience: 'something was always present in the snow/ that fell between our parish and the next', emphasising the metaphorical boundary between the parishes. It is this kind of ineffability, the metaphor of the almost imperceptible space between snow and air, which Heidegger sees as key to 'being': 'however much […] understanding of Being (an understanding which is already available to us) may fluctuate and grow dim, and border on mere acquaintance with a word, its very indefiniteness is itself a positive phenomenon which needs to be clarified', emphasising that being is both known and unknown.[97] Similarly, Burnside depicts the intangible 'something' as, paradoxically, relating to physicality: the collective voice knows 'without knowing' that 'everything was finite and alive', and this is realised in the stains of bloodroot on the speaker's fingers. The red fingers are 'meant to happen, a sliver of fate' which interlinks corporeality, time and the influence of the plant: the bloodroot crosses the skin's boundary. 'Bloodroot', the plant Sanguinaria, is known for its toxicity and when applied to the skin can cause damage. Burnside presents this bloodroot as 'digging in', ambiguously moving between the human figures

[96] John Burnside, *The Light Trap* (London: Cape Poetry, 2002), p.17.
[97] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: HarperCollins, 2008 [1962]), p.25.

digging for bloodroot, the plant itself 'digging in' to the speaker's skin, and 'digging in' as an act of retrenchment.

The allusion to Robert Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' in the line 'through snow and miles of sleep' also creates an intertextual shift. Frost's poem states:

> My little horse must think it queer
> To stop without a farmhouse near
> Between the woods and frozen lake
> The darkest evening of the year.[98]

This reframes Burnside's appropriation of Heidegger's title of 'Being and Time' for the title of his poem, as 'Being and Time', like 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', attempts to depict the in-between. Burnside picks up on Frost's liminal location 'between the woods and frozen lake' by locating 'Being and Time' in the unknown space between 'our parish and the next.' Like Frost's poem, which gestures towards the future in the closing lines 'I have promises to keep/ And miles to go before I sleep', 'Being and Time' shifts temporally: the opening '[t]here are times when I think/ of the knowledge we had as children' situates the poem in a simultaneous moment of recollection and experience.[99] This is not merely a philosophical engagement with body and world, then, but a poetic one. Burnside's attentive intertextuality signals an interweaving not just of the human and the non-human but of other literary, mythological and philosophical sources. Heidegger's belief that 'poetry, as the gauging of that strange measure, becomes ever more mysterious' is therefore reverberated in Burnside's representations of the lived

[98] Robert Frost, *Collected Poems* (London: Longmans, 1930), p.275.
[99] Frost, p.275.

body, earth and poetic representation, as he addresses the fraught relationship between phenomenology, ecology and mediation.[100]

5.3 Metamorphosis

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is continually used as a frame for intertextuality and adaptation in literature, as Andrew Feldherr describes:

> The changing implications of metamorphosis among the many kinds of literary discourse in which it occurs make it a narrative element that invites contrasting readings and opens out interpretative possibilities. Ovid himself participates in this process by introducing multiple points of view on transformation itself as well as raising questions about the generic status of his work. Thus metamorphosis continually compels readers to refigure their relationship to the text, their understanding of the narratives it contains, and ultimately how it functions as a literary representation.[101]

The way in which *Metamorphoses* is polyphonic and invites questions about genre seems particularly relevant to Oswald's experimentations with form and genre in *Dart*, a poem which shifts between fragmentary, Modernist voices and lyrical modes. Although *Dart* deliberately enters into a tradition of river poetry stretching back to one of its source texts, Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, Oswald also continually reframes such traditions by transforming them. Oswald uses *Poly-Olbion* as an intertextual link for the naming of the nymph-boats: 'Glico of the Running Streams/ and Spio of the Boulders-Encaved-In-The-River's Edges'.[102] *Dart*'s preoccupation with water nymphs also recalls Milton's collaborative play *Comus: A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*; both Milton and Drayton

[100] Heidegger, '…Poetically Man Dwells', p.222.
[101] Andrew Feldherr, 'Metamorphosis in the Metamorphoses', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. by Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.163-179, p.165.
[102] Drayton, *Poly-Olbion.* Oswald, *Dart,* p.17.

depict the story of Sabrina, the goddess of the river Severn, who was saved by sea-nymphs.[103]

Sanders points out that this use of tradition creates a literary connection between representations of rivers and goddesses, noting that 'Milton's appropriation of the Severn myth of Sabrina is […] a harnessing of a centuries-old literary tradition of associating women with rivers'.[104] In the twentieth century this utilisation of water and nymphs as a metaphor for change can be identified in *The Waste Land*:

> The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
> Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
> Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
> Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
> The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
> Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
> Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.[105]

Eliot's allusion to the 'Sweet Thames' is itself taken from Edmund Spenser's *Prothalamion* (1596), granting his depiction of the river a literary background and maintaining *The Waste Land*'s theme of Ovidian metamorphosis.[106] In Eliot's river-city poem the river nymphs are 'departed', suggesting both death and absence, but these nymphs themselves have shape-shifted. By linking together the images of detritus and nymphs the poem suggests that the nymphs themselves form the rubbish in the river. It is this blurred natural-artificial riverine environment that Oswald takes as the impetus for *Dart*, using

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[103] John Milton, *Comus: A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle 1634* (London: E. Harding and W. West, 1799).
[104] Julie Sanders, *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama, 1620-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.47.
[105] Eliot, 'The Waste Land', p.62, l.173-179.
[106] Each stanza of *Prothalamion* ends with the refrain: '[s]weete Themmes runne softly, till I end my song.' Edmund Spenser, *Prothalamion* (London: Printed for William Ponsonby, 1596), pp.1-10.

traditions of river poetry to create a literary base for her own work. Rather than directly referring to Sabrina, Oswald alludes to Drayton's water nymphs as 'named varieties of water', including 'Glico', 'Spio', 'Cymene' and 'Semaia'.[107] Howarth points out how these allusions form part of the work of the sounds of the poem: 'the unfamiliarity of the Nereid names […] makes us hear them as sounds more than words'.[108] Thus Oswald transforms the bodies of the water nymphs into a form of signification, taking Eliot's metamorphosis of riverine legacies further.

In addition to these longer traditions, Oswald also ties her work to Hughes's, recognising his influence in her essay 'Wild Things' for *The Guardian:* 'Hughes always finds some procedure for stripping away the protective layers – the soundproofed ears, the double-glazed eyes – that prevent us making contact with anything outside ourselves.'[109] Oswald's metaphor of breaking away the barriers on a building shows how, for her, Hughes's work provides a way of considering the relationship between poetry and the physicality of the outside world. Both Hughes and Oswald take inspiration from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136), engaging with the mythology of *Metamorphoses* in their own respective representations of rivers and bodies, and reacting to Ovid's preoccupation with water in his text.[110] Hughes's own adaptation of *Metamorphoses, Tales from Ovid*, opens by transforming Ovid's invocation-

[107] Oswald, *Dart*, p.17.
[108] Howarth, '"Water's Soliloquy": Soundscape and Environment in Alice Oswald's *Dart*', p.197.
[109] Oswald, 'Wild Things', p.5.
[110] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007). Oswald recounts the legend of Brutus and his arrival in Totnes in *Dart*, p.30-31. Hughes uses Monmouth in his collection *Remains of Elmet* (1979), using the text to consider the ancient history of the Elmet region. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.9.

like '[y]ou Gods, who have yourselves wrought/ every change'.[111] Hughes's poem opens:

> I summon the supernatural beings
> Who first contrived
> The transmogrifications
> In the stuff of life.
> You did it for your own amusement.
> Descend again, be pleased to reanimate
> This revival of those marvels.[112]

Hughes's rewrite of *Metamorphoses* is aware of the weight of tradition. He intertwines Ovid's address to the gods with his own address to Ovid: 'you did it for your own amusement.' Myth, then, works as an intertextual method, as Sanders points out:

> A myth is never transported wholesale into its new context; it undergoes its own metamorphoses in the process. Myth is continuously evoked, altered, and reworked, across cultures, and across generations […]. It is perhaps therefore no surprise that Ovid, the prime author of narratives of metamorphosis and transformation, has proved a particularly rich source.[113]

Hughes's mutation of 'metamorphoses' to 'transmogrifications', which can be defined as 'strange or grotesque', therefore allows his adaptation of Ovid to self-consciously form a change in its own right.[114]

Dart, on the other hand, does not directly translate or adapt *Metamorphoses.* Instead it alludes to Ovid throughout via the metaphor of transformation, confirming Sanders's note that 'adaptations and appropriations

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[111] Ovid, p.1.
[112] Hughes, p.865. 'The Flood' section in *Metamorphoses* details the devastation of water on the land, ultimately shape-shifting the earth itself: 'now land and sea/ Had no distinction; over the whole earth/ All things were sea, a sea without a shore.' Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.9.
[113] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) p.64.
[114] *Oxford English Dictionary*, *'Transmogrify, v'*, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 26 November 2013].

can vary in how explicitly they state their intertextual purpose.'[115] Oswald implicitly responds to Ovid's 'Salmacis and Hermaphroditus' tale in a sexualised interchange between a forester and a water nymph:

> [W]hen the lithe water turns
> and its tongue flatters the ferns
> do you speak this kind of sound:
> whirlpool whisking round?
>
> Listen, I can clap and slide
> my hollow hands along my side.
> imagine the bare feel of water,
> woodman, to the wrinkled timber[116]

Oswald adapts Ovid's story of Salmacis's seduction and appropriation of Hermaphroditus's body into a consideration of the relationship between river, 'the bare feel of water', and the work of the woodman.[117] In Ovid, the perspective is Hermaphroditus's: 'he clapped his hollow palms against his sides.'[118] Oswald's shape-shifting, though, moves between perspectives, as the 'I' voice cannot be clearly identified as either the nymph's or the forester's. *Dart* also develops *The Waste Land*'s interlinking of sound with literary allusion. For instance, Eliot's reference in 'The Fire Sermon' to the rape of Philomela in *Metamorphoses* works as a weaving within *The Waste Land* itself, linking back to 'The Game of Chess' earlier in the poem:

> Twit twit twit
> Jug jug jug jug jug jug
> So rudely forc'd
> Tereu[119]

[115] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p.2.
[116] Oswald, *Dart*, p.11.
[117] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, pp.83-85.
[118] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.84.
[119] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, p.63, l.203-206.

Eliot transforms ‘jug’ as a nightingale’s cry into contemporary sexual allusion, using sound to connote Philomela’s song in *Metamorphoses,* as well as recalling John Clare’s phonetic ‘Transcription of a Nightingale’s Song’:

> wew wew wew – chur chur
> woo it woo it tweet tweet
> tweet jug jug jug[120]

Taking impetus from Clare and Eliot, then, sound in *Dart* both forms and unsettles the apparent presence of the water: the ‘tongue’ of the lithe water is barely perceptible, but the speaker in the following stanza is able to simultaneously listen, call ‘listen’ for attention and ‘imagine’ and experience the ‘bare feel of water’. The perceptible and the imperceptible contrasts with the regular formality of the rhyming couplets, creating disparity between the elusive sounds of water and the song-like lyricism of the poem. The water nymph takes bodily form, the form of the river and is also evocative of a tree trunk in the images of ‘hollow hands’ and ‘wrinkled timber’ as, like in the myth of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, Oswald merges the nymph and the woodman.

Despite this sense of merging, the voices of the forester and the water nymph still contrast formally, with the woodman’s voice taking prose form and the nymph’s poetry. Thus the nymph sings:

> oh I could sing a song of Hylas,
> how the water wooed him senseless,
> I could sing the welded kiss
> continuous of Salmacis
>
> and bring an otter from your bowels

[120] John Clare, ‘Transcription of a Nightingale’s Song’, *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet,* ed. by Alice Oswald (London: Faber, 2005), p.36. Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* pp.134-142.

to slip in secret through my veils
to all the plump and bony pools
the dips the paps the folds the holes[121]

Again, Oswald brings together sound with imagery, with 'the dips the paps the folds the holes' forming an ambiguously sexualised and embodied landscape, while the preceding sibilance confirms the slippery sensuality of nymph's song. The 'welded kiss' evokes the coming together of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, the welding of *Metamorphoses* and Oswald's work and also continues the theme of marrying industrial and natural processes. In *Metamorphoses,* Ovid uses a gardening simile to represent this union:

Her prayer found gods to hear; both bodies merged
In one, both blended in one form and face.
As when a gardener sets a graft and sees
Growth seal the join and both mature together,
Thus, when in fast embrace their limbs were knit,
They two were two no more, nor man, nor woman –
One body then that neither seemed and both.[122]

As well as denoting hard work and labour, Sanders describes how in the notion of 'graft' 'literature has long found a rich source of metaphor for its own creative processes', and Oswald certainly responds to Ovid's gardening metaphor through her interlinking of the natural and the artificial.[123] Furthermore, Oswald creates an intertextual link with Hughes's version of the tale, which states 'as her body/ Knots itself every way around him/ Like a sinewy otter'.[124] Oswald's depiction of intertwined bodies is therefore additionally formed through intertextual grafting. The perspective in *Dart* is rendered more ambiguous, however, as 'bring an otter from your bowels'

[121] Oswald, *Dart,* p.12.
[122] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* p.85.
[123] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation,* p.55.
[124] Hughes, *Collected Poems,* p.1024.

refers both to Hughes's simile of Salmacis's transformation as 'like a sinewy otter' as well as Hermaphroditus's shape-shift in Ovid.

Dart's engagement with Ovid's Proteus also acts as an extended metaphor that filters throughout the work, as Howarth details:

> Proteus was the god whom Menelaus had to capture in order to allow the sea-voyage back from Troy. Seizing him while he lay asleep, Menelaus had to hold on to him for dear life as the god continually changed shape in his grasp. So the water in *Dart* is Proteus, constantly changing shape, constantly wondering "who's this", and constantly turning into "all names, all voices" along it.[125]

Dart concludes with a final change in voice: the anonymous 'me' persona is 'Proteus', the shape-shifting Greek mythological god. The location of the poem's conclusion is in a sea cave beyond Dartmouth:

> There the musky fishy genital smell
> of things not yet actual: shivering impulses, shadows,
> propensities,
> little amorous movements, quicksilver strainings and
> restrainings:
>
> each winter they gather here,
> twenty seals in this room behind the sea, all swaddled
> and tucked in fat, like the soul in its cylinder of flesh.
>
> With their grandmother mouths, with their dog-soft
> eyes, asking
> who's this moving in the dark? Me.
> This is me, anonymous, water's soliloquy,
> all names, all voices, Slip-Shape, this is Proteus,
> whoever that is, the shepherd of the seals,
> driving my many selves from cave to cave…[126]

The poem resolves and transforms its opening question of '[w]ho's this moving alive over the moor?' in the dark of the cave, whilst the closing ellipsis

[125] Howarth, 'Water's Soliloquy', pp.191-192.
[126] Oswald, *Dart*, p.48.

signals any lack of conclusion, avoiding a clearly lineated narrative. The seals and the sealwatcher sense each other's presence, with lingering sexuality in the 'musky fishy genital smell', the smell of 'things not yet actual' and the possibility of births during the winter seal-gathering.

Eliot points out in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) that tradition 'cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, […] and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'.[127] He argues that the work of allusion and literary tradition necessarily has an element of presentness. This presencing, then, is a way of calling attention to mediation and its refractions of literary legacies. Oswald's use of the present-tense throughout *Dart* therefore grants her intertextual links an apparently contemporary presence: 'this is Proteus'. At the same time, Oswald multiplies the apparent individuality of the Protean body in order to problematise the singular subjectivity of the lyric convention, tying her representations into previous traditions whilst still maintaining a focus on the present: her Proteus, for instance, has no identifiable gender. Proteus both identifies and questions himself/herself, stating 'this is Proteus,/ whoever that is', acting as a figure for how *Dart* simultaneously presents multiple perspectives whilst also demonstrating their ambiguity.[128] Oswald's reactivation of *Metamorphoses* is, then, deliberately shifted into the present tense, creating interrelation between the present form of the poem and historical literary legacies.

[127] T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Faber 1997 [1920]), pp.39-49, p.40.
[128] Oswald, *Dart*, p.48.

Dart's polyvocality troubles the lyric, a form which Brewster suggests demonstrates an 'isolated speaker abstracted from specific historical conditions who can convey an immediacy of experience, "personal" thoughts and feelings.'[129] What Adorno describes as 'the paradox specific to the lyric form' creates tension between singular transient voices such as Jan Coo and the 'all voices' of Proteus. Adorno notes that:

> The "I" whose voice is heard in the lyric is an "I" that defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective, to objectivity; it is not immediately at one with the nature to which its expression refers. It has lost it, as it were, and attempts to restore it through animation, through immersion in the "I" itself. It is only through humanization that nature is to be restored the rights that human domination took from it.[130]

The 'I' of individual voices and Proteus's ambiguous 'all voices' is both formed and challenged by 'the collective' of the community of the river Dart. The perspectives of the poem are not simply singular, are not 'an "I" that defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective', but are defined and discussed through the collective voices, much like the construction of *Dart* itself. In the naturalist section, for instance, a speaker notes 'she loves songs, she belongs to the soundmarks of larks', evidencing Oswald's frequent use of portmanteau to poetically represent 'grafting'. Here, 'soundmarks' evokes the balance between sound and the marks of the text itself in *Dart.* Rather than depicting a consistent lyrical 'I' voice, Oswald interlinks polyvocal sounds, environmental sounds, the sound of the 'song' of the poem and the words on the page. Indeed, Adorno suggests that the subjectivity of the

[129] Brewster, *Lyric*, p.30.
[130] Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Lyric Poetry and Society', in *Notes to Literature Volume One*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Sheirry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp.37-54, p.41.

'I' means that referentially it is 'not immediately at one with […] nature' but that, paradoxically, this 'nature' can only be 'restored' through further 'humanization'. Like Williams's awareness of the nuanced relationship between nature, culture and industry, Adorno's study of the lyric voice suggests that representations of nature are ultimately constructed through 'humanization', through cultural artefacts. Oswald's engagement with the lyric tradition is, therefore, an act of poetic metamorphosis in itself. The 'all voices' and 'many selves' of Proteus recalls the voices of literary tradition, the 'ambiguous Proteus' of *Metamorphoses* transformed into a metaphor for intertextuality.[131] By engaging with literary tradition *Dart* depicts not just metaphorical shape-shifts between the human and the non-human, but also acts as a lyric poem which enters into and metamorphoses a 'body' of literary legacies and transformations.

Similar to these entangled literary transformations, Shapcott's emphasis on formal transformation is a thread found in both *Of Mutability* and *Tender Taxes*. Entwistle suggests that Shapcott's use of literary allusion 'contests and reconfigures her own literary and political displacement', arguing that Shapcott's responses to other texts is part of a feminist poetics.[132] For instance, 'Thetis,' the opening poem in *My Life Asleep* (1998), depicts a Greek shape-shifting sea-goddess:

> No man can frighten me. Watch as I stretch
> my limbs for the transformation, I'm laughing
> to feel the surge of other shapes beneath my skin.
> […]
> My name is Thetis Creatrix and you,
> Voyeur, if you looked a little closer, would see

[131] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.25.
[132] Alice Entwistle, 'This Place Which Is Not One: Shapcott's Shifting Territories', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 31:2 (2002), 167-181, p.180.

> the next ripples spread up my bloody tail, to bloom
> through my spine as the bark begins to harden
> over my trunk.[133]

The note to the poem states: 'Thetis was a sea goddess who had the marvellous ability to change her shape. Peleus was taught by Proteus the way to overcome her: to bind her and hold on tightly whatever shape she took.'[134] According to Ovid's 'Peleus and Thetis' in *Metamorphoses*, Proteus is implicated in the control of Thetis, mirroring the way in which the figure of Proteus himself is ensnared in traditional myth.[135] Proteus tells Peleus: 'Peleus, you shall gain the bride you seek/ If, while she's sleeping in her rocky cave,/ You catch her off guard and truss her tight'.[136] Shapcott's interest in Thetis transforms Ovid's tale into a consideration of female submission and control.

Thetis's shape-shifting comes from within her own bodily form, 'beneath' the skin, and extends to a transformation from a human body to natural and non-human features:

> I think
> my soul has slithered with me into this
> shape as real as the little, long tongue in my mouth,
> as the sun on my back, as the skill in absolute stillness.[137]

The sibilance here accentuates how Thetis's 'soul' and voice are 'as real' as her physical lizard-tongue, as if they have changed along with her material transformation. Ovid notes how Thetis changed first to a bird, 'and then a sturdy/ tree' and finally a 'stripy tigress'.[138] In Shapcott's version Thetis's

[133] Jo Shapcott, *My Life Asleep* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.1.
[134] Shapcott, *My Life Asleep,* p.1.
[135] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* p.438.
[136] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* pp.256-257.
[137] Shapcott, *My Life Asleep,* p.1.
[138] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* p.256.

shape-shifting is, paradoxically, 'absolute stillness', a fluctuation between movement and stability, as her form takes on the attributes of the surrounding environment: '[a]lready I'm so much the oak/ I lean everything towards the black oxygen/ in the black air'.[139] Shapcott's engagement with Thetis, in contrast to Oswald's focus on Proteus, grants the bodily transformation and engagement with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* a deliberately feminine attention. The poem presents the physical and emotional horrors of rape as well as the labour of childbirth: 'raped until I bleed from my eyes,/ beaten out of shape and forced to bring forth War'. The final ambiguity of 'war' suggests both Thetis's anger and that her final metamorphosis is childbirth, as the note states: 'the result of this forced union was Achilles,' suggesting an anti-war element to 'Thetis', as 'bring forth War' recalls Achilles's involvement in the Trojan War.[140]

Like Oswald's allusions, Shapcott's adaptation of Ovid can be directly contrasted with Hughes's adaptation of the Thetis myth in *Tales from Ovid*, which ends in reconciliation:

> Then he undid her bonds. As he massaged
> The circulation into her hands and feet
> His caresses included her whole body.
> She was content to let them take possession
> Of her skin, her heart, and, at last, of her womb
> Where now he planted Achilles.[141]

The play on 'plant' reflects Thetis's shifts between the human and the non-human, yet this version ends not in brutal rape or 'War' but consensual union. Thetis's shape-shifts in Hughes's poem are themselves sexual rather than a

[139] Shapcott, *My Life Asleep*, p.1.
[140] Shapcott, *My Life Asleep*, p.1.
[141] Hughes, *Collected Poems*, p.936.

concrete act of resistance: 'he shut his eyes and hung on, ignoring/ Her frenzy of transformations/ Till they shuddered to stillness'.[142] Unlike Thetis's shape-shifting 'stillness' in Shapcott's poem, Hughes's union is troublingly peaceful. In contrast with Hughes's representation of Peleus as the creator of Achilles, Shapcott's 'Thetis' deliberately interlinks Thetis's motherly creation with Shapcott's own work as a female poet: 'Creatrix' means both 'mother' and 'creator' in Latin.[143] Here, Shapcott's adaptation and response to the myth of Peleus and Thetis presents a metamorphosis that is metaphorical and intertextual, as she uses Ovid's tale to reframe representations of sexual politics.

In 'Composition', Shapcott interlinks the act of writing poetry with representations of landscape and bodily discomfort, echoing Hughes's 'The Thought-Fox':

> I was drowning in possibility
> while underneath the world
>
> an ice shelf collapsed into the sea
> and a cat with a white-tipped tail
> walked by and somewhere in my body
>
> the changed cells gathered
> and my hair was damp on my neck
> and I prayed to be disturbed
>
> and hurricanoes whirled and hissed,
> my nose itched, my ears hurt,
> and then there was this.[144]

The final line of 'and then there was this' responds to the final line of Hughes's self-referential 'the page is printed' in 'The Thought-Fox'.[145]

[142] Hughes, *Collected Poems*, p.936.
[143] *Oxford English Dictionary*, *'Creatrix, n'*, <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 25 November 2013].
[144] Shapcott, *Of Mutability*, p.51.

Hughes's poem points to physical processes of the printed text itself and transforms the convention of invocation by using a fox as a muse. Similar to Oswald's 'soundmarks', Shapcott's 'Composition' also evokes the composition of art and music as well as poetry: 'my pencil/ (blue) sounding loud on the page'.[146] The poem moves from a narrative account of the bodily experience of writing: 'O my hips/ ached from sitting', to the urge to procrastinate and undercurrent of fear in 'I prayed to be disturbed', with 'this' referring to the product itself as well as the experience of the speaker. The reference to the ice-sheet 'underneath the world', potentially in the Antarctic, points to the tension between the speaker-writer 'drowning in possibility', both literally and figuratively, whilst furiously searching for inspiration: 'even a hangnail thrilled'.[147] As with Oswald's preoccupation with the present participle, Shapcott's final shift in spatial deixis is significant, as 'this' reveals the proximity of the poem's creation to the speaker's bodily experiences: 'my nose itched, my ears hurt/ and then there was this'. The contrast caused by the comparison between the 'this' of the poem and the 'this' of the speaker points to the materiality of the text, the on-going process of landscape, the physical condition of the speaker and the temporary precariousness of the earth hinted at by the references to natural disaster.

Like Oswald, Shapcott's use of portmanteau reveals intertextual links. 'Hurricanoes' in 'Composition' amalgamates a hurricane with a volcano, as well as alluding to the storm in Act III Scene II of *King Lear* (1608), where

[145] Hughes, *Collected Poems*, p.21.
[146] Shapcott, *Of Mutability*, p.51.
[147] Shapcott, *Of Mutability*, p.51.

'hurricano' is glossed as 'waterspout', transforming natural processes.[148] The poem interlinks the bodily experience of the speaker metaphorically drowning whilst the ice melts in Antarctica, both 'underneath the world' and underneath the speaker's physical awareness. This evokes an entanglement between the body and the environment, a 'meshwork' of human and non-human relations.[149] Yet the literary allusion in 'Composition' also highlights tensions between the meshwork and poetic representation. Indeed, Shapcott's response to Helen Chadwick's landscape art in *Of Mutability* and to Rilke in *Tender Taxes* further influences the relationship between text, poet and representation, as Rees-Jones points out: 'the on-going strategic nature of Shapcott's poetics of dialogue and intertextuality leaves a porousness between the authority of the creator and created'.[150] Recalling Presley's multiple frames of representation, this recognises that *Of Mutability* and *Tender Taxes* create a metaphorical threshold between different forms of art as well as between the work and its creator, further unsettling any clear connection between Shapcott and the 'I' in her poems.

'Mutability' in Shapcott's poetry can also be associated, therefore, with her adaptations of other poets and artists, particularly given the literary association of 'mutability' with Edmund Spenser's *The Mutabilitie Cantos* (1609), which themselves respond to *Metamorphoses*: 'Proud Change (not

[148] *King Lear* reads: 'Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!/ You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout/Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!'. William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2014 [1608]), 3.2 l.1 p.263. Shakespearian scholarship has also made forays into ecocritical analysis, most notably in *Ecocritical Shakespeare* (2011), which finds 'in early modernity a sincere concern for the human impact on the biophysical environment'. Dan Brayton and Lynne Bruckner, 'Introduction: Warbling Invaders', in *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, ed. by Dan Brayton and Lynne Bruckner (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp.1-13, p.1-2.
[149] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p.63, p.70.
[150] Rees-Jones, '"Wanderer, incomer, borderer/ liar, mother of everything I see": Jo Shapcott's Engagement with Landscape, Art and Poetry', p.176.

pleasd in mortall things/ Beneath the moone to raigne)/ Pretends, as well of gods as men,/ To be the soueraine'.[151] Shapcott describes Elizabeth Bishop, for instance, as like 'my geography teacher, or perhaps even my anti-geography teacher', pointing out that 'the poets who have gone before are the ones who teach us our business, help us refine our craft, and carve out our territories. We quarrel with them, rebel against them, restate their positions, assert our own.'[152] Shapcott's geomorphic poem 'In the Bath' uses the third-person perspective to refigure Bishop's 'The Map', which was published in *North and South* in 1946.[153] 'The Map' is a poem concerned with the limitations of mapping as a means of geographical representation and Shapcott presents an image of a pubescent female body in order to respond to Bishop's consideration of the politics of map-making. She echoes and extends Bishop's frayed distinctions between land and water by figuring the bathing body as landscape in water. In Shapcott's poem the figure initially imagines her body cells covering the landscape: 'herself/ spread thin and making the surface of the world/ sparkle,' but by the end the image shifts to body-as-representation:

> she raised her body
> slightly, building an island chain of hip bones,
> belly, breasts all of which began to dry at once.
> She loved the water trails over her body curves,
> the classical lines between wet and dry
> making graph patterns which she thought might follow
> the activity in her brain – all she wanted
> was to be a good atlas, a bright school map
> to shine up the world for everyone to see.[154]

[151] Edmund Spenser, *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. by S.P. Zitner (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1968 [1609]), p.79.
[152] Jo Shapcott, 'Confounding Geography', in *Contemporary Women's Poetry: Reading/Writing/Practice*, ed. by Alison Mark and Deryn Rees-Jones (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp.40-46 p.41.
[153] Elizabeth Bishop, *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), p.3.
[154] Jo Shapcott, *Her Book: Poems 1988-1998* (London: Faber, 2000), pp.67-68.

Shapcott connects the control, precision and subjectivity inherent in cartography, which is implicitly critiqued by Bishop, to the figure's impossible desire to control the water patterns over her body and ultimately to control her own body through 'the activity in her brain'. Rees-Jones's reading of the poem sees it as 'an image of the body as a teeming mutable complexity subject to many fluctuations and transformations, rather than a fixed and coherent identity', which ultimately undermines the fixed representation of cartography.[155] Indeed, the map-like 'classical lines between wet and dry' and the 'graph patterns' do not match up with the speaker's 'activity in her brain', her wish to be 'a bright school map'. This recalls Bishop's portrayal of disconnection between the physical land, its mapped representation and the subjectivity of map-making: 'are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?'[156] In 'In the Bath' the corporeal body becomes representational, an image of the world 'for everyone to see', whilst 'to be a good atlas' recalls the Greek god Atlas holding up the globe, and the implicit vanity echoes Ovid's myth of Narcissus and Echo.[157]

The concern over the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in Shapcott's lyrics also occurs in relation to other forms of representation. In 'Myself Photographed' in *Of Mutability*, for instance, the speaker considers a photograph of him/herself, negotiating different forms of self-representation:

> Perhaps it is an expression of surprise
> that I am in the world at all, let alone
> that this wrong turning resulted in an oak

[155] Deryn Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels: Essays on Modern Women Poets* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2005), p.223.
[156] Bishop, *The Complete Poems*, p.3.
[157] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, pp.61-66.

(I want to say leaf, leaf); high grass (I want
to say hay tickle); my dodgy ankle (I want to
say friendly old pain); the warm tang
of saliva in my mouth (I want to say
charged tongue); my body cells
so new, fresh, and not disorderly at all[158]

Shapcott's interest in visual perception stems from the fact that *Of Mutability* responds to Chadwick's visual art, as Shapcott's poetry displays a preoccupation with ways of seeing both the self and the landscape. The opening of 'so this is me' is reframed by the rest of the poem, which queries the veracity and accuracy of the photographic representation as well as self-identity, recalling 'Gladestry Quatrains'. Earlier on in the poem the speaker states 'perhaps I always look like this', suggesting a crisis of identity and signalling how the photograph has failed to capture the speaker's image convincingly. Gillian Rose points out that 'photographs are one way of addressing what it is to be human in the sense that, confronted with proof of the inevitable passage of time, of decay and of death, the viewer of a photograph has no choice but to contemplate their own mortality.'[159] Yet in 'Myself Photographed' the image of humanity and mortality is influenced by the other aspects of the photograph: the oak and high grass. In fact, the speaker qualifies and rewrites his/her view of the environment: 'oak/ (I want to say leaf, leaf)', suggesting that the poem itself is both tempered and influenced by the frame of landscape. The instability of perception and self therefore connects to the function of descriptive language, as each parenthetical statement qualifies the previous, transforming the everyday 'high grass' to the

[158] Shapcott, *Of Mutability,* p.49.
[159] Gillian Rose, 'Photography and its Circulations', in *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities*, ed. by Stephen Daniels et al. (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.287-292, p.287.

poetic ‘hay tickle’ and ‘dodgy ankle’ to the personified ‘friendly old pain’. Yet of course the photograph itself is also absent: the poem is ambiguously ekphrastic, metaphorically responding to a fictional representation, creating another layer of representation in itself.

Shapcott describes *Of Mutability* as ‘a series of meditations imbued with mortality and mutability, coming from the body, or from the boundaries between the body and the world’.[160] This consideration of the perceived and permeable boundaries between body and world is a phenomenological and material approach to the human body, concerned with the relationship between corporeality and landscape. Yet Shapcott’s sense that the ‘meditations’ in *Of Mutability* come from the body or even ‘the boundaries between the body and the world’ rather than linguistic representation reveals a tension between the material body and poetics. Shapcott’s ambiguous explanation of the ‘meditations’ in *Of Mutability* troubles how far phenomenology allows for or represents an encounter between body and landscape. The metaphor of the body as a representational and subjective surface therefore creates a link between the physicality of the body, its poetic representation and its metamorphosis, expanding on Shapcott’s limits of representation seen in ‘Myself Photographed’. Rees-Jones notes how ‘for Shapcott, […] it is precisely […] [the] space between the material and the invisible which offers for her a place of transformation’, highlighting the potentially productive tension between phenomenological experience and poetic mediation.[161] Shapcott uses the paradoxical relationship between text and physicality to

[160] Crown, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/24/jo-shapcott-poet-interview> [accessed 14 November 2013].
[161] Deryn Rees-Jones, ‘A Dog’s Chance: The Evolution of Contemporary Women’s Poetry?’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.151-172, p.164.

continually frame her depictions of the human body, with her work remaining self-referentially attentive to the process of writing itself. Indeed, Shapcott's use of the lyric form is a deliberate attempt to undermine any straightforward singular identity, mirroring Brewster's sense that 'the modern lyric is outside of "me", and however personal it seems, the lyric voice is always heard through another's lips: the text, the persona, the unpredictable movements of language itself.'[162] Ultimately the notion of bodily 'mutability' and metamorphosis occurs at the level of form, through fluid subjectivities and adaptations, as Shapcott explores poetic and metaphorical implications of how far illness, the body and the world inter-relate in her poetics.

Recalling the tension between 'stillness' and transformation in 'Thetis', Burnside's 'The Myth of Narcissus' sequence in *The Good Neighbour* responds to Ovid's tale of Narcissus and Echo, describing 'a watcher at the wet edge of the light/ torn from the current and learning to be/ still.'[163] As well as the intertextual engagement, Burnside's depiction of Narcissus is bound up with considerations of textuality, as the titles of each poem in the sequence reveal: 'urtext', 'apocrypha' and finally 'urtext' again. However, the use of the term 'apocrypha' unsettles this, as Burnside avoids attributing the source of the 'myth' of Narcissus to any singular text or author. In fact, the poem 'Apocrypha' in the sequence states how 'each telling discovers a space' as each rewrite of the Narcissus tale takes on new meaning.[164] In this poem, the figure of Narcissus staring into his reflection in a stream uncovers questions about the body, identity and representation:

[162] Brewster, *Lyric*, p.111.
[163] Burnside, *The Good Neighbour*, p.51, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, pp.61-66.
[164] Burnside, *The Good Neighbour*, p.51.

And what does this future promise, if not
the perfect body, cleansed of hurt and sin,

the perfect body, like a hollow reed,
clean as the black of a cave, or the snow in a picture?

What does it keep of the present, other than this:
that all he knows, the undertow, the stream,

the self he uses now, for hurt and sin,
is purest metaphor?
That *self* is metaphor

and what he mistakes for himself
and the presence he loves
are different

as emptiness and form
give rise to one another ceaselessly

the shaper shaped
the lines
identical.[165]

The 'perfect body' is not found in material form alone but in comparative representation. The similes 'like a hollow reed/ clean as the black of a cave, or the snow in a picture' echo the image of Narcissus looking at his own image, yet Burnside uses blank imagery, 'the black of a cave', to represent this image, a circular process of reflection and non-reflection. The sense that '*self* is metaphor' suggests that the concept of the 'self' is an image, a reframing or reflection of the material body. This creates the interplay between 'emptiness and form', as metaphor and materiality 'give rise to another ceaselessly' to give the 'shape' of the body. Furthermore, 'the shaper shaped/ the lines/ identical' self-consciously binds the process of poetics to self-reflection. It ultimately recalls Ovidian adaptation, as the word 'identical' ironically evokes

[165] Burnside, *The Good Neighbour*, p.53.

both the reflected image of Narcissus and the poem as a reflection of Ovid's text, even as in its adaptation it refuses to be 'identical'.

In 'Poetry as Ecology' Burnside asserts in an apparently allusive response to Bate's *The Song of the Earth* that 'the song of the earth is not a metaphor, but an actual sound, one that can be listened to'.[166] Like Oswald's concept of the sound produced by raking, Burnside presents the earth as physically offering up its own sound and 'song'. Yet in 'The Myth of Narcissus' sequence the body and self of Narcissus moves ambiguously between materiality and metaphor; despite the 'perfect body' of human corporeality, Burnside also points to the 'body' and form of poetry itself: 'the lines/ identical' ironically highlights the poem's fragmentary stanza form. Wylie considers how phenomenology avoids any consideration of productive tensions between self and world or the human and the non-human:

> The phenomenological project regarding landscape often falters, perhaps necessarily falters, as a result of its desire to fuse inside and outside, self and landscape, because this has difficulty in admitting any element of absence and estrangement as a precondition of writing through landscape.[167]

Wylie discusses how landscape phenomenology can result in a problematic fusion between self and environment. Here, Burnside's exploration of the body as reflection and as materiality suggests that it is representation which helps to negotiate between the human and the non-human, whilst, paradoxically, also creating what Wylie calls 'absence and estrangement'. In comparison with Shapcott's 'Myself Photographed', then, 'The Myth of Narcissus' therefore

[166] Burnside, 'Poetry as Ecology', p.102.
[167] John Wylie, 'Writing through Landscape', in *Process: Landscape and Text*, ed. by Catherine Brace and Adeline Johns-Putra (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 45-64, p.49.

points to the tension between 'what he mistakes for himself/ and the presence he loves', the relationship between physicality and forms of representation.

The sequence ends by contemplating the fraught relationship between material environment and identity:

> it's not the self we forfeit
> but the world
>
> and surely what arrives to take our place
> a new form at the wet edge of the light
>
> rising to find the surface
> and bleeding through
>
> surely this is all we have forgotten
> the scent of water mint
> the chill of dawn
> mistaken for the gold we left behind
>
> when something was resumed
> like space
> or wings
>
> unfolding
> in new light
> above the water.[168]

The speaker considers Narcissus's death, 'that kiss of nothingness', not as a loss of self-identity alone, but also of 'the world', again revealing Burnside's negotiation between individual experience and wider implications. In death Narcissus transforms to 'wings/ unfolding', altering from corporeal form to an angel. What 'arrives to take our place' at the metaphorical stream, the location of both self-identification and confusion, is 'a new form', leaving behind the sensorial experience of the water, the smell of water mint and the cold air. The poem ends in a characteristic fashion, with 'something […] unfolding' above

[168] Burnside, *The Good Neighbour*, p.54.

the stream, either 'like space/ or wings', an angel or spirit, but ultimately intangible and immaterial.

'The Myth of Narcissus' opens with an epigraph from Yamamoto Tsuentomo, which states:

> Our bodies are given life from the midst of nothingness. Existing where there is nothing is the meaning of the phrase "Form is emptiness". That all things are provided for by nothingness is the meaning of the phrase, "Emptiness is form". One should not think that these are two separate things.[169]

Like his attempt to depict angels as metaphysical figures with elusive bodily form, Burnside's intertwined relationship between 'form' and 'emptiness' is played out through his poetics. What John Lucas calls Burnside's 'repeated and unabashed references to "soul" and to angels, to presences that at least vestigially occupy the land' are part of his response to the dialogue between materiality and metaphor.[170] Thus the paradox of writing poetry as a means to connect the corporeal body with the environment is rendered productive rather than abortive, environmentally sensitive rather than anthropocentric. In his essay 'Poetry and a Sense of Place' Burnside suggests that 'the lyric invites its reader to identify, not with the poet, or with the poet's experience, but with the space in which that experience unfolds. The best lyric poetry creates a magical, or metaphysical space which the reader can inhabit'.[171] By arguing that the lyric 'creates a magical […] or metaphysical space', Burnside uses mythology to shift his discussion of the material world into metaphor. Comparably, in

[169] Burnside, *The Good Neighbour*, p.50.
[170] John Lucas, 'Souls, Ghosts, Angels, and "Things Not Human": John Burnside, Alice Oswald, and Kathleen Jamie', *PN Review* 34:1 (2007), pp.27-33, p.28.
[171] John Burnside, 'Poetry and a Sense of Place', (1996) <http://www.hum.uit.no/nordlit/1/burnside.html> [accessed 9 April 2015].

Mythologies (1972) Roland Barthes considers 'myth' as a 'metalanguage', a cross-generational intertextuality.[172] He uses a tree analogy to explain:

> A tree is a tree. Yes, of course. But a tree as expressed […] is no longer quite a tree, it is a tree which is decorated, adapted to a certain type of consumption. […] Language lends itself to myth. […] It is very rare that it imposes at the outset a full meaning which it is impossible to distort. This comes from the abstractness of its concept: the concept of *tree* is vague, it lends itself to multiple contingencies. […] The meaning can almost always be *interpreted.*[173]

The 'tree', the original myth, once 'expressed' or adapted, is altered. This transformation occurs through language, a language whose form and expression is open to 'multiple contingencies' and, vitally, 'interpretation'. Therefore Burnside's use of myth not only links back to and transforms other legacies but also forms its own 'metaphysical space'.

Like Oswald, Burnside focuses on gardening as a metaphor for the process of creativity. In 'Koi' from *The Light Trap*, the relationships between cultivation, gardening, representation and illusion intertwine:

> every time we gaze into this pool
> of bodies
> we will ask
>
> how much they know of us
> and whether this
> is all illusion
>
> like the play of light
> across a surface gilded with a drift
> of pollen
>
> or the sound a blackbird makes
> as it withdraws
> one moment at a time

[172] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p.63.
[173] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected and trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993 [1972]), p.109, p.132.

remembering its myth of origin.[174]

As with 'The Myth of Narcissus', 'Koi' is concerned with how 'we gaze into this pool/ of bodies', of the representation and interpretation of imagery. *The Light Trap* opens with an epigraph of the fourth poem in Wallace Stevens's 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' from *Harmonium* (1923): 'a man and a woman and a blackbird/ are one'.[175] 'Koi' responds to Stevens's sequence, with the closing line of 'remembering its myth of origin' linking, as with 'The Myth of Narcissus' to the 'origin' of the bird itself as well as the intertextual reference. The speakers point to the artificial trappings of the koi and the creation of their pond evokes the creation of representation: 'the trick is to create a world/ from nothing'.[176] Here, the koi's bodies become a focal point for the collective speaking voice to consider the balance between the real and the illusory, at the same time signalling the construction of the poem itself: 'and whether this/ is all illusion.' In this way, the space of the koi's pond becomes a metaphor for representation, for the potential trickery and illusion of poetry. In Lucas's words, in Burnside's work '"something" has to negotiate between the numinous and the vapid', vacillating between the metaphysical and physical sensation.[177] For Burnside the relationship between human and non-human bodies and environments reflects the paradox between landscape phenomenology and its linguistic mediation. His representations of the real and the imagined and the possible and the impossible create a delicate balance

[174] Burnside, *The Light Trap*, p.5.
[175] Wallace Stevens, *Harmonium* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950 [1923]), pp.158-162.
[176] Burnside, *The Light Trap*, p.3.
[177] Lucas, 'Souls, Ghosts, Angels, and "Things Not Human": John Burnside, Alice Oswald, and Kathleen Jamie', p.31.

between materiality and metaphor that sensitively accepts the distance between human and non-human physical experience.

5.4 The shaper shaped

This chapter has engaged with the ways in which Burnside, Oswald and Shapcott create contact zones in their depictions of the body's physicality and its metaphorical and poetic potential. The poets' representations of labour move from the notion of labour as a purely human-centred activity to the interlinked industrial-natural processes seen in *Dart*, Shapcott's depictions of labour as both deeply personal and a source of estrangement, and Burnside's traversal of the relationship between home, work and dwelling. Yet it is 'metamorphosis' which has remained a theme throughout: rather than presenting a straightforward phenomenological merging of the human body and landscape, each poet creates a sustained engagement with how the concept of the body slips into metaphor. From Oswald's and Shapcott's reactions to Hughes and Ovid to Burnside's dialogue with Heidegger, their intertextuality formally transforms their treatment of the body. Burnside's connection and contrast between 'emptiness and form' in 'The Myth of Narcissus' reveals a paradoxical tension of the 'the shaper shaped/ the lines/ identical', of the balance of the 'shape' of poetic form and metaphor. Indeed, 'form' connotes both the formal potential of a poem and the physical form of a body. The 'grafting' together and metamorphoses of historical allusion itself creates a formal mode: as Barthes states in *Mythologies*, 'myth is a system of

communication. […] It is a mode of signification, a form'.[178] The poets' experimentation with and mutation of the lyric convention thus grants their exploration of bodily motifs a formal dimension: the fluid metamorphosis of the human and the non-human is physical and metaphorical, but this transformative potential is ultimately displayed through form. *Metamorphoses'* opening 'of bodies changed to other forms I tell' therefore reverberates into contemporary poetry's representation and transformation of the forms, in all senses of the word, of body and environment.

[178] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p.109.

6 Afterword

6.1 'Pens are too light'

Words!
Pens are too light.
Take a chisel to write.

[…]

Name and date
split in soft slate
a few months obliterate.

Basil Bunting, *Briggflatts*[1]

The above epigraph from *Briggflatts* opened this thesis, bringing Bunting's representation of inscription to bear on contemporary poetry's negotiations between the material environment and poetic representation. Like *Briggflatts*'s representation of the Lindisfarne manuscript as a simultaneously completed and yet frayed and unresolved narrative, this thesis both frames and opens up understandings of contemporary poetry of environment and place. As Falci states in one of the earliest forays into definitions of poetry and place, 'postwar "poetry of place" – a term needing both evacuation and reinvigoration – is most powerful when it pushes hard against the places is represents and the spaces it constructs', and likewise the impact of this pushing 'hard against' rings equally true for representations of environment.[2] This element of flux is compounded by the way in which contemporary poetry confirms and

[1] Bunting, *Briggflatts*, p.15, p.16.
[2] Falci, 'Place, Space, and Landscape', p.219.

challenges previous legacies. Certainly, the reframing of literary legacies echoes the way in which *Briggflatts* functions as an intertextual pivot for Modernist and post-war poetry, as Bunting's text anticipates contemporary poetry's negotiations between literary traditions and innovation. Not only this, but the tension invoked by Bunting's metaphor of the mason's carving elucidates similar concurrences in contemporary modes. The slate has been split during the act of inscription, with the force of the mason's work conflicting with the soft sibilance of the lines, and yet 'slate' can also refer to building material or, particularly evocatively, a writing slate. 'Name and date/ split in soft slate' is therefore both a potentially permanent act of inscription and the temporary tracing of chalk on a slate board, acting as a microcosm for the strain between permanence and transience in writing. The permanent record is queried, and 'a few months obliterate' evokes a fraught balance between the impact of time on the stone as well as suggesting the obliteration of time itself.

In a similar vein, the final chapter's notion of 'metamorphosis' offers up an evocative way of thinking about how literary legacies inform, shape and shift in the present, creating an understanding of contemporary poetry which is simultaneously present and 'presencing', both permanent and transient like Bunting's slate metaphor. Robinson's definition of contemporary literature as 'in perpetual forward movement', due to the way in which 'the present is […] shaped by poetry from the recent or remote past,' resonates throughout this thesis, which has traced not just literary transformations but also material and socio-political influences on contemporary poetry.[3] The legacies identified in

[3] Robinson, 'Introduction: the Limits and Openness of the Contemporary', p.3, p.2.

this study have unveiled 'presences' within contemporary nature poetry itself, offering ambiguous yet productive links between past and present. Whilst each chapter engages with a specific conventional binary mode of thinking and representing the environment, it also both confirms and radically undermines such modes: the unstable categories of the natural and the artificial, the fluid convergence of site and place, the paradox of the border and the intersection and friction between material and representational forms.

What has continued, then, is a metamorphosis of temporality, encouraging an understanding of contemporary poetry as engaged with the legacies of the past and yet operating on its own generically transformative terms. Moving in a trajectory that traces the unstable categories of the natural and the artificial in Fisher, Skoulding and MacSweeney to challenging and elucidating the relationship between poetic form and bodily form, the thesis has maintained an ongoing drive towards recognising the disorientations found in contemporary poetry. In so doing it confirms and yet reworks conventional ecocritical notions of poetry as being straightforwardly wedded to physical reality. Karl Kroeber's ecocritical understanding of Romantic poetry as 'proto-ecological', for instance, stems from his interpretation of the relationship between materiality and representation:

> An ecological view of the world, even a proto-ecological one, must be fundamentally materialistic, since its basic premise is that human beings are appropriately situated here on earth. How nature appears to be ordered, the romantics realized, is largely shaped by our internalized cultural presuppositions. To judge these, to reinforce or revise them, we must estimate how congruent they in fact are to the materiality of the physical universe that we experience every moment of our lives.[4]

[4] Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.9.

Kroeber's point about the fundamental materialism of environmental perspectives reverberates through each chapter of the thesis: from Fisher's metaphorical mining of the archaeology of Birmingham to Minhinnick's ecological attentiveness to the Glamorgan coastline. Rather than draw lines between the 'world' and 'text', I have argued, contemporary poetry that is concerned with environment and place embraces the inherent conflicts found in this negotiation between representation and referent, between the pressures of ecological consciousness and poetic creation.

An environmentally aware poetics must traverse the boundaries between environmental realities and socio-political constructs, such as those found in Riley's and Finlay's trepidation around social constraints on rural walking. In converging and repositioning literary geography and ecocriticism the study has taken steps towards reassessing the torsions and paradoxes in representations of environment and place. In a corresponding move, Jarvis's interpretation of the balance between materiality and text states that:

> As soon as the mountain or forest in question is written about, the "geology and vegetation" themselves are not what is in the text. However, nor do I want to fall back on the idea that what is in the text should be understood in terms of representation – that sense of reflection which will always and anyway fall short, in terms of simple insufficiency of descriptive power, given the vast complexity of the physical world itself. Rather, as a discursive response to the physical world, the text constitutes an active engagement with that world in the sense that the linguistic act offers a judgement upon the world, a judgement on how that world […] should be seen, understood or conceptually approached.[5]

Each chapter maintains a critical eye on the potentially reductive binary of the physical environment and its representation. As Jarvis points out, environment

[5] Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*, p.10.

is never 'what is in the text' alone, yet assuming that a poem is autonomous from the world also undermines both the influence of environmental thought and 'the vast complexity of the physical world itself.' It is in this way that the ecocritical thrust of the study has been particularly valuable in uncovering the political and material implications of poetry of place and environment, whether in Presley's exploration of the politics of ownership on the Somerset coast or in Oswald's unpicking of the commodification of water in *Dart*.

The potential of such an approach means that understandings of environment and place became fruitfully indeterminate. For example, Alexander and Cooper's *Poetry and Geography* draws out two potential modes for depictions of place in contemporary poetry:

> At one end of the spectrum place is regarded as stable, permanent and intimately familiar, whereas at the other it is characterised as unsettled, in process and radically open to change. The tension between these representational poles remains imaginatively productive for contemporary poetry, though the general tendency is to emphasise process and flux.[6]

Here, Alexander and Cooper describe the 'representational poles' within which contemporary poetry engages: place as conventionally fixed or place as 'unsettled, in process and radically open to change', before they ultimately recognise that it is the tension between the two poles wherein imaginative interest lies. Indeed, this 'general tendency […] to emphasise process and flux' relates to representations of the environment, too, and addressing this flux and even paradox in post-1990s poetry allows the specific individuality of each representation to be recognised within this general theme. This thesis has traced contingency and process throughout, with each chapter uniting

[6] Alexander and Cooper, 'Introduction: Poetry and Geography', pp.5-6.

contrasting poets through a shared theme, whilst still remaining attentive to their particular differences. In a larger sense, though, these themes unveil links and comparisons which can be made between and across chapters.

The natural and the artificial chapter shows how Fisher, MacSweeney and Skoulding put the distinction between city and rural poetry under pressure as well as revealing fluctuating temporal paradoxes. In particular, Skoulding's *Remains of a Future City* demonstrates how contemporary poetry's formal structures interweave with a destabilisation of material categories, as her architectural modes traverse the fraught boundary between the world and its 'construction' in language: 'wanting to speak in spires and towers/ to hear the rattle of uneven tiles/ against our teeth'.[7] Fisher's representations of Birmingham remain rooted in historical and contextual reality but consistently unsettle that reality by suggesting that place shifts between the centre and periphery, between nature and culture and between temporalities. This negotiation of historical and present concerns also occur in MacSweeney's works, whilst he continues to push at the apparent boundary line between description and a hallucinatory-like representation of place, challenging straightforward demarcations between the natural and the artificial. In addressing these issues each poet uses metaphorical transformation to bear out their understandings of the material presences of the city.

These representations of flux anticipate the 'contact zones' found in the discussions of site and place in chapter three, as the relationship between specific locations and generic senses of place can be elucidated and transformed by contemporary formal modes. Riley, Clark and Finlay engage

[7] Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, p.35.

with what appeared to be specific locations, but their representations of place naming and walking prove to destabilise any clear distinction between site and place. Riley's lyrical subjectivity is subverted through the use of two 'selves' in *Alstonefield*, allowing for convergences and separations between places, representations and voices, which contrasts with Finlay's deliberately multi-voiced and social depiction of the sites and places of the Peak District in *White Peak/Dark Peak.* Clark's poetry, on the other hand, details formally contained poems which still address the ambiguities of place and its scales and complexities. Rather than limiting contemporary poetry to the genre of 'place poetry', this chapter recognises the potential for generic refinement, while the metaphorical implications of 'walking' reveals how walking texts can, as Macfarlane puts it, act as 'restatements of each other – a print-trail or series of steps of their own'.[8] Once again, the boundary between the material environment and metaphorical representation is challenged but not crossed, and the chapter similarly creates a dialogue between disciplines, using the metaphor of Heidegger's bridge to broach and recognise the gap between geographical and performative approaches to location.

This bridging is taken further in the borders and boundaries chapter, which also unsettles generic conventions by arguing for the potential of Severn Estuary/Bristol Channel poetry. As with the transformative power of the theme of convergence identified in the previous chapter, the relocations found in the Bristol Channel poetry reinvigorates notions of fixed location and place. The site and place and the Severn Estuary chapters attend to a conventional concept of environmental writing yet transform it by focusing on to the 'process and

[8] Macfarlane, *The Old Ways*, p.30.

flux' inherent in contemporary representations of environment and place, considering the in-between in order to elucidate frictions, connections and contact zones between places and environments. Gross, Presley and Minhinnick show the tension between metaphorical and material meaning through the notion of borders and boundaries, usefully described by Casey as follows:

> A border is a legally or historically or cartographically recognised delineation of a place of some kind; but it is also established by bodily actions and ritualistic practices, both human and other-than-human. The place can be altogether natural and wild, but it can also be part of an officially recognised region or territory that is marked down on a map.[9]

The negotiation between a border as a place 'altogether natural and wild' and a border as represented by cartography is mirrored by the contemporary poetry in this chapter. Although Gross, Presley and Minhinnick respond to a particular area of the Severn Estuary, they use their individual formal processes to manage and explicate this balance between materiality and metaphor. Presley's poems, for instance, might be most closely associated with the 'radical landscape poetry' that Tarlo espouses (and certainly Presley's work is represented in *The Ground Aslant*), yet her formal experiments with the relationship between the Bristol Channel, art and poetry demonstrate a concern over the torsion between materiality and metaphor which also preoccupies Minhinnick and Gross. Whereas Presley pushes clearly at the boundaries of poetic and artistic form, Gross attends to the aporetic gap between the environment and poetry by drawing out comparisons and contrasts

[9] Edward S. Casey, 'Borders and Boundaries: Edging into the Environment', in *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, ed. by Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp.67-92, p.73.

between the process of writing and ecological estuary processes. Similarly, Minhinnick's fluid lyrical perspectives and voices put the lyric form under pressure as he calls attention to the limits of language, drawing comparison with Riley's 'unselving' perspective in *Alstonefield*, Shapcott's undoing of the 'I' voice and Clark's deliberately ambiguous second-person address.

In fact, contemporary Severn Estuary poetry can also be seen as indebted to older traditions of writing about the region, creating an additional layer of intertextuality. In the final chapter on 'body, place and environment' this is taken further, using material-metaphorical relations to consider implications on textuality. Shapcott, Oswald and Burnside have similar and yet distinctive preoccupations with the concept of the 'body' – whether human, non-human, or linguistic – as their formal divergences reveal the theme of 'metamorphosis': transformations of poetic legacies and conventions as well as formal modes. Furthermore, the taskscapes uncovered in *Dart* and the natural-artificial representations in Fisher, MacSweeney, Skoulding and Burnside's work on harbours make particularly convincing connections with the negotiation of landscape types identified in the first chapter of the thesis, a thread which is maintained throughout. Whether in Shapcott's understanding of work and craft or in MacSweeney's ship-building metaphor, the notion of 'grafting' interlinks poetic craft with working landscapes without attempting to suggest that writing itself is akin to such physical labours. These mediations between landscape and form are, then, always re-mediations: more than Williams's mediation as 'interceding between adversaries, with a strong sense of reconciling them', the re-mediations found in the poetry presented in this thesis reconcile yet also destabilise relations between materiality, metaphor

and literary precedents.[10] The work of the poets thus re-mediates insofar as it consistently negotiates between past and present forms of place and environment poetry, pushing at and identifying new generic conventions.

6.2 Materiality and Metaphor

The re-mediations and metamorphoses in contemporary poetry suggest that the 1990s onwards is not clearly and neatly bound within a stable frame. Instead, an intertextual and intratextual line extends through the chapters, stretching from MacSweeney's medieval-twentieth century shifts in and between *Pearl* and *Hellhound Memos*, Skoulding's engagements with the *Situationist International Anthology*, the nod made to Riley by Finlay, the transformation of seventeenth-century Severn Estuary writing, and ultimately to the literary and mythological legacies explored by Oswald, Shapcott and Burnside in the final chapter.[11] 'Metamorphosis', therefore, unites the poetry thematically and formally, uncovering how it responds to and moves beyond intertextual links as well as conventional modes. In Leighton's exploration of the relationship between form and content, the notion of formal metamorphosis helps to challenge the binary between an apparently Modernist understanding of art as only representing itself and 'the question of significance, of emotional affect or of interpretative choice […]', as she argues that 'however much form tries to shut them out, those external needs and desires complicate its abstract

[10] Williams, *Keywords*, p.170.
[11] MacSweeney, *Hellhound Memos.* MacSweeney, *Pearl*. Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a new urbanism', pp.1-8.

purity.'[12] Alternatively, taking impetus from Henri Focillon's *The Life of Forms in Art* (1934), Leighton suggests that defining form as organic and metamorphosing undermines conventional dualisms between representation and referent:

> The word 'metamorphoses' […] routs the abstract fixity of modernist accounts. Form spawns life, change, movement. Far from being a finished object, integral to itself, abstract and finished, it is the start of change […]. This capacious definition of form explodes the old dualisms, rejects the argument from abstraction, and offers instead a seething sense of reproductive life. Form consists of all the metamorphic interactions the artwork initiates […]. Far from being cut off from purpose and affect, authorial or readerly interests, form brings them all energetically into play. From the hard-edged, untouchable sculptures of modernism we have moved into a De Quincean world, where form is imagined as the uncontrollable, promiscuous 'animism' of a dream, or of nightmare.[13]

Although Leighton's interpretation of *The Life of Forms in Art* comes close to an ecocritical notion of poetry as alive and material in and of itself, the concept of metamorphosing forms is particularly striking in regards to this thesis. Leighton's point that metamorphosis gets around the tension between a Modernist understanding of art as referent in itself and art as representing 'truth' or affectivity therefore extends to intertextual relations, as contemporary poetry draws on a plethora of varied sources. Indeed, Tarlo's anthology of apparently 'radical' landscape poetry points out that 'the connections between the poet and the landscape [is] an age-old poetic relationship often associated with the Romantic age. Here it is again, but this time explored in the context, not only of that history, but also of all the variety,

[12] Leighton, *On Form,* p.17. Henri Focillon states that 'the most vigorous rules, apparently intended to impoverish and to standardize formal material, are precisely those which, with an almost fantastic wealth of variations and of metamorphoses, best illuminate its superb vitality'. Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2013 [1934]), p.41.
[13] Leighton, *On Form,* p.17.

intimacy, complicity and complexity of modernity', as she recognises that recent poetry of environment and place contends with both the weight of Romantic influences and the implications of modernity.[14] Given that contemporary poetry's internal conflicts around tradition and experiment can be traced back to Modernism, it perhaps seems appropriate to trace similar preoccupations around environmental materiality and form in other poetries.

Certainly, Modernist poetries have been seen as bound by and reacting to Romantic conventions, yet this literary heritage also begins to redress the borders between types of Modernist poetry, as Howarth points out: 'what modernists and non-modernists share is a more common set of problems to do with […] issues of autonomy and engagement bequeathed them by the Romantic poets'.[15] It is through such a reframe that further work could fruitfully extend this study, tracing the influence and transformations of post-Romantic poetry both backwards and forwards. This should also emphasise formal methods, again teasing out the relationship between literary history and poetic processes, as Howarth adds: 'a poem's formal structure, its way of spacing time and sound, is inseparable from its connections to history and agency, although it is not reducible to them'.[16] The notion of re-mediation therefore paves the way for a longer consideration of both textual and thematic metamorphosis in poetry, recognising that the implications of this study can be applied retrospectively, emphasising not a linear progression from Romantic nature poetry but a nuanced and unstable response to particular themes and modes. The connecting threads of contact zones, the in-between,

[14] Tarlo, 'Introduction', *The Ground Aslant*, p.13.
[15] Peter Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.7.
[16] Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism*, p.12.

metamorphoses, relocations and re-mediations identified in this study may find useful application in other forms of poetry which have also previously been boxed neatly into a specific generic frame.

By way of example, Bunting's *Briggflatts* straddles the boundary between Romantic depictions of nature and Modernist processes. Certainly, Bunting was not alone in such generic vacillations, and the late Modernist and post-war period between 1945 and 1970 (during which *Briggflatts* was written and published) marks a notable shift in thinking about landscape poetry as well as signalling murky generic boundaries. Using the beginning of the alleged 'poetry wars' of the 1970s as an end point, the post-war pre-contemporary period indicates an important development for landscape poetry.[17] During this period Fisher began his poetic insights into the relations between the natural and the artificial with *City* and *A Furnace*.[18] In 1952 David Jones had further unsettled both formal convention and depiction of place in *The Anathemata*, and by the publication of Allen Fisher's influential *Place* in 1970 the foundations were laid for post-1990s poetry's fluctuating representations of place and environment.[19] *The Anathemata* in particular forms a collage of Modernist fragmentation and multiple art forms, including prose and visual images, and John Goodby and Chris Wigginton point out that Jones's 'work relishes palimpsestic layerings, concrete particulars, and jostling registers too much to be subsumed by orthodox ontologies (Christian or Heideggerian), and it is this which lets us read it against the grain of its tendency to aestheticise

[17] Peter Barry, *Poetry Wars: British Poetry of the 1970s and the Battle of Earls Court* (Cambridge: Salt, 2006).
[18] Roy Fisher, *The Long and the Short of It: New Poems 1955-2010* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books 2013 [2012]).
[19] Allen Fisher, *Place* (Hastings: Reality Street, 2005 [1970]), David Jones, *The Anathemata* (London: Faber, 1952).

history'.[20] Jones's paradoxical interrogations into located history and representational forms anticipate the poetry featured in this thesis, particularly Oswald's *Dart.* This therefore points to how contemporary poetry can be linked to previous modes of place poetry: from Ian Hamilton Finlay's early concrete poems to Jones's weavings of forms, histories and cultures.

Attending to the key themes of this thesis through a similarly evocative generic reframing has the additional benefit of further situating contemporary poetics, readdressing the divisions between types of poetry and considering the fluid relations between Modernist and Romantic poetry. Indeed, recent work by Neal Alexander and James Moran details 'a more general effort to expand and refine the parameter of literary modernism', as they 'seek to show that the long afterlife of regional modernism extends well into the second half of the twentieth century.'[21] For Alexander and Moran this comes through a search for the 'interlacing' themes of regional, national and transnational modernisms, re-examining conventional notions of place and city in Modernist writing. This leaves a tantalising space for further work, for considerations of how shifting representations of place and location might tie into similarly unstable generic poetic boundaries in the post-war period. Developing and reframing this thesis's negotiation of the relationship between materiality and metaphor could therefore be benefited by continued consideration of the processes of poetry. For instance, Paul de Man's 1956 essay 'Process and Poetry' reveals a burgeoning interest in the echoing remnants of Modernist attention to formal

[20] John Goodby and Chris Wigginton, 'Welsh Modernist Poetry: Dylan Thomas, David Jones, and Lynette Roberts', in *Regional Modernisms,* ed. by Neal Alexander and James Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp.160-183, p.172.
[21] Neal Alexander and James Moran, 'Introduction: Regional Modernisms', in *Regional Modernisms,* ed. by Neal Alexander and James Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp.1-21, p.3.

processes during this period. He details the relationship between form and content, suggesting that 'process' is integral to poetry as a 'whole':

> We are led to distinguish two kinds of poetic attitude: the first would be that of a poetry of process, maintaining itself as consciousness at the expense of the sensuous object, whereas the other would be a poetry of substance, maintaining the sensuous object at the expense of consciousness. Quite clearly, though, this schema is oversimplistic. The problem of poetry and process does not present itself in the form of a choice between two equally possible directions. A genuine poetics has to be able include this oscillation in a vision of the whole that would account for its passionate, and sometimes even tragic, character.[22]

Like Leighton, De Man challenges the 'oversimplistic' distinction between poetry that is concerned with its own 'consciousness' or artifice, and poetry which is 'of substance', which is apparently tied to materiality and the 'sensuous object'. Here, 'a genuine poetics' is only possible through an interpretation of 'the whole', or the referent world, a view which includes both formal processes and attention to physical reality. It is in this vein, then, that work on post-war Modernist legacies could appropriately re-determine and reformulate the apparently 'Modernist' attention to artifice, turning instead to the balance between physicality and form.

Bunting's *Briggflatts* asserts that 'pens are too light', as if the material act of writing does not correspond with the metaphorical weight of its content. His unpicking of the balance between materiality and metaphor has reverberated throughout this thesis: 'pens are too light' ironically undermines the influence of poetry whilst revealing the paradoxical tensions within the concept of inscription. This is a process that is ongoing, appropriately obfuscating the demarcation of post-1990s place and environment poetry, and

[22] Paul de Man, 'Process and Poetry', in *Critical Writings, 1953-1978*, ed. by Lindsay Waters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp.64-75, p.71.

encouraging the parameters of this study to be tempered by an awareness of poetry's ongoing metamorphoses. Whilst by no means exhaustive, this work brings to light the productive interplay between the fields of literary geography and ecocriticism as well as recognising the insights and innovations in contemporary poetics' representations of environment and place. Yet perhaps what most neatly sums up the thesis is the negotiation between materiality and metaphor. This occurs through the poetry's interplay of world and text, shifting evocatively between environment and place and between literary legacies and forms. The poetry strikes a delicate balance of form and content, encouraging an understanding of poetic representations of place and environment as paradoxical and mediating. Poetry which responds to the matter of environment and place therefore maintains simultaneous distance and proximity from its source material, creating vital instabilities, transformations and disorientations.

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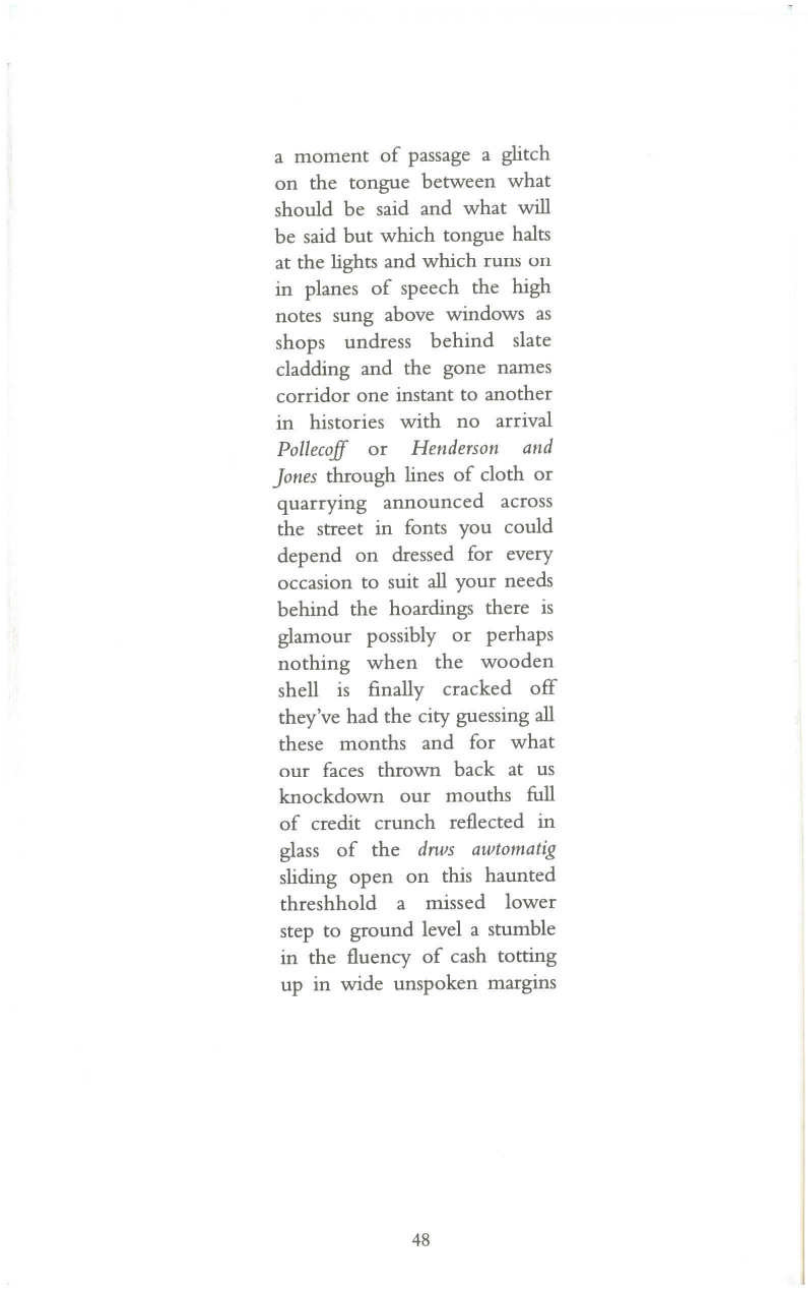
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8 Appendices

Appendix 1

Zoë Skoulding, *Remains of a Future City* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), p.48.

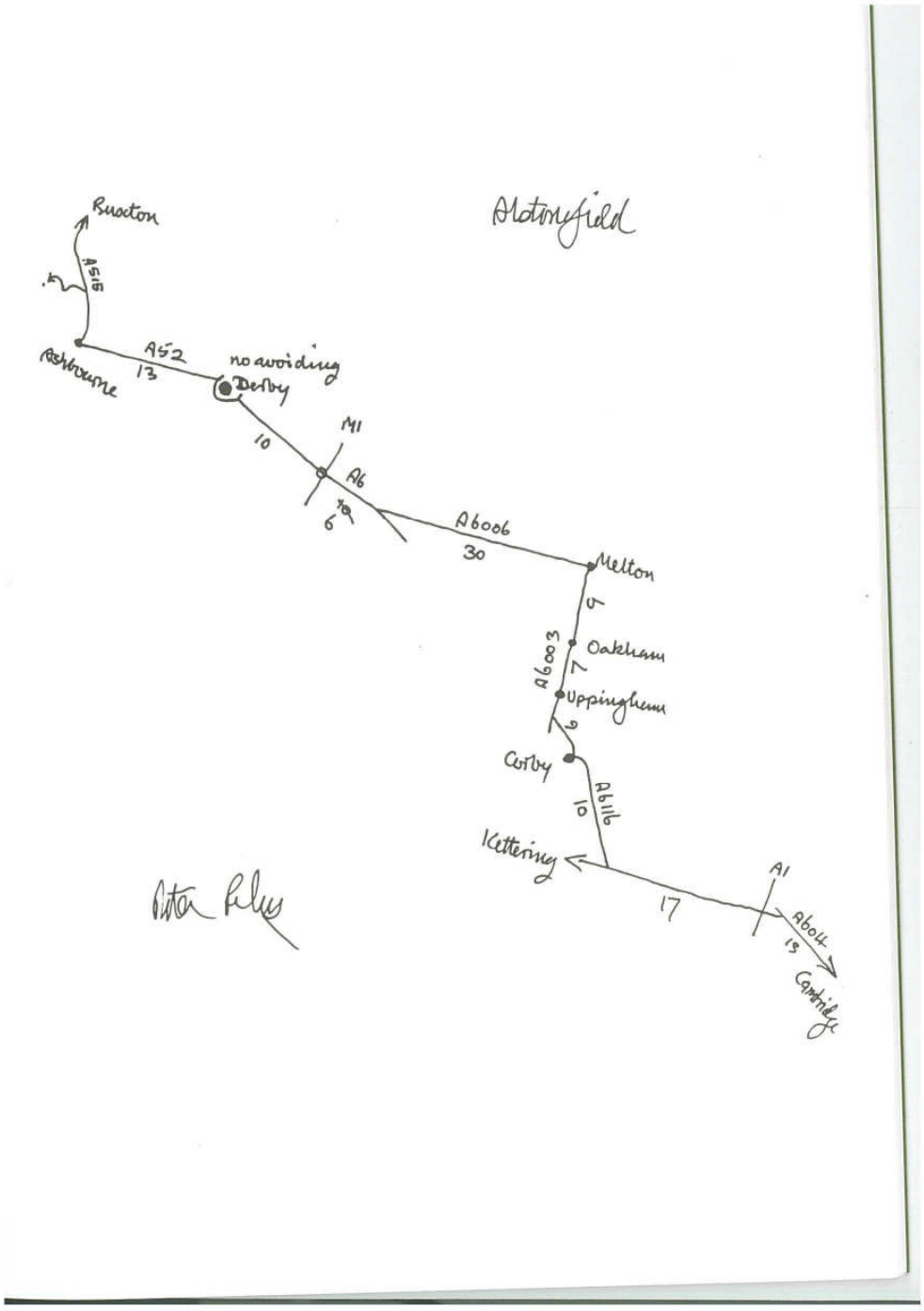


a moment of passage a glitch
on the tongue between what
should be said and what will
be said but which tongue halts
at the lights and which runs on
in planes of speech the high
notes sung above windows as
shops undress behind slate
cladding and the gone names
corridor one instant to another
in histories with no arrival
Pollecoff or *Henderson and*
Jones through lines of cloth or
quarrying announced across
the street in fonts you could
depend on dressed for every
occasion to suit all your needs
behind the hoardings there is
glamour possibly or perhaps
nothing when the wooden
shell is finally cracked off
they've had the city guessing all
these months and for what
our faces thrown back at us
knockdown our mouths full
of credit crunch reflected in
glass of the *drws awtomatig*
sliding open on this haunted
threshhold a missed lower
step to ground level a stumble
in the fluency of cash totting
up in wide unspoken margins

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Appendix 2

Peter Riley, *Alstonefield: Stanzas Unfinished* (London: Oasis/Shearsman, 1995)



Appendix 3

Alec Finlay, letterbox in Empel, Netherlands,

<http://alecfinlayblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013_03_08_archive.html>

[accessed 23 April 2015]



Appendix 4

Alec Finlay, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.



Bleaklow

LB: located in Torside Reservoir carpark
(53°28'54.41"N) (1°53'56.37"W)
SK 067983

Coombes Clough | **Alec Finlay**
From Crowden Brook carpark take the Pennine Way N SK 068991. The renga-views are from SK 066995 looking over Hollins Clough, Coombes Clough, Millstone Rocks & Lad's Leap; and S, from Lad's Leap SK 052998, looking over Torside & Rhodeswood Reservoirs.

Shining Clough | **Alec Finlay**
From the LB take the Longendale Trail E. Head S at the signpost to Wildboar Clough; keep the clough on your left. Cross the clough SK 082977 heading N and NE following the gritstone escarpment to the renga-view of the Dowstones SK 096987.

Bleaklow (Higher Shelf Stones) | **John Sewell**
Leave the Pennine Way at Devil's Dyke SK 094937. Head NW across the moor and Crooked Clough to Higher Shelf Stones SK 089948. This renga-view can be combined with the Wain Stones SK 093959 by continuing N.

Bleaklow (Wain Stones) | **Alec Finlay**
From the LB take the Longendale trail W to pick up the Pennine Way running S SK 057980. Follow the path to the Wain Stones SK 093959. Alternatively, complete the view of Higher Shelf Stones SK 089948 first, then head N.

Appendix 5

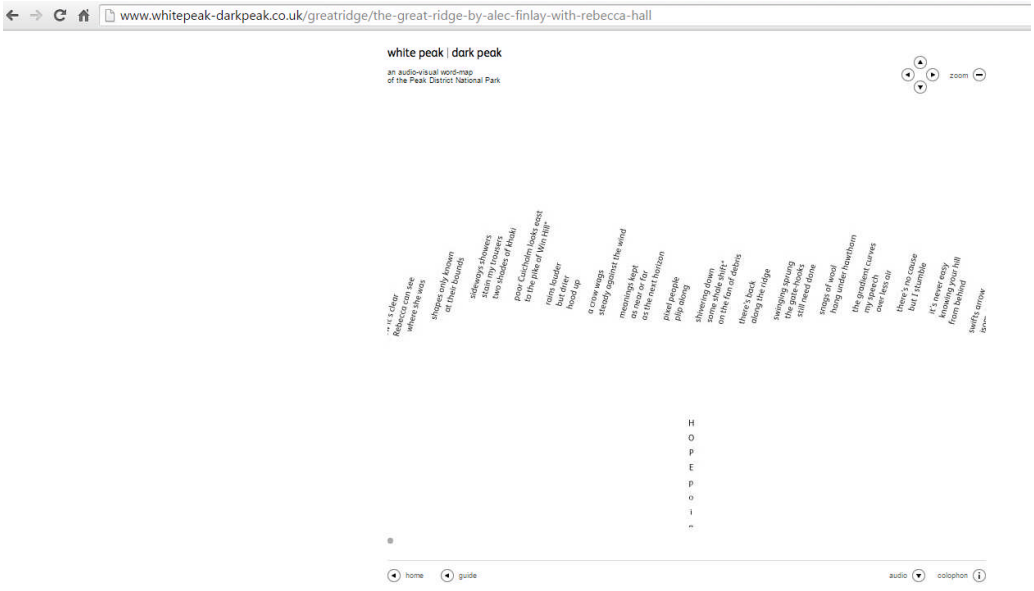
Alec Finlay, ‘Paths’ and ‘Drystone’, *White Peak/Dark Peak*, n.p.



Appendix 6

Alec Finlay and Rebecca Hall, 'The Great Ridge', <http://www.whitepeak-darkpeak.co.uk/greatridge/the-great-ridge-by-alec-finlay-with-rebecca-hall>

[accessed 23 April 2015]



Appendix 7

Frances Presley, *Myne*, p.79.

